



THE HUNTERS

AND THE HUNTED

*a novel of
high adventure
in the Shangri-la
of the U.S.S.R.*

by
IVAN
BAHRIANY

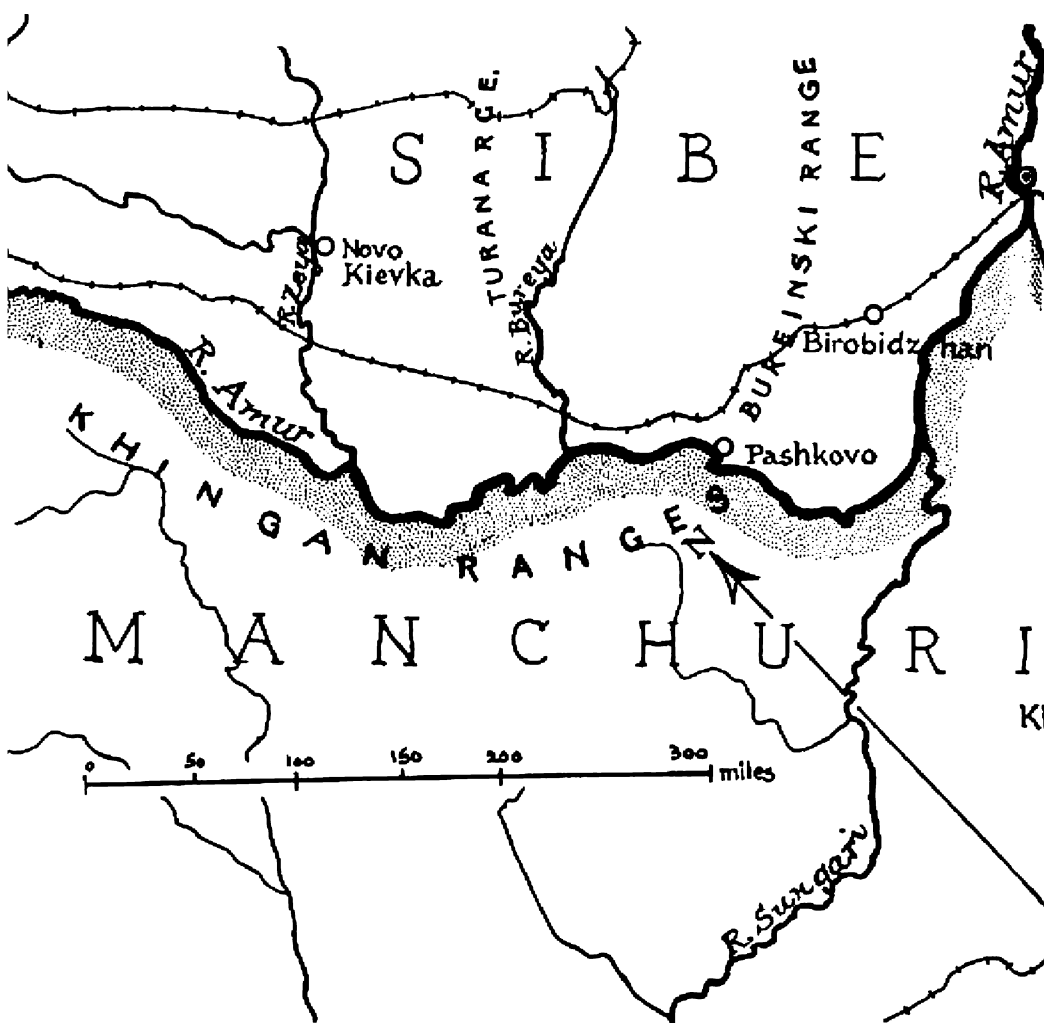
THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED

Like *THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON* this is an account of the experiences and encounters of a heroic household, winning its way day by day against wild life and the forces of nature. The style and manner are the same as in *THE COSSACKS*, *THE RAID*, and *THE WOOD-FELLING* by Tolstoy, except that there is an even greater tendency to dwell on all the details of the out-of-doors and make the most of them. Only in the personality and ideas of a young intellectual, who is not a member of the household, is there to be found the deeper significance of the story. All but broken by political persecution, he has finally succeeded in making his escape and is soon gathered into the safety of the household. From then on, he is constantly planning how to live his life in his own cherished and familiar way, free from all oppression from without. His achievement of this determination is the high point of the story.

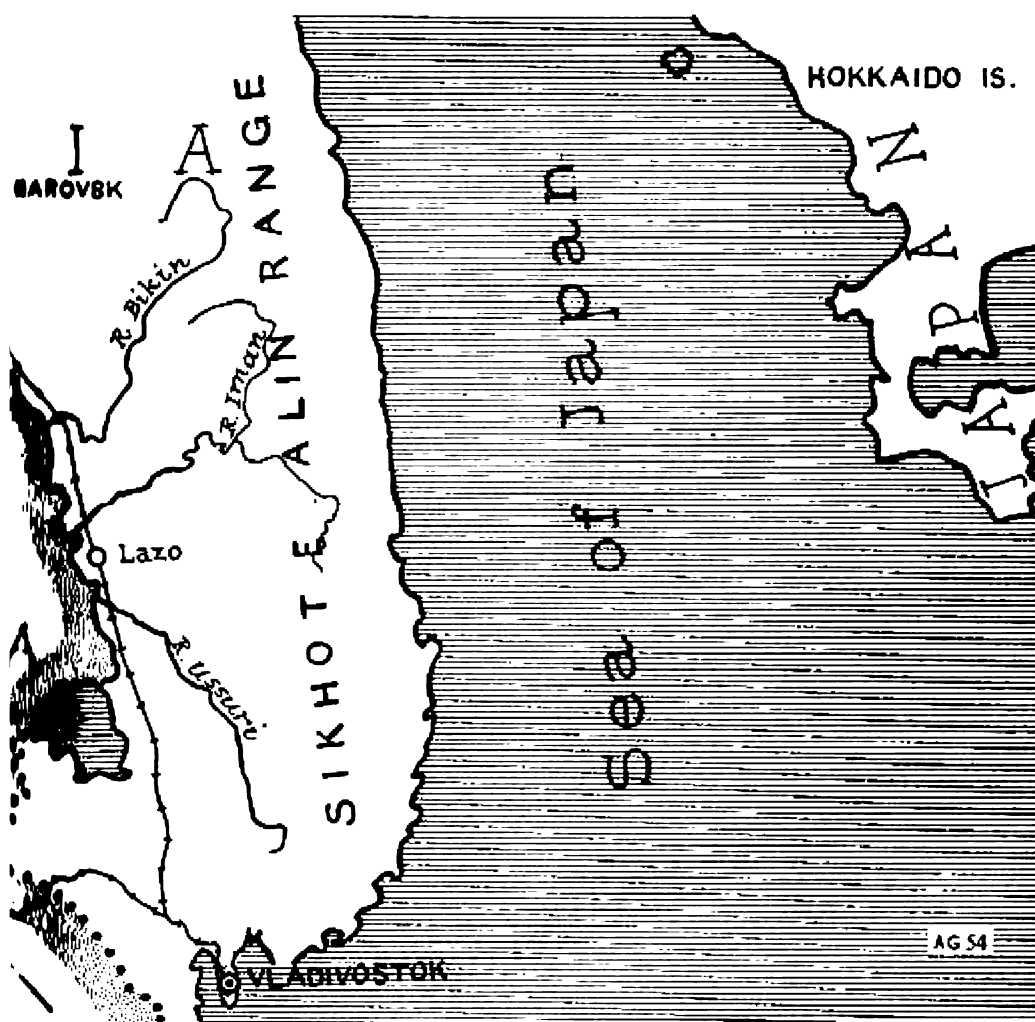
The novel is bound to serve a useful purpose in this country in helping us appreciate and understand the mind and heart of New Canadians coming to us from the gentle land of the Ukraine. Their sense of wonder is not the same as ours, and they make comparisons where we see nothing in common. We may hope to acquire their respect for honest simplicity, and their passion for pursuing objectives of individual achievement and self-expression through being able to blot out from their minds all that threatens to hinder or oppress.

CHANCELLOR SAMUEL BEATTY,
University of Toronto.

Jacket design by CARL DAIR



The map shows the area in which the action of the novel is set. Numerous Ukrainian settlements extend along the rivers Ussuri and Amur. In one of them, at the foot of the Sikhotealin Range, the hero, Hryhory Mnohohrshny, finds refuge after his escape from the



convoy of prisoners. The hunting expeditions follow the banks of the Iman and the Bikin rivers, while strange adventures await him in the town of Khabarovsk. In the end, Hryhory and Nataika escape from the Soviet Union, after crossing the border at Pashkovo.

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Foreword

The title, *THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED*, which Professor Luckyj gives to this translation of the novel by Ivan Bahriany is intended to prepare the reader for stories of conflicts with wild and fierce animals, under the most difficult conditions of terrain and storms and biting weather. Like *THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON* this is an account of the experiences and encounters of a heroic household, winning its way day by day against wild life and the forces of nature. The style and manner are the same as in *THE COSSACKS*, *THE RAID*, and *THE WOOD-FELLING* by Tolstoy, except that there is an even greater tendency to dwell on all the details of the out-of-doors and make the most of them. Only in the personality and ideas of a young intellectual, who is not a member of the household, is there to be found the deeper significance of the story. All but broken by political persecution, he has finally succeeded in making his escape and is soon gathered into the safety of the household. From then on, he is constantly planning how to live his life in his own cherished and familiar way, free from all oppression from without. His achievement of this determination is the high point of the story.

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Chancellor Samuel Beatty.

Introduction

The author of this novel, Ivan Bahriany, was born in 1907 in the province of Poltava. His father was a bricklayer; his mother came of peasant stock. After attending a grammar school and graduating from an industrial trade school, Bahriany entered the Institute of Fine Arts in Kiev. He completed his course of study, but failed to gain a diploma because he was suspected of "political unreliability." His first poems and short stories began appearing in Soviet Ukrainian periodicals in 1925. He was a member of the literary group MARS (The Workshop of the Revolutionary Word) which stood aloof from the official literary currents sponsored by the Party. All members of MARS became victims of the purge of Ukrainian literature in the early 1930's.

Several of Bahriany's collections of short stories, his long poem *Ave Maria*, and the historical novel *The Little Cliff* were published between 1926-32. His novel was severely attacked by the communist critics and condemned as nationalist and counter-revolutionary. In 1932 Bahriany was arrested. After spending eleven months in an isolation cell in prison, he was sentenced to five years penal servitude. He served his sentence in a *Bamlag* (a concentration camp on the Baikal-Amur Main Line). In 1936, fearing that his sentence might, as frequently happened, be renewed, he escaped. For two years he was a free man, though pursued by the NKVD, which seized him in 1938, while he was on a visit to his mother in the Ukraine. He was rearrested and spent two years and four months in a prison in Kharkiv,

awaiting trial. Finally, because of ill health he was released, but compelled to live in his home town under the surveillance of the local police.

During the Second World War Bahriany made his way to the West. Since 1945 he has lived in Germany, unable to emigrate to the United States or Canada because he is suffering from tuberculosis. He continued writing after the war. In 1945 he wrote a short pamphlet *Why I Don't Want To Go Home* which was translated into several languages. Among his other works are the novels *The Orchard of Gethsemane* (1950) and *The Ring of Fire* (1953), a collection of poems, *The Golden Boomerang* (1946), and a play, *The General*.

In 1943 Bahriany took part in the Ukrainian resistance movement, and today he is the leader of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Democratic Party, largely consisting of Soviet Ukrainian refugees, dedicated to the idea of an independent and democratic Ukraine.

The novel *The Hunters and the Hunted* was published in 1943. Unlike all Bahriany's other works, it is an adventure story with an unusual background and spirited action. It preserves the distinctive colour of the Ukrainian homeland, although the action takes place in the Ukrainian settlements in the Soviet Far East and reveals an unknown Shangri-La in the USSR. Moreover, it is full of the spirit, courage and determination exemplified by its hero and heroine, who triumph over the horrors of Soviet life. Its special appeal will be felt particularly by the young and the unsophisticated of every age to whom it will offer that peculiar kind of satisfaction that only a good adventure story can give.

I

The Dragon

With wide-open fiery eyes, breathing fire and smoke, shaking the bush and wilderness with its mighty roar and sweeping away with its belly all traces of its path, flew the mighty dragon.

Not out of Chinese fairy tales, nor from the pagodas of Tibet; but from somewhere in the centre of the "country of wonders," from the black hole of the land of men-hunters it rose and rushed over the distances — above the endless Urals, over the impassable vastnesses of Siberia, across the grim Baikal, across the wild watershed of Trans-Baikalia, across the Stanovoy watershed, it wound and curled itself among the peaks and rocks, and sowing sparks and stench into the sky it flew and flew on into the endless night. It burst into flame above the crevasses, curled up over the precipices, flew like a whistling spiral above the wild highlands and suddenly disappeared somewhere into the bowels of the earth, digging itself in like a fiery-eyed serpent. It roared and screeched its way into the breast of the rocky mountains, drilled through them with lightning speed, showered sparks as it went. Then it disappeared and suddenly flew out of the ground far far away like a creature out of hell, shaking the night with its infernal laughter. With blood-shot eyes it whined madly, waved its tail like a comet and flew and flew.

And the rocks parted and only shadows flickered by and the frightened spruce and pine trees ran, scared, in all directions. A moose taken by surprise froze in a clearing, paralysed with fear, then, suddenly electrified into action, dashed off bruising its legs and ripping its hide, running into the unknown with all its might. And the echoes, like mountain spirits, flew into the mountains and disappeared into crevasses and thickets for they were being chased by a dragon.

This was no fictitious creature of naive Chinese tales, nor the legendary dragon of Dalai Llama. No, it was real, it was the only real dragon, the biggest and the most fearful of all dragons. Neither Kozhumiak* nor St. George himself could have dealt with him. With steely claws, a fiery belly and iron jaws it snarled as if it had just come out of hell.

Sixty boxes, sixty parts to this dragon. At the front a fiery-eyed head — a huge two-eyed Cyclops, a super locomotive J.S. (Joseph Stalin); at the rear a similar super locomotive F.D. (Felix Dzerzhinsky). A projector was on the tender and a pincushion of bayonets in each wagon; like a porcupine — no, like a dragon, he raced on and roared.

Sixty sections to the dragon; sixty brown coffins each filled with swallowed victims, each full of living dead. A whole series of flickering eyes peered through the grating, through the darkness into the lost world, back towards their country bathed in sunlight, their motherland enlivened by the laughter of children and curtailed youth, where mothers, families, wives were left. The eyes flickered and flew into a darkness black as pitch. The belly of the dragon was full of these. It was pulled by the Cyclops J.S. and pushed along by the demon F.D. The whole unit was an *étape*, an echelon of death. A consignment of those condemned by the GPU, NKVD.

* Kozhumiak, a legendary Ukrainian hero, a dragon slayer, renowned for his physical strength.

And the dragon continued on his way, crunching along on his iron paws, carrying those condemned, hopeless and emaciated, as though anxious to bear them into the frightful unknown so that none should know where — across thirty lands to the edge of the world.

And there was no legendary Kozhumiak, no one, no one to save them, no one would know, no one would hear, only the dark, endless night.

And the spruce continued to scatter aside to get out of the way, and the dragon's eyes devoured everything ahead. Occasionally there was a shot; and another. The guard imagined some plot to escape — he lost his nerve, shouted desperately, and peered blindly into the hurrying shadows, into the spruce and telephone posts.

And, although no one could jump off and live at this pace, and although no one, so well guarded and sealed in could escape, still — the guard must be careful and "observant," for he had been assigned a task of "honour and glory and heroism." But perhaps he too was frightened, perhaps his head was spinning, riding on the tail of this diabolical comet, and he tried to keep up his nerve in this dark, treacherous night.

Scores, hundreds, thousands of kilometres slipped by, forests and wilderness, mountain ranges, rivers and dark lakes ran back, bridges and semaphores and tunnels flew back with a grating sound — everything flew back — only the dragon flew into the dark Siberian night, into the unknown. It crossed the meridian and described a gigantic parabola somewhere near the 49th parallel leaving a fiery trace like a comet. It beat into the black shroud and exuded its poisonous fire and smell; and now and then it roared.

No express moved like this — only this fantastic echelon of death, the special echelon of the GPU, NKVD. This — one of many — they all drove at this mad pace through the deaf night and still deafer Siberia for they were bound

in secrecy. Not ordinary secrecy but a secrecy of State, festooned with bayonets, equipped with projectors — the “secret” was bound for its secret destination as impenetrable as Siberia itself, or as that Siberian night.

There were the fantastic yet real accessories of an unsolved legend; a secret legend about the disappearance of souls.

At various places the echelon stopped only for a moment, a very brief moment and then gnomes ran along the roofs, jumping from wagon to wagon, poking sticks into the gratings to see whether a break had been effected anywhere or whether there were any attempts to escape, and another group ran along the sides of the echelon knocking on the side — perhaps a bolt had been loosened, perhaps from within one of these wagons an enemy had connived against the State, against law and order. After all, it was their task of “glory and honour” to see to it that this echelon reached its destination, that abyss that opened up years ago and was constantly being filled with human bodies and souls, though without success.

At the same time the commandant of the echelon ran along, starting from J.S., and with his head high cast a worried look from wagon to wagon searching for something. He continued along this series of grim, hermetically sealed brown boxes built for 40 men or 8 horses, and finally stopped near the middle to catch his breath. And then, reaching up to the grille, he yelled into the tired eyes and pale faces that peered through, “Mnohohrishny!”

The faces and the tired eyes dispersed; instead, one pair of similar eyes from the depths of the wagon approached the grating and a deep voice replied “I.”

“Name?” There was a brief pause and then slowly, in a deep sullen tone, “Hryhory.”

For a moment the commandant of the echelon looked silently into the sullen face; apparently reassured, he turned and went back.

The two eyes in the pale face now glued to the grating followed him and a voice coming from deep down, from an inferno boiling in the heart, burst through clenched teeth, "You are guarding; you dog." And then a voice from a far corner, muffled and sarcastic, "Oh, so. You, my friend, are like a General, you have attained high honour. The big chief himself does not eat, does not sleep, but comes running to pay his respects." And another voice of encouragement, "Never mind, you will serve your 25 years and become a Marshal, eh?" And suddenly he burst out in a shower of awful, uncontrollable curses against law, against the Universe, against Hell, against Heaven itself. The echelon suddenly rose and flew on, and in the clanging of the wheels there rose the sorrowful song of the hobo, swelling and swelling. It began with one voice, the voice that said "I, Hryhory," sullen and deep. It began the heart-rending song:

*And the fields turned white, and the fields turned white;
Even the glens*

With the end of the first couplet the tones were lost in the crunching of the wheels; almost lost. Then another voice, like a blood-brother, picked it up strongly,

Even the glens

*And the two together, full-chested,
And the body hurt and so did the heart*

Two voices and two friends, they were joined by a third and the song, struggling like a bird in a sepulchre, suddenly flew to freedom out of this coffin, out of this dragon's belly above the crunching and the screeching of the wheels. A song in three voices took wing and rose above the dragon.

A maddened guard beat the butt of his rifle against the wall of the wagon, "Stop singing, stop it. . . ."

*And even the head — but no one will weep over this pale
body*

The guard stopped beating against the wall, unable to stop the song; the melody grew and swelled.

The train flew on with its screeching and whistling. And perhaps it was not the song, perhaps in this veil of screeching and madness he had heard this before, maybe he sang it himself; perhaps it was only the sound of the train or the wind of Siberia crying in a hundred voices. The guard grasped his rifle and stood there, leaning heavily against the wall.

And only his comrade will cry and weep, only his comrade. . . .

Clouds of acrid smoke tickled the nostrils and squeezed the throat, and J.S. burst into a roar of diabolical laughter.

*Oh my dearest brother, my dearest friend,
Perhaps I will die, perhaps I will die. . . .*

The tide of endless grief, or anger, or grim sorrow — the song fluttered over the dragon and spread over the trail and the dragon cut through it, tore it to shreds and swept it aside with its fiery tail. And in its wake followed two bloody endless ribbons, shimmering and flashing, two veins spun out of the song, no, spun out of the heart. They stretched far behind and followed in step, they followed from the lost homeland, they followed the heart or spun out of it sodden with blood, stretched to the breaking point yet unable to break.

Perhaps I will die, perhaps I will die.

Will you make for me, dear brother, dearest friend, a coffin of elm?

The train ripped into tunnels and squeezed through them madly, like a shell through a cannon, as though striving to erase the song and its bloody trail, but the song remained and the veins did not break.

* * *

Silhouettes of mountains flickered by, the wilderness of the Amur, the peaks and ranges of the Little Khinkhan, crossroads, block posts, and stations. The servile semaphores raised their arms well in advance, for this was a trainload

of convicts, and the signals in the block posts rang well in advance: it was coming.

Everything stood aside as the train flew by, whistling and roaring.

After a while the echelon stopped again, and again the guards ran along the roofs of the wagons, and again the train commandant ran back, stopped near the middle wagon, raised his head and shouted, "Mnohohrshny,!" "I, Hryhory." The chief returned, and was followed by two flickering eyes and a suppressed and increasingly embittered, "So you are guarding; you dog."

And so it was repeated at every stop, and after each stop the chief seemed more composed and his tone less alarmed, his questions now showing a trace of sarcasm, and at the end he added scornfully, "Brave guy." After all, the echelon was reaching its objective.

With each new stop the despair and indignation opposed to the sarcasm and diabolical hatred grew in intensity. There was more sadness, and a dogged determination to undertake something unusual in the owner of the deep and glittering eyes. The turmoil of a disturbed but unbroken and undefeated will did not foreshadow any good.

In the meantime the echelon was approaching its objective, it was moving across different latitudes, having turned sharply to the South after crossing the wide Amur. It was approaching land's end—it was crossing the crests of different mountain ranges, penetrating new wildernesses and passing through the last, endless tunnels.

During the day there was visible the beauty of the blossoming land, spilling with a sea of flowers. Those few who were lucky enough to be near the grating cast their eyes in despair over the enchanting land. The horizon was guarded by a range of grey to violet hills and a cockscomb of trees. Wide valleys bathed in sunlight, spreading and twisting, were covered with luxuriant grass, flowers and ponds; a wonderful fantastic countryside. But this was

not their destination. In their urge for at least the illusion of freedom the condemned pressed to the grating and reached out through the openings. Then shots were heard along the echelon, but no one paid any attention except that the train seemed to gather speed.

A starlit sky came out at night, millions of stars mixed with the sparks from this mad train; and trees and flowers ran desperately from the right-of-way, only to approach each other again in a chimeric dance at the rear of the dragon.

The landscape continued to change, and then there was no more land. On the fifteenth day of this mad rush the land suddenly ceased. The echelon had reached the blue ocean and screeched to a stop. It heaved a sigh of smoke and steam and halted.

The echelon had reached its destination — the last ocean station — and now began to shake itself free of its burden. It began regurgitating the contents of its 60 stomachs. Amazing, how many people could be packed into these dirty brown boxes! How did they stand it, what kept them from falling apart?

Thousands! Thousands of ragged, filthy rat-like skeletons, aged and hump-backed, although many of them were between 20 and 25 years of age, yet they all looked like octogenarians. Thousands of them wrapped in rags and blankets or half-naked — cast out of their native land, away from their families, from society, tortured, without any rights, condemned — yes, condemned to die somewhere in the unknown which they had yet to reach. The echelon had reached its goal, but not its contents — the *étape* — these thousands of martyrs.

They were herded together like sheep, in groups, surrounded by guards, and gazed without expression at the grey, endless, watery desert covered with a light mist.

That was their route — across the sea of Japan, across the endless Pacific, somewhere to Magadan; more thousands

of kilometres over the watery desert to hostile, unknown Kolyma and maybe farther.

But they were beyond excitement and fear. They were dull and unconcerned; these exhausted beings could only stare at the ocean ahead. They came from Kiev, Poltava, the Kuban and Kherson — children of a different, sunnier land and another sunlit sea.

The guards dispersed all the civilians from the station, surrounded the place, and guarded it with rifles and wolf-hounds at the ready.

More convicts kept pouring out of the cars. Some could no longer walk and were supported by their friends who apathetically helped them cover the last bit of ground, possibly the last stretch of life's road.

Suddenly the alarm sounded! When all the convicts had emerged from the cars the commandant of the echelon cast his eyes over the mass of humanity; and then suddenly dashed off to the middle car.

“Mnohohrishny!”

Silence.

“Mnohohrishny!”

Again silence. No one replied, “I,” and no one replied, “Hryhory.” As though stung, the commandant drew a pistol and jumped into the box-car. Empty. He ran out in front of the crowded convicts and yelled:

“Lie down!” — and he boiled over with the most violent cursing.

The crowd lay down.

“Mnohohrishny!” The chief's shouts sounded both angry and pleading — he half-threatened, half-begged. No sign. . . .

A command sent the guards scurrying round the empty train and the surrounding area. Telephones rang from the station. The dogs were sent ferreting in every corner — still no sign. Neither the dogs nor their aides could turn up the missing.

Finally they found the "secret," but not the missing convict. And the "secret" was, that in the middle box car, No. 32, they found four boards had been cut across with a knife above the buffer; exactly where one would have least expected it. Only a convict, with superhuman patience and willpower, could have done it. That must have taken many nights, all the way from the Urals; and then masked somehow each day. That mad maniac had eventually jumped out while the train was in full motion.

He could only have jumped to his death, yet he did not admit defeat. There were at least 99 chances out of a 100 that he would end up in bits and pieces; yet he jumped.

"The devil! The devil!" boiled the commandant of the echelon. How he had guarded him to no avail! The thought maddened him. One more thing seemed clear. Someone had helped, someone had carefully covered over the hole.

"Get up!" he shouted. All rose. Their heads hung low in an effort not to look at the authorities and thus betray themselves by the changed look in their eyes.

"Who helped?"

Silence.

"Car 32! You will be crushed! Turned into manure! Who helped?"

Silence. The inmates of car 32 were separated. About 60 of them formed a separate group.

"Who was his partner?" The men continued to gaze down sullenly. They were silent, though their hearts beat violently. Not from fear, no, from wild joy, almost a vicious joy, and pride over that "devil," that lad. They knew how and when he jumped. Far from here, in the middle of the night.

But no one breathed a sound.

There is a solidarity, an unwritten code of convict morals, the like of which exists nowhere in the world — the

morals of the downtrodden, the *sanctum sanctorum* of convict friendship.

The men stood unconcerned. But the hands of many itched to reach for their cap and touch it to the ground — “May this earth rest lightly on you, you scatter-brained dare-devil!”

They remembered his words, which came out with a sigh one night.

“Better to die running than to live, rotting.” And he added angrily, desperately:

“To live! To avenge! — or to die.”

The mass of these ravaged, dehumanized beings seemed electrified. Each heart pounded. Human dignity, long crushed, came to life. Faces turned back, and wings seemed to grow on those who had been completely broken. The crowd whispered:

“He escaped! To certain death, yet he escaped!”

The commandant seemed to sense trouble and with his pistol waved off those who were to be punished.

The rest, too, were driven to the harbour.

* * *

After they were loaded aboard the steamer, after everyone knew about that “devil,” the young man who had been condemned to 25 years of hard labour, who had crossed the “tribunal” and jumped to death from the train, men stood on deck and, turning to face the West, gazed and gazed with wide open eyes.

They were bidding farewell to everything . . . and before their eyes was a picture of the one who had not given in, who had managed to stay behind. He was the symbol of proud, uncowed youth, a symbol of that freedom-loving, plundered Fatherland. . . .

The steamer faded into the grey mist, and was followed by the legend of a proud eagle, a foolhardy dare-devil. This was the incomplete legend of the unknown, proud

descendant of the first Siberian convict, about the great-grandson of Hetman Demian Mnohohrishny.*

* * *

In the meantime, along the whole Trans-Siberian railway and all frontier points a message was signalled about the escape of, and the search for, a great enemy of the State; with these points underlined: Youth, 25 years of age, fair, athletic, aviator. Sentenced to 25 years. Name — Hryhory Mnohohrishny.

* Demian Mnohohrishny, a Cossack Hetman (17th Cent.), banished to Siberia.

The World on Wheels

With flashing nickle handles in its luxurious compartments, and with brightly lit windows, along the same Trans-Siberian Railway came another express, the so-called "Pacific Express No. 1." Swaying gently as if in a dreamy waltz, with strutting silk curtains on the windows, and crystal clear mirrors, the express rolled on like a string of lustrous pearls, with only the enamelled names of the various cars flashing by "Niegorieloye — Vladivostok." It carried exalted passengers somewhere into the unknown and dream-like country, into a wonderful Eldorado.

Between deep blue mountain ranges and along the legendary Baikal and across the high ridge of the Stanovoy watershed it flew like a handful of meteors among the stars; dropping into the valleys and rising and twisting around the walls of precipices, the express moved like a glittering spiral as if held by magic to the rocky mosaic.

This was the best and most modern Express in the USSR; the most comfortable in the so-called worker-peasant State, with a round trip reaching half-way around the earth, "Niegorieloye-Vladivostok," that is, from the sombre Baltic to the shores of the sea of Japan, 12,000 kilometres each way. It was suitably fitted out for its assignment, for a ten-day journey; the wonder of civilization, the acme of human taste and imagination.

Joyful and festive, filled with life and sound, this first-class luxury express floated along; a separate world within the world.

Compartments were soft, dreamlike and quiet, decorated with flowers, packed with luggage, lit by lamps with many-coloured shades and populated by expansive and noisy inhabitants of various ages and positions. The whole express was filled with them, a copy of the phantasmagoria of the "Sixth of the World," a copy in miniature, but somewhat dressed up and relaxed.

Engineers and aviators, Stakhanovites, airmen, party workers and tourists, collectivizers of Kolhozes and Sovkhozes, bureaucrats, efficiency men and industrial hucksters, directors, and camouflaged adventurers, lawyers and spend-thrifts, potential thieves and impotent Pharisees — civilian and military — workers in the organs of "revolutionary law enforcement," contrabandists and "responsible matrons" and eccentric but equally responsible "lady comrades", with lovers and without lovers, with briefcases and without, with and without Party status, enamoured "kittens" and even more enamoured "cats," responsible and irresponsible grabbers and deserters with and without Party cards, and many others.

Expansive discoverers of the obvious and arrogant record-breakers of what is long past. Seekers of dangerous adventures and even more dangerous careers, seekers of fortune and "long rubles," amateurs of long and even longer figures on bank cheques foreseen by the "codex" of labour laws, amateurs of belles lettres within the limits of the "codex" and the Collective Agreements and the "Criminal Code."

Experts in applied geography, comfortable jobs, resorts and railway maps.

Lovers of Dunayevsky,* Marx, and *preference*.

* Dunayevsky, a popular Soviet composer of light music.

In a word — the cream of the workers'-peasants' empire in all its greatness and all its facets.

All differed in age, profession and status, but all had one thing in common — they were looking for something and escaping from somewhere — seekers of fortune and escapees into the unknown.

All had escaped from the hateful reality at the one end of the earth and were now dashing off towards the other, running from everything and chasing everything, escaping what was already tiresome and perhaps cursed, and searching for what was unknown, unseen but beautiful and appealing.

This common characteristic might be called a fever, a reckless drive towards a half concrete chimera, an exotic Eldorado where they had not been before. This was the common bond uniting this mass of humanity, these wanderers who populated this unique world on wheels.

Yet to the majority of them this "somewhere" seemed fairly concrete and definite. They were going to the DVK (The Far-East Country), somewhere at the other end of the world on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. That was where they would find the real fairytale world, of which they had heard so much, about which they had read, dreamed and reflected. That was the destination of this speeding community — dashing onward without pause for breath or backward glance.

An imaginary extra-territorial world: a world of blessed independence from any kind of "spets" (Specialist) and "prof" (professional) substance, and from any sort of "spets," "prof," "part" (Party) discipline, from the hustle and bustle of compulsion and chiefs, from endless queues and equally endless "series of meetings" in the trade group or union, in the service of the home. This was a world of ideal freedom and complete absence of dictatorship if you did not take into consideration the dictatorship of love and the over-officiousness of the conductor. A world of adven-

ture and romance, a world of kisses and conference, of fantastic stories, unbelievable events, transformed by a prism of exalted fantasy.

A world of blessed freedom purchased for cash together with the reservation. Night followed day, then again day, then again night; forests and deserts and mountains disappeared, the whole world was running away . . .

This new concrete world took its place, tense, magnetized, radiant in the hues of the purple, rose and green light emanating from luxurious lamp shades shielded by gauze curtains and saturated with flirtation and yearning, to the accompaniment of gramophone foxtrots and rumbas — and above all this Arseniev.* Oh, that Arseniev!

Yes, Arseniev! He was the God of this express, this world on wheels. He was the lord of its thoughts and hearts. He reigned here as he had never reigned in the land he discovered which made his name, the hallmark of all adventurers and other conquistadors like those on this express. He was the Columbus of this trans-Amurian and Ussuri Galilee! . . . the discoverer of the unique; the conquering hero of the unconquered, the balladeer and champion of the most exotic and most fantastic region in the world — the Russian or rather Soviet Klondike.

Tigers — they began and ended all conversation. They reigned over the imaginations as a frightful yet inescapable image of that unknown land towards which each had started out so lightheartedly as if to a wedding. They took part in 'preference' card games, in drinking, in gossip, and even in love-making.

"Did you hear . . . , did you read how a tiger recently stole a guard . . . ?"

"What are you saying! . . . One heart . . . How did it happen?"

"Two spades! Ho, ho, took him away like a kitten . . ."

* Arseniev, a Russian explorer of south-eastern Siberia.

"My God . . . Pass! . . . my God!"

Or:

"Oh, you sleek kitten!" that, of course, between lovers. Another woman, sitting across, widened her eyes and whispered to a neighbour:

"Some kitten! He is her fourth since the Urals."

"And to Vladivostok?"

"Some appetite, God forbid, more like a tigress than a kitten!"

Two others were courting in the corridor; holding each other close, they gazed out of the window and dreamed:

"Ah, how happy I am! . . . We will go far, far into the taiga, and there in the bush, midst flowers and primordial forests I will build a cozy little house . . . I will make it so . . . so . . ."

"Careful, you will rip off the buttons Oh, how wonderful Aren't you afraid of tigers?"

Or:

"Please tell me, can one walk around the streets in Khabarovsk? Safely? Is there a militia?!"

"There is. Why?"

"Well, I read that until recently tigers frolicked in the streets and carried away people, even horses. Is that true?"

"True."

"My God!" And turning to her husband in a desperate hysterical mood: "Didn't I tell you, didn't I? To hell with that Far Eastern Country! But no we're going, we're going. He will get . . . He'll get isolation pay. He'll . . . It's not enough for him! I'm getting off! I'm getting off at the first station! I've had enough of your fancies."

"Please dearest heart, please calm down!" The distraught husband (probably a bookkeeper of a "Soyuzryb" (Fish Trust) or a "Soyuzzoloto" (Gold Trust) tried to cheer her. "All right, we won't go to Khabarovsk, we'll go to Sakhalin. It's surrounded by water and the devils won't be able to get there."

Tiger. A frightful deity with a striped skin and an even "striper" reputation. The almighty "Amba" more famous than Arseniev himself, and the most exotic on earth.

Perhaps Zhen-Shen was the only thing that could compete with tigers in this unusual assemblage of shattering exoticism. Zhen-Shen, that wonderful root, that mighty talisman, mythical yet real, product of this Ussurian Eldorado, surrounded by the aura of an all-Asian, no, all-Union or even universal fame. Even the magic fern which blooms on the night before Ivan Kupala* in all European literature which guards a host of treasures and legends, paled before the magical Zhen-Shen.**

Even the name — the compound word, had gained magic power, rejuvenated old men and gave them hope that all was not yet lost, disturbed old hearts which had long ceased to react to high breasts and other attractions, provoked old bachelors to boyish pranks and Don Juan gestures, and drove the young to fever pitch. Exhausted by excesses, they dreamed of the moment when that enchantment of Zhen-Shen would at last be at their service And not being able to await that blessed moment they dragged out their "kitten," and the imagination gave rise to a conviction that they had just come under the influence of Zhen-Shen and wonders would now be there to behold

Oh, Arseniev, did you ever dream that you would become such a successful promoter, the driving force behind such a mass of humanity, able to rouse them to such extraordinary deeds, and drive them toward that chimeric fairy-tale country, there, where you froze your feet and lungs, where in pain and poverty under the stress of frightful Asiatic experiences, you prematurely laid down your wandering, rheumatic bones?

* Ivan Kupalo, a pagan deity and festival named after him, celebrated in mid-summer, the time of greatest vegetation and fertility.

** Zhen-Shen, a rare medicinal root, found in the Ussuri forests; used in Tibetan medicine.

Did you ever imagine that after death you would become such a promoter, such an instigator in the hearts of sloe-eyed beauties, their mamas and papas, reckless adventurers, and even drunkards, even bookkeepers, and old co-operators? Had you any notion that some day you would drive them over 30 lands, over countless chains of mountains, endless bush and wasteland with families and chattels, to conquer and hold the land you discovered, that renowned Klondike and Eden; yes, that Eden where grape vine and cranberry grow, and the cork tree and, if you are to be believed, the polar birch, the sub-tropical panther and the Himalayan bear, and the polar "ursus arctos" besides, the noble elk and the snow-white gorilla?

And the hearts and dreams of all these exalted conquistadors flew ahead even faster. Having started out from Takanka, or Sukharevka, or Lopan near Kharkiv, Krevan, Shuliavka, from the mudholes of Odessa, Leningrad or some other all-Union slum, having escaped the boredom of Soviet daily life, and "social competition," having ended all that in one stroke at the ticket office, they climbed aboard this longest of long-run trains and began life anew. To live again, to love again, to yearn again. Some with a purpose, some without, they dived into the unknown which began permeating their consciousness from the first day, asserting that they were going to a place where things were different, where the whole world was different.

The scenery, the attitudes, the flora, the people and the horizon changed from day to day, everything was new and increasingly strange. When they crossed the Urals they noticed snow on the mountain tops. In the Viatka they noticed samples of the folk craft which they were used to seeing in the city art and craft shops, and they bought mouth-organs and whistles and all kinds of bric-a-brac made of wood, paper, clay, bark; painted, carved, or burnt out by the genius of the Russian civilization of Viatka. And these bits and pieces, these mouth-organs and these

whistles changed the decorative and vocal style of the whole express. European styles were overpowered by the styles of Viatka. The place was filled with real folk craft — baskets, slippers, suitcases, toy bears, combs and vases, and the most useless toys.

Whenever the express stopped there was always something new that none of them had seen before. The passengers baled out of the train and bought up whatever they could lay their hands on, dragged it back into the train, sat down, and the train dashed off again; and again there was laughter and jokes, ribald singing at the tops of their voices, "Long and wide is my native land."

Near Irkutsk they looked out of the windows and sang a famous prisoners' song which they all knew as the hymn of the former Tsarist Empire, "Far in the regions of Irkutsk."

East of Baikal they noticed a sharp difference in the native population: red-skinned Buriats and Buriato-Mongols around Ulan-Ude—proud, wind-, snow- and sun-burnt, bronze Yakuts, reminiscent of Jack London's Indians, similarly bronzed Yakut women at Chita, dressed in national costumes; Tunguses with their sharp-eared clogs — Chinese, "Gurans"

Partly to entertain the passengers, and partly to display his erudition, a professor of history, with a little round belly and glasses above a hairy wart, with a fan of cards in front of his nose, was delivering a historical treatise about the first political exiles of Siberia who laid down their bones in this area of trans-Baikal, the grimmest and harshest corner of eastern Siberia.

There were two of these pioneers; the first was a rebel and traitor, the Little Russian hetman, Demian Mnohohrishny, the second was the mad schismatic, the priest Avvakum.*

* Avvakum, a Russian archpriest, author of the well-known *Life*; a schismatic, who spent many years in Siberian exile.

But no one reflected on how that "traitor," that patriarch of exiles, had happened to beat such a wide highway to Siberia for all his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and so truly deserved a monument somewhere here among these bare crests midst the wilderness of trans-Baikal.

Through the windows there flickered in a wide arc the grim landscape cut by ranges of rocky mountains. It flowed by both sides of the express, repulsive in its treacherous, historical reputation.

And suddenly, as though a purposeful illustration to the professor's excursion into history, like a mirage summoned from the past, there was an addition to the scenery. Like an apparition, all these generations of exiles to hard labour, whole armies of them, stood on both sides of the railway track leaning on pickaxes, shovels or wheelbarrows, knee deep in water and mud, and gazed at the train:

"Poor fellow! Look! A *Bamlag*!"*

Everyone dashed to the windows. My God! There they were! Real, flesh and blood in countless numbers like the solution of a painful secret, like the secret itself, too frightening to behold.

There they stood in countless rows, tired, exhausted, in queer and frightful *Bamlag* uniforms: rag caps, pulled over their ears, and in such rags, it seemed they had been ripped and torn by all the dogs on earth, and all the winds and storms of trans-Siberia.

They stood and watched the express, this flickering miracle of an almost forgotten world.

Unshaven and filthy, with burning, sickened eyes; row upon row of humanity written off the register of life, surrounded by patrols, shotguns and dogs. Some waved their hands, others just looked dull, waiting until the express went by.

* *Bamlag*, concentration camps providing labour for construction of the Baikal-Amur Main Line.

They were building a new road, paving it with their despair, and now here they stood as though on parade, from Poltava, Chernihiv, Kherson and Kuban . . . the progeny of Mnohorishny and Avvakum, the first convicts. They were the ones about whom some day people would tell stories and sing slow, sad, painful songs, as painful as the winter winds of trans-Baikal.

Suddenly things were thrown out through the windows of the express; first from the engine, like a signal — several packages of tobacco, and then out of all the windows there flew cigarettes, pieces of chocolate, lemons, boots, pieces of bread, parcels wrapped in newspaper, a holocaust of the most varied items. Children waved, and urged on by an elemental drive and a general mob psychosis which seized the express, they threw out flowers, candy, mouth-organs — they clapped their hands enthusiastically and laughed from sheer joy.

The people in the *Bamlag* uniforms came to life and rushed at the gifts, stamping over each other in the process.

Shots were fired from the embankment. And, as though in protest, someone madly tossed out of the window of the train everything that came to hand: a pillow, overshoes, phonograph records, a bed-spread, money . . .

The wind picked these things up and they hovered over the train like doves over Jordan scared into flight by the shots.

Someone in the train buried his face in the seat cushion and wept bitterly.

The paper money continued to float over the train and followed in its wake. There seemed to be no end to the prisoners. They seemed to rise out of the ground and waved their hands silently; and as the distance increased they blended into a blurred grey fog.

The express flew on madly without a stop.

And ceaseless tears continued to flow on that comfortable, soft seat in the pullman.

This was all part of the exoticism.

But this event passed quickly like a mirage and only momentarily marred the spirit among the passengers. New and more interesting impressions pushed that mirage aside as though it had never happened. It was left behind somewhere in trans-Baikal, and towards them came new wonders, new scenery such as they had never seen before.

As the train came out of the dark tunnel the blinding sun shone over the express revealing such a beautiful panorama that some could hardly resist the urge to pull the handle marked 'Westinghouse' which would have stopped the train. "If one could only stop here and walk out, no, run out, into that landscape. . . ." Then again darkness. Then the express ran into a tunnel of night and, gushing forth flame, it flew into a fantasy. Rocking pleasantly to the accompaniment of gramophone tangos and foxtrots, and dreaming and dreaming, it flashed on towards a fairytale.

It both created, and dashed towards this fairytale, losing the sense of distinction between reality and fiction, between facts and their meaning, it became part of it, a part of its adventures, a part of this Kingdom of Arseniev, "Dersu-Uzala" and "Amba."

II

It was bright and comfortable in the dining car. Large fans rotated smoothly and quietly near the ceiling, making a pleasant breeze. Ruby wine bottles twinkled pleasantly on tables covered with snow-white cloths. There was beer and cognac and liqueurs and port bottles crowned with gold. They seemed to carry on a conversation with the clicking wheels. Their sound seemed to be an invitation to the passengers. Near the bottles were huge cut-glass bowls of oranges, candies, pieces of chocolate and a variety of tarts.

Solicitous waiters in black jackets with white towels slung across their arms stood on guard; they were ready to move at the slightest movement of an eyebrow and seemed to foresee the slightest wish of a customer.

Such comfort, such luxury, such a variety of drinks! This must be the only place in this whole fantastic "one sixth of the world" where one could find anything like this. So much fashion, such noble manners, and wealth, such solicitude for human needs!

The express was a kind of extra-territorial state. It had its own customs, its own laws, its own regime; it was a separate world. Sometimes foreigners travelled on this train, diplomats, ministers and guests from far-off countries.

The bottles continued to ring out merrily, and the fans kept turning dreamily. A huge mirror, hung with cut glass prisms, shed a fairy-like, flickering light.

Evening silhouettes ran past the windows in two continuous rows: violet and rose-tinted landscapes, white peaks of mountains, deep indigo valleys, grotesque outlines of trees, block posts, buildings; like two endless films.

The buffet car was almost empty. Those lovers of beer and wine and happy conversation who used to fill it during the first few days were no longer there, some of them had reached the bottom of their pockets because these things cost money; others had devoted themselves completely to cards, some were romancing and still others were playing another rhumba. Only a few people occupied this cozy spot.

The end table by the window was occupied by a powerful-looking major — dark brow, fleshy nose, somewhere over 30 years of age — a major in the OGPU, NKVD. He had pushed his blue cap to the back of his head, undone his collar and was drinking his wine; his glass never strayed far from his lips, and his eyes were glued to a newspaper which he had managed to stand up vertically. He was sipping both his wine and his *Pravda*,

studying the leader's speech delivered at the last conference of the All-Union Communist Party. Now and then he took out a pencil and underlined something, smiled enthusiastically, then frowned, took another drink and continued to peruse the paper with his jet-black eyes. The major seemed to be the embodiment of the stately power and honour of his "proletarian" state. None in the train bore himself with such dignity, such pride and such self-assurance; yes, even with some disdain, with a secretive mien, and an intense feeling of superiority.

He was not moved by anything exotic, by eccentric tales, not even by tigers. What were these compared with what he had seen, what he knew, what he could do? The kind of hunting of which he had been, and still was a master, could not be compared with any other. If only these amateurs knew that wonder and that legend! He was both the wonder and the legend! Here, under his glittering uniform, were hidden things before which even Arseniev with his silly Dersu-Uzala would pale; and even all those tigers, even their hair would stand on end.

He was not following some exotic will-o'-the-wisp. He was following other game. He had received another assignment, a high post somewhere there in the devil's playhouse and was going to assume his post in the ordinary run of duty. He was fully disciplined, punctual and not inclined to get involved in trivialities. In the meantime he wasn't wasting time: he drank his wine and studied the leader's speech.

At the other end of the buffet car there was a pleasant atmosphere, the ring of drinking glasses, humorous stories and laughter. A pleasure-seeking group had pitched camp there. They had shoved two tables together and covered them with a battery of bottles, glasses and plates. Five of them had settled down to drinking and laughter. Five grinning dare-devils, soldiers of fortune, young reckless comrades. They were typical of this country's young

'heroes of our time' who were so plentiful those days, who couldn't settle down anywhere for long and kept moving from place to place, earning good money and spending even better, and grinning at everything. They were the spend-thrifts of life and money, perhaps professional engineers or pilots or both. They were the ones who flew all over this 'one sixth part of the world', over this huge polygon of humanity, and would fly over all the other worlds if they could get out.

One of them was wearing a pince-nez, gaiters, and up-to-date English breeches. The others, half jokingly half seriously, referred to him as 'professor'. Another, dressed in a jacket of military cut and fawn riding breeches was most elegant and undoubtedly reckless. More than the others, he laughed arrogantly and poured out highly spiced language. Only now and then he stopped abruptly, frowned, and looked around suspiciously. Two others — wind-and-sun-burnt by the Crimean or perhaps Odessa sun — were big, muscular and grim. The fifth was from Novorosiisk in the Kuban and a contrabandist from Batum; but nobody knew that.

Four of them had travelled together from Kiev. They were going to the 'Eldorado' somewhere at the other end of the world. Why? No particular reason! They had met in Kiev, pub-crawled together, and decided to go. They were looking for something better. They quit their jobs, signed contracts for the Far East, got their passage money, boarded the train and went. If they don't like it there they'll simply go back. They knew the Labour Law by heart and nobody could pull a fast one on them.

The fifth one — the one wearing a military jacket and fawn riding breeches — had joined this happy, carefree group *en route*.

The boys drank whiskey followed by Malaga and Port and then went back to whiskey after a bout of beer. They seemed to enjoy themselves and not a care in the world

seemed to bother them. Later they ordered food, and generally conducted themselves like young millionaires. "Waiter, three more caviars . . . waiter, some more smoked meat! . . ."

The waiter hurried with his task. His face retained a look of complete indifference. He had seen a lot in his time, but these boys seemed to have seen more. You couldn't surprise them or ruffle them. The 'professor' had been to the Far East before. He had even been to Chukotka right next to Alaska on the Bering Straits. It was he who had talked the others into going. Now he was entertaining them with humorous accounts of his adventures.

The subject of conversation was the same here as in the other sections of the express.

The waiter brought the smoked meat and the 'professor' picked up a knife and fork and started to cut a piece. His efforts proved completely useless. "*Eureka!*" he announced suddenly with enthusiasm, and added solemnly in professorial tones: "*Eureka!* I shall make myself some shoe-soles out of this piece. I shall sign them, full name and address, and the year of birth. And I shall walk through this blessed land . . . and eventually I will be eaten by a tiger. Yes, he will eat everything, bones and all, but not the soles of my boots! That will be more than he can manage! You, my dear chaps, will find them, and you will bury me, or rather the soles, and you will drink my, no, their health. . . . Waiter! *Zubrovka*,* please!" There was loud laughter in the group. The waiter brought the *zubrovka* and made a casual effort to remove the offending smoked meat. But the 'professor,' politely but firmly, protested: "No, no, what do you think you are doing? I paid good money for this and I won't give it up so easily. After all this is quality material! How about patent rights?"

The major frowned disapprovingly at the group but they didn't pay the slightest attention to him, as though

* *zubrovka*, brandy.

he weren't there. He put the paper on the table and stared out the window

"Hey, chaps, did you notice the *Bamlag* today?" asked one of them suddenly, casting a meaningful glance at the major.

"Yes, we saw it," replied one of the men in solemn, thick tones. "Yes, we were even present at the parade I wonder who threw out a pillow. It will help them sleep comfortably!"

"The hell with the pillow. But someone threw out a gramophone record. What in the world good will that do?"

"Why not, it might be useful at that," . . . then only whispers and a pause, followed by a burst of laughter.

The major shifted, looked back in the window, frowned again and then smiled, repressing inward laughter. "Let those boobs laugh. They've either been there already or they are candidates."

The 'professor' changed the subject:

"Attention please, attention please," he began like a radio announcer. "This is . . .

"Odessa-mamma," interjected the one with the coffee-coloured jacket.

"Yes, Odessa-mamma."

"And Vladivostok — a filthy dump hole. . . ."

"Well, we'll get there and we'll see. Attention please! Which one of you learned geography? And history? . . . Well, it is well that you all studied it. If you didn't you will, until it chokes you Well, by way of education, self-education that is, I will tell you how God created the country we are going to. Waiter, beer!"

The happy 'professor' poured out the beer for his chums and began an authoritative discourse on a naturalist-geographic-cum-religious theme about 'how God created that queer country,' that Golden Eldorado where they were

going, and that 'it is a place where even the devil will break his leg before he figures out what it is all about'.

"But," he continued, "it is generally known that that country has everything in creation, everything is there just as in a museum, except for bananas and monkeys, if you don't take into account Darwin's researches, and except for crocodiles, if you regard as crocodiles only those things that swim somewhere near Cheops pyramid. Everything else is there. You see it was like this When God created the world — although the Vladivostok Turk who told this one ascribed this achievement to Allah, for, as is customary all over the world, everyone roots for his own team—so, according to this Turk, Allah created this miracle, but orthodox unbelievers and the Christians have made their own corrections Well, when our God made the world, he moved from west to east and placed things as was necessary according to plan. He carried a sackful of seeds and things and placed them carefully as though following a carefully worked-out Finance Plan of a heavenly Communist Economy. This here, that there, right around the earth. And finally he came to this area and stopped on the crest of Sikhote-Alin — yes, there is such a range — and there was no more land! His sack, however, still held all kinds of things! God looked and wondered. It would be too much of an effort to go all the way back, so he simply spilled everything out of his sack right here! And that is how it all began.

And the mess that this caused was such that, God forgive, people will puzzle for a long time yet as to how this could have happened. I must say, it is some country! And, in the words of that Vladivostok Turk, nobody can figure the whole thing out, only Turks or Zaporozhians perhaps! Why Zaporozhians? To that he replies, that that is the way things are ordered on earth. If things are too tough in any spot, then send in the Zaporozhians, or at least their progeny. In the Kuban — Zaporozhians, on the Terek —

Zaporozhians. At Petrograd — again Zaporozhians! The same thing here. Tsar Nicholas was no fool when he insisted upon those foolish *khakhly*.^{*} God, too, had them in mind when he created this world. It's been that way ever since, and it might not end until our generation. . . . Waiter, cream soda, please!"

When the lecture was finished, the boys drank it down in clear whiskey, made editorial corrections and additions to the text. Things were going well; not a worry in the world.

Thus they enjoyed themselves. The major, in the meantime, was again deep in his paper, and had by now reached the sixth page containing sport and other all-Union reports.

Two men dressed in rubber coats, elegant chrome leather boots and Uzbek skullcaps so popular in summer, entered the dining car. They sat down at the end table and opened a bottle of beer. Apparently bored, they gazed around the car and listened to the hum and laughter. They looked at the major, at the jolly company . . . and exchanged glances.

Shortly afterwards one of them rose and walked up to the jolly boys. He stopped in front of the one wearing the military jacket, stared at him for some time, and then announced solemnly:

"Follow me . . ."

The youth in the military jacket looked him over slowly from head to foot, picked up his glass and said:

"Excuse me, are you speaking to me?"

"Yes, you!"

"I am listening . . ."

"Follow me!" repeated the skullcap sharply, shoving his hand deep into his pocket.

"Oho, do I understand you correctly, and have you — have you got the right place?"

"Shut up!" shouted the other. Suddenly his companion

^{*} *khakhly*, derogatory name given by the Russians to the Ukrainians.

came up and stood beside him smiling, his eyes darting all over the buffet and especially over the other members of the group.

"Shut up!" shouted the first one threateningly.

"Listen when you are told. You are under arrest. Follow me."

"In the first place I am not yet arrested. In the second place I have no intention of following anyone, anywhere, and in the third place we have yet to see who will follow whom, and where."

The youth rose slowly, clenched his teeth, leaned on the back of the chair and tapping his heel, continued: "Listen here . . . am I drunk or are you, am I a silly ass or is it you? How about your documents?" And then, addressing himself to both, "Where is the order for my arrest? If you please, the order for my arrest?"

"With pleasure," and the man wearing the skullcap pulled a revolver from his pocket and raised it to the youth's nose, "here's the order for your arrest."

"Bravo!", the youth exclaimed sarcastically, "but you are a fool, that is a false order. I have a similar one; here," and pulling back his jacket he slapped a holster containing a revolver which hung on a belt at his hip.

Immediately his feet were knocked from under him, and his arms were pinned behind his back with a jiu jitsu hold, but the youth was strong, he broke loose and in the process knocked down several chairs and one of the attackers. After a short but determined struggle they pinned him again and disarmed him. The buffet car was filled with curses, the frightened waiters were hovering in the doorways.

And now the major got up and took two steps forward, "What's this all about, citizens?"

One of those wearing a skullcap rushed over to the major, stood rigidly at attention, and reported something in a whisper.

This set the major's eyes afire, "Mnohohrishny?"

"Yes," and he passed some documents and photos to the major. But the major would not even look at them and pushed them aside. He rubbed his eyes, knocked his forehead with the palm of his hand and suddenly cursed vehemently through his teeth. There was a satanic note to his curses, but he soon regained his self-control and in a calm and serious tone said to the skullcap: "Let him go, he's not the one. I know the other one personally." And, after a pause, "Oh yes, I know him very well."

The man in the skullcap wavered and the major turned to him sharply but quietly:

"What did I tell you? And I advise you generally to be more careful. Are you blind? Check the documents and then give your Chief a report."

The skullcap paled perceptibly, stood at attention and repeated, "You have been told to free him. Yes, free him, and give a report to the Chief." And he turned to the scene of recent battle. The three men concerned went aside, looked through the documents and continued cursing. The two skullcaps were full of apologies to the youth wearing the military jacket, who continued to curse them roundly through clenched teeth.

They returned his revolver and broken belt, then the two of them sneaked out quickly.

"Fools," mumbled the youth as he fastened his own belt, "damned idiots, can't do a job cleanly. Boobs!" and without looking at any one or saying goodbye he left the buffet car.

In the meantime his friends had sobered considerably during the incident and sat quietly. They just stared at each other.

"Well, boys," said the 'professor, finally, "how about another order for each one of us? Just one" The jest didn't work. Things weren't the same. In spite of the efforts to revive the recent carefree feeling, nothing came of

it. They had lost the desire for further 'orders' as well as the assurance that, after what had just happened, they could continue in safety the way they had done hitherto.

"The world has come into its own! Oh, yes, the world, tram-tram-tararam!"

As though at a command the boys got up. Four husky blue-eyed daredevils hardened by storms and winds and wandering, and welded together by a short yet strong friendship which had so recently been threatened — four friends in search of adventure, of unknown regions and of a better fate. They poured themselves full glasses of whiskey and raised them solemnly. Smiling they looked each other straight in the eyes and emptied the glasses in one swallow. They paid the waiter and departed.

* * *

The major was left alone in the car. For a long time he sat and drank; but now it was cognac instead of wine. He continued to rub his temples and somehow could not stop the waves of frightening memories connected with that cursed name which kept welling inside him. "That's the devil."

That was the only one he had not broken and who would continually reappear in his mind's eye for the rest of his life.

He recalled that episode of two years ago — the investigation he had conducted into the case of an aeroplane-constructor, a friend of the pilot Chukhnovsky*—that zoological nationalist, that devil in human form.

Brrr! those eyes with tiny spots on the lids — they would follow him for ever.

What didn't he do to him! In fits of maddening anger he had broken his ribs, twisted his joints. . . .

He no longer insisted on his testimony, no, he only wanted the devil to howl and weep and to beg him as all the

* Chukhnovsky, a famous Soviet pilot and aircraft designer, later arrested.

others had done. But he only gazed back with wide open eyes, like a statue. At first he fought back madly, contemptuously, with curses and sarcasm, he spat at him — the investigator — right in the eye. Later he only sucked in his breath through clenched teeth and was silent; crushed but not broken. He was silent and filled with contempt. They had to bring him in on a sheet for he could no longer walk. . . .

He was already dying — but he wouldn't breathe a word, and those eyes, those eyes!

They poisoned his sleep and peace of mind, they seemed to poison his whole life. With those drops of blood on the eye lids they burned in a deathly pale face with a sickening fire of unspoken, infinite, beastly hatred, and stared unblinkingly right into the bottom of his soul They would crucify him, tear him apart!

Damnation!

That thundering wide-eyed serpent! How often had he struck out at those eyes; he had even tried to gouge them out but couldn't manage it himself because that devil had the strength of a Goliath even when bathing in his own blood, even when carried on a sheet. At first it took four of them to lay him out but he couldn't very well gouge out his eyes in the presence of witnesses, and moreover, his nerves couldn't stretch that far. But they should have been gouged out! Now they would hound him for the rest of his life!

He had said so at the very beginning:

"I will torment you for the rest of your days. All of us who have come through here, we will all torment you and accompany you to your grave — thousands of us who have been beaten and tortured

"You will go to sleep, but you will not be able to sleep; we will yell and roar in your ears

"You will have a mistress — but you will not find happiness with her; you will kiss her like a thief, but you

will not possess her — we will yell, roar and howl

“You will embrace your wife — and suddenly you will be driven to madness by our lament

“You will have children but they will not bring you comfort for you will see us in their eyes. I shall stare at you from their eyes and you will run from your own flesh and blood, but there will be no escape. . . .”

“The devil! The werewolf! The scoundrel!” The major gnashed his teeth from too much drink and from a nervous tremor that travelled up and down beneath his skin. He had come to know this feeling well since he had ruined his nerves on this job. With shaking hand he poured another cognac and gulped it. And the unpleasant associations continued to press on like the tide through a broken dyke.

“The devil must have cast a spell!” The major remembered those suffocating sleepless nights which he alone knew. And the hallucinations — he who had nerves like hausers — he had hallucinations. Eventually he was afraid to sleep by himself and got married. And having married, he used to run away, afraid to sleep at home.

The major recalled when that maniac had escaped from the lunatic asylum where he had been placed as a result of the interrogation. That was fine; that seemed to be the end. He, the major, the investigator, would now have complete peace because the only exit from the asylum was the grave.

But no! He had escaped! He wasn't mad at all!

They caught him. And the major begged to be allowed to continue the investigation, although he was now the head of a department. He wanted to attend to it personally because he felt that as long as that man was alive he would have no rest. It was up to him to finish this case. And the tribunal sealed it properly! It had looked as if everything was now over.

But damn the man, he had escaped again somewhere here where his own fate had led him.

The major continued to pour and to drink, and his thoughts led him over and over again to his first days with this maniac. His head was buzzing even without the drink, and the glass seemed to contain neither wine nor cognac; once he thought it was blood. He spilled it out through the window and set the glass down. He gazed at it. He saw two eyes with little drops of blood on the eyelids approaching him; they were burning with a fearful, inextinguishable inhuman hatred, they were the eyes of a murdered, crushed but undefeated victim.

The major pushed the table back and rose unsteadily; "The bill!"

* * *

The express dashed on and on, rocking gently, carrying the exalted seekers of fortune, impatient passengers into that unknown imaginary region — the kingdom of Dersu-Uzala and Amba, now close at hand.

3

The Duel With Death

It was a high taiga cut by four ravines thickly covered with vegetation and as impregnable as the African jungle. It stood still as though charmed, not a leaf rustled, not a twig moved. Huge cedars, well over a hundred feet tall, had outstripped everything else in search of the sun, and their clean brown stems reached out from the chaos underneath and stretched towards the heavens, only their pinacles crowned with foliage. Sunbeams flickered over these crowns, and white clouds sailed over. Huge poplars followed the example of the cedars in another ravine. In the third there was a thicket of nut trees with a few elms and small birches and choke cherries entwined by long vines of wild grape. The fourth and last ravine was complete chaos; in some places there were compact thickets of various bushes, and tall grasses and weeds. Everywhere there lay, criss-crossed, dead trees like giants on a battle-field, some perfectly sound, others decaying, with gaping hollows like the muzzles of strange guns. Others had been uprooted with their whole root systems which clung to the trunk like huge palms with rock and earth still between their fingers.

The earth itself was covered with moss which seemed to grow everywhere. It was dark and damp; only here and

there sharp streaks of sunlight broke through and stood out like swords stuck in the ground.

An impenetrable virgin jungle, which now descended and then rose slowly uphill moving thus from crest to crest like a profuse sea of vegetation, spilled over into the unknown.

A little striped animal which sat on its haunches on a fallen cedar and like a studious scholar investigated an old mushroom which it held between its paws, was suddenly alarmed: No, it was really nothing, the jungle was as quiet as the strange temple of a strange god. Only a woodpecker chattered and flew from one high cedar to another where it stopped dead on a branch with its tufted head downwards and its neck stretched out, otherwise perfect quiet.

Tiny shadows flickered across a fallen tree. The chipmunk began playing with them, and with his tail high like a Sultan's dragoon, he hopped over these shadows. Finally he stopped and looked down. Below, a narrow path seemed to emerge from the weeds and from among the fallen trees and then disappeared into a similar background. It was a small animal path beaten down over thousands of years. There were many such paths never before trodden by human foot. The chipmunk scrambled down on to the path, moved hither and yon and, suddenly, uttered his cry and dashed madly up the cedar and then to a young oak. He peeped out and then hid again. He uttered another cry and stopped abruptly but continued gazing from around the branch. No, he wasn't mistaken, something was moving, something was coming up the path. He heard the rustle of a dead leaf and then the crack of a twig, then a few pebbles went rolling down the slope, something heavy was moving slowly up the winding path towards the clearing. The disturbed chipmunk dashed upward and chattered with all his might — he was alarmed. He couldn't make up his mind from which vantage point he should observe the scene — which was the safest. He had seen quite a few

things in his time. He knew all the animals and knew exactly how to conduct himself in their presence. He knew the deer and the *isubra*.^{*} He had watched the woolly bear straining up the slope and the silly wild boars who always left havoc in their wake. He had seen the marten, he knew the wolves and specially all his enemies, primarily the fierce bobtailed cat. He knew all his friends and all his enemies. Some he welcomed and from others he ran with all his might. But the kind of thing that was coming now he had never seen before. Should he run or should he stand his ground? Goodness me!

Having finally climbed to the top of the crest, a two-legged creature, breathing heavily and faltering, came up the path. It was ragged and as thin as a skeleton. A hairy chest heaved irregularly over the ribs that showed through the tattered rags. On reaching the fallen cedar, the unexpected guest sat down heavily, leaned against the roots, threw back his head and closed his eyes. Slowly, with his hand, he wiped the sweat off his face. He was quite young; and completely exhausted.

His darkened face with tightly clenched jaws was covered with a growth of beard. Two deep, upright wrinkles between his brows were covered with a salty deposit from perspiration. One brow was flickering nervously giving the impression that it was about to rise in flight.

For a while he sat motionless as though asleep. Then suddenly he opened wide a pair of agitated eyes and, leaning forward, listened intently. Again he closed his eyes and huddled to the upturned roots. He licked his dried, cracked lips, and without opening his eyes, slowly waved his head. "It's no use. . . ." As though in reply, he clenched his teeth, rose and, rocking from side to side, took two steps but had to turn and sit down again.

"That is enough . . . this damned, accursed country. There is no strength left. . . ."

^{*} *isubra*, Manchurian deer.

He whispered this without any tone of complaint. In the manner customary to people who have been jailed for a long time, he talked to himself.

"Hey, my head! How much you have taken and endured, and yet you are dying. And you will die . . . Hm. . . ."

His nostrils twisted in a brief smile, he sighed, then wrinkled his eyebrows in a heavy frown. His head had had enough. Myriads of thoughts ran through in feverish disorder. He had been going now for five days; not walking, but running like a deer in a straight line through the bush. He had escaped from the claws of death and flown as though on wings. "Freedom! Freedom!" His nostrils widely distended, he was almost overpowered by the sense of freedom as he dashed through the tangled greenery. All his twenty-five years came to life at once, straining every muscle and mobilizing every joint and every nerve in his body.

"Freedom! Freedom, be my bond!"

And he drove on for he knew that his very existence depended upon how far he would be able to get away in the first days. When his strength gave out, all he needed to do was to stop and look back and there rose before him the frightful mirage of what he had lived through, and the even more frightening scene of what was in store. Then a sudden burst of energy welled within him and he flew on like the wind. "Farther, farther, as long as your strength lasts." Just a bit farther and he would be safe. "Then we shall see. Oh, yes, then we shall see." He would skip far beyond the borders of this 'fatherland', into Manchuria, Japan, Alaska, China . . . new, strange, unknown countries. He would go around the whole world and then return home. Yes, he would come back a venging conqueror. He left eastwards but he would return from the West.

And he flew on and on. At least he thought he still went as fast as he did at the beginning, whereas in fact he

only walked; and more slowly and more heavily as time went on. He almost crawled. The spirit within flew on like a falcon, but his legs, barred by the tangled growth underfoot, hardly stirred.

Yet he fought on in a straight line through the wilderness. If he came upon a path he avoided it; he went straight, like a beast pursued by dogs. He feared meeting a human being. In the morning he was wet with dew from head to foot but he would not stop. Quick movement and the heat of the sun would dry him. He knocked his feet against stumps and stones but paid no heed and felt no pain. His course drove him into a tangle of windfalls and he fought on recklessly for hours, ripping his clothes to shreds and tearing nasty gashes in his skin. He climbed over huge logs, his feet struck loose gravel or gaping holes in the ground covered over by weeds and he fell, wrenching his joints, but he rose and went on. And when night came, when darkness spilled over everything and it became impossible to see anything, he stopped and slept where he was. He had nothing with which to make a fire, no weapons, no cap and no shoes, only half-rotten prison rags which were slowly being ripped to shreds, which formed a trail behind him.

The first night he slept on a huge fallen log and was wakened in the morning by drops of cold dew falling from high branches. The second night he spent in a hole, and in the morning he was frightened out of his wits when he saw an overhanging mass which stood about five metres tall; a wall of roots of a huge tree that had been uprooted with earth and rocks. The roots were bound together so tightly that they held this mass of earth and rock in a death-like grip and had they loosened even one of those rocks it would have been big enough to kill an ox. He sought water, drank and was on his way. The third night he fell into a pile of dry grass and weeds that had been collected by something and made into a lair. Something jumped out of

the lair and dashed off grunting, leaving broken branches in its wake. He assumed that he had hit upon the lair of some awful beast but before he could think the idea through, he was asleep.

Utter fatigue, only now did he begin to understand what that meant. He had never known it before. At first he did not think of food, then hunger struck suddenly and violently, demanding satisfaction for today and all the other days. At first he thought it would be a simple matter in this wonderful and fertile kingdom of vegetation, animal life, fish and birds. Then came terrifying anxiety; he could not find anything which was edible. The taiga would yield him nothing. In vain he ferreted with the care of a scientist and the desperation of the hungry man. No berries, no fruit, and apart from toadstools there were not any of those things he had read of as being usual in forests.

The powerful vines of wild grapes would not yield him one gram, there were no fish in the brooks, no animals, no birds in this jungle. As far as he had gone he had not seen one living being apart from an occasional snake that slithered away off a stump or stone bathed in sunlight. Where was that strange and even exotic world of birds and beasts? A wilderness, a still green wilderness. And yet he had scared an animal off one night, therefore they must be here. But how would he get it even if he did meet one? There were ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that such an animal would get him rather than the reverse. Yet somehow fear did not penetrate his consciousness. He pulled out roots from the ground and tried to chew them, and once he chewed and swallowed something which made him faint, and his body became covered with cold sweat; he vomited, drank water, vomited again as though his whole inside were coming out through his throat.

"Damnation!" And yet he was not a victim of despair. He had gone through too much to become desperate. He had had countless opportunities to die and it was only his

good fortune that he was still there to walk this endless green ocean. If he could only eat, just a little bit, he would be completely happy to continue swimming this sea and to experience the same form of life all the other living things here enjoyed, like these huge cedars that reached the clouds. No, he was not a victim of despair. He clenched his jaws tighter and went on. He was driven forward by unusual stubbornness and a steeled manhood which had been tried a hundred times. Forward, in spite of everything! But his cool brain declared that he was dying none the less and that he was walking a razor edge between life and death. One slight blow and he would fall into the dark abyss. No! Something within fought fiercely and rose in a tight knot towards his throat. He licked his dry, blood-encrusted lips and shifted his head into a more comfortable position. His head was swimming. He opened his eyes and stared ahead unconcernedly. Suddenly he noticed that right in front of him sat a little striped animal, whose eyes too were wide open and who looked at his guest carefully with evident curiosity. Tsik! Tsik! Tsik! Then he flicked his tail, cocked his head and went "Tsik" once more.

"It doesn't move," so the chipmunk hopped down and disappeared in the weeds. In a moment he was back again on the tree, settled down comfortably on a branch looking like a Tartar in his little striped coat. He took a nut out of his mouth and holding it in his fore paws he studied it carefully.

Apparently the nut was satisfactory and he began gnawing it rapidly without taking his eyes off his guest. He worked fast with his tiny jaws, spat out the shells and then wiped his whiskers with his paw.

Two surprised and hungry eyes looked back at him. Saliva was pouring in their owner's mouth.

"Look at the beast, he's eating."

Slowly the traveller rose. Without taking his hunger-

driven eyes off the little animal, he began to edge forward stealthily. He was seized by an overwhelming desire to catch this living piece of flesh and blood. Therein lay his salvation. Very slowly, his eyes half-closed, he moved closer and closer. The animal continued to chew his nut apparently oblivious to what was happening. He raised his hand, closer and closer. All he had to do now was suddenly to close his fingers, when the little animal darted away as though blown off by a gust of wind. He jumped down into the grass, dropped the nut and dashed off in fright. The hunter jumped clumsily after him and tried to trample him down in the grass but the animal succeeded in reaching a gaping hole in a huge log. The hunter beat the hollow log madly with his bare foot. It gave out a hollow drumming sound but did not yield. He picked up a stout stick and with it succeeded in breaking the log through in several places but the animal was not there. He hadn't noticed that it had run out the other end of the log some time ago, scampered up a very tall tree and now looked down full of concern, not for his life but for his home in the log. His home was now completely smashed, and the hunter was feeling desperately inside the ruins in the hope that he had crushed the animal somewhere with his blows. As he dug away in the pile of rotten wood he suddenly found something. His fingers dug in and he pulled out — nuts! He tried one — yes they were nuts! Whole, beautiful, confiscated. And the number! He kept pushing them into his pockets and they kept dropping out through the holes. He finally used his torn shirt-tail to make a bag. A treasure! A dishful of nuts. He began cracking them; and his hand continued to feel around in the hollow log. . . .

The sad chipmunk looked down wistfully as he watched the two-legged robber pillage his store. Little did he know last fall, when he used all his professional skill to collect them and carried them in ones and twos in his little mouth sacs, what fate would befall them.

The robber now sat on a stump and ate the nuts, or rather devoured them with lightning speed. He noticed a peculiar plant nearby and pulled it out. It looked and smelled like garlic. He tasted it and found it was good. He put the nuts aside, looked around the immediate area and found several other garlic plants. Then he settled down seriously to his meal.

He ate for some time and the pangs of hunger slowly subsided. Peace, and even some strength returned, not so much from those nuts as from hope, founded on what had just happened, that all was not lost.

The chipmunk approached the fallen log and saw what had happened to his home. He climbed on to a branch, looked sadly at his attacker and complained bitterly to someone — “tsk, tsk, tsk, — sabotage, brothers, robbery!” . . .

The traveller’s good humour was restored. He looked up at the victim and said with sympathy:

“I am sorry about this business, little brother, but what can one do? It might have been worse, don’t you agree? I would like you to know that this is the worst crime I have committed in my life and I would certainly deserve 25 years for this. But they gave me that much for the devil knows what. I will let you in on an interesting secret. They were taking me away and guarding me ever so carefully; and I up and got away! They had taken me to the end of the world, but I escaped; right into the dark night out of a speeding train. I bet the chief raved! How he looked after me! Whenever we stopped he would come running up to the window with:

“Mnohohrishny!”

“I.”

“Name!”

“Hryhory! . . .”

“And yet he failed. Ha-ha-ha!”

He continued to explain to the chipmunk how he had

been sent with a trainload of convicts from Ukraine, bound for Kolyma. They had sentenced him to 25 years and were going to bury him somewhere in the snows.

Eventually he looked sadly at the pile of shells which was all that remained of the nuts, tightened his belt, found himself a stout walking stick and proceeded along the path. He even joked: "Forward, Robinson, God is not without mercy and a Cossack is not without fortune."

When he reached the bottom of the ravine he found a tiny spring, had a drink and felt much better. The taiga now appeared brighter. Sun shadows danced over the greenery. Far away he heard the laughter of a squirrel. It was still early. The dew still shone on the grass and reflected the sun's rays like the most expensive jewels. A wind rustled in the tree tops but here at the bottom it was sheltered and quiet.

As he followed the path his eyes darted round and took in everything. They were searching for food. Now and then he left the path thinking he had seen something promising. He forced his way into the thicket only to find that it was a piece of rotten stump.

The path began to rise and wind among fallen trees and stumps and over huge boulders. Heavy branches and tall grasses hung over the path. At times it became necessary to crawl under this green cover which converted the path into a dark tunnel. There were animal tracks everywhere. Although he could not see them he knew there must be large numbers of animals in the vicinity. Funny he hadn't noticed this before! Here was a tree with chunks of hair stuck to the bark. It must have been a large beast, because the hair was fully five feet off the ground. Here claw marks were imprinted on the path and there the prints were like those of a sheep. And there — a bare, gnawed, yellowish skeleton. He was not alone here, the place was full of other inhabitants! But where were they, why couldn't he see them?

He had walked for about two hours and the path still continued upwards. His brief elation began to wane. Fatigue and hunger exhausted him and he felt as though he had been walking an eternity. Stubborn sweat poured into his eyes, there was a pain under the heart and his head was spinning. Now he stopped more often, leaned against a tree, closed his eyes and listened to the ringing in his ears and the drumming in his head. It seemed he would never reach the crest. There, beyond that peak, must be the end of all his suffering. "Well, keep going. . . ." Again he took himself in hand and went on.

Finally he reached the top. The forest now gave way to a clearing covered with flowers. And beyond, a magnificent view opened before his feverish eyes. A rolling green sea stretched out before him as far as the eye could see. It was ruffled by huge fantastic waves which followed each other upward; it was the forest rising to each crest, then falling away and rising again. The first crest was greyish-green and serrated. It was followed by another that was greyish-purple and stretched right and left as far as he could see. Then the colours turned bluish-grey and light blue, and always higher and higher. A wonderful, fantastic panorama, awe-inspiring in its beauty; and frightening. Who could possibly wade through this endless ocean?

The traveller sat down on the ground. The path ran down hill now and disappeared in the bush, but he sat down, rubbed his forehead and pressed the swollen veins on his temples. Perhaps that would stop the knocking in his skull. This must be fever. God, if he only had a gun or at least a few matches!

Bees were humming all around. He closed his eyes and soon imagined himself in an apiary . . . he was once more a little boy who had come to visit his grandfather . . . there was an ikon of St. Zosim and St. Savaty under the huge lime tree, and there were beehives all around. There were the beehives in the tree-trunks covered with large

pottery lids. Ripe black cherries, like a girl's lips, peeped from among green leaves. And there were the cherries. . . . A woodpecker was pecking one and calling to him: "Have you had your lunch?" And another replied, "Already." They were teasing him. His grandfather, clothed in white and with a white beard, was looking into the beehives and mumbling something. . . .

He opened his eyes and sure enough there were myriads of bees hovering over strange multi-coloured flowers; just like an apiary. Where do they fly, where do they take their trophy? . . . The air was filled with many types of insects and butterflies. The bees were crawling into little rose-coloured bells which looked just like roses except that they were very tiny. They dug around inside for a while and then flew away. But where? In this chaos of activity it was impossible to follow their flight. The sun was blinding and his eyes were already filled with many-coloured discs.

The traveller rose suddenly — there must be a dwelling somewhere near. Surely that was where the path led. He must follow it; that was his only salvation.

The path led downwards into dense bush. He walked until noon but found no sign of a dwelling. Eventually it became obvious that this path had never been trodden by human feet and that it had been made by animals in the course of many centuries. In some places where the ground was soft it was beaten down half a meter deep and the rocks over which it led were worn as smooth as the palm of your hand.

But the path did lead to a fast mountain stream which wound its way through the bush. He could hear the water bubbling over rocks, and in the distance he could hear a monotonous roar which indicated rapids or a waterfall. He sat down on a rock and stretched his legs out into the water. Then he lay down face upwards. It was pleasant to lie there and to feel his legs soaking up water ravenously, and to feel it rising higher and higher through his veins and

stilling the pain in muscles and joints. After the legs had had a drink he turned over and soaked his parched lips, then his chest and shoulders and his whole body.

Finally he came out, lay down on the shore and stared into the clear, painfully blue sky. He closed his eyes and dozed. The sun burned mercilessly. . . . Suddenly he sat upright. He was not conscious, but his eyes were wide open:

“Initial M . . . Mnohohrishny. . . .”

“I’ll be ready in a minute. . . . I am dressing. . . .”

“May they be thrice damned! . . . They are taking him for questioning. . . . I’ll be with you right away. . . .”

Slowly the gurgle of running water and the roar of the rapids crept into his consciousness and the terrifying scene disappeared.

“Phew, things are bad, brother. You’re not doing very well, Robinson!”

He was about to rise when he caught sight of something between the rocks. My God! He reached down quickly and retrieved his find. A knife; a hunting knife! Actually it was a sheath out of which protruded a rusty knife handle. The sheath was half rotted away and the handle had turned green but still, dear God, this might be his salvation.

It wasn’t easy to extract the knife; it had seized up in the sheath. He cleaned the handle with sand and revealed the series of copper, lead and bone rings with which it was covered. Then he worked on the sheath, knocked it on a rock, pried it, soaked it in water and finally extracted the knife which had turned black with rust but was well balanced and heavy. In twenty minutes he had it shining, and though it was heavily pock-marked, it was well made and still in good condition. There are few knives like these hunting knives. This was not only a knife, it was a real weapon. That was why the handle was made of heavy metal and bone; it had to be heavy and serviceable in time of need.

He was as happy as a child. The knife must have been lost a long time ago. It must have been there for years awaiting its destiny. Now he wasn't in a hurry. First, the knife must be sharp and so he sat down to sharpen it on a stone. Occasionally he tried it on a hair and continued sharpening it until he achieved a razor edge. Then he repaired and cleaned the sheath and chain and hung the knife on the piece of rope that served him as a belt. That felt good!

Armed thus, he crossed the stream. Perhaps the other side would be more hospitable. He used his weapon to cut through the bush on the edge of the stream. Further on he ran into a quiet pool of back water and peered into it. Staring back at him was a strange, dark-bearded face. My God! Even his mother wouldn't know him. He decided to shave!

Settling down on a stone he began shaving. He soaked his whiskers, peered into the clear water and tried the knife. "It cuts!" This was a better shaving instrument than was glass in prison. When he finished he washed himself and inspected himself in his "mirror." Indeed, a young man. "My God, how many changes have taken place since I last saw myself clean-shaven!" He began feeling sorry for himself, sorry for that carefree, young, happy face which at one time had distracted girls out of their wits. He felt sorry for his youth and all those things that were lost, never again to return. A serious, metallic face looked back at him from the water. It was still young, but there were those vertical lines between the brows and the big eyes burned like those of a madman.

"Well, my dear fellow, with a face like that one should live in the jungle and be a scarecrow for the living and the dead. What a face for a man of your years, a real Mephistopheles. Buck up, smile, life is bound to change."

But life did not seem to change. For a long time he walked through the taiga. He thought he walked quickly,

but in fact he moved slowly like a wavering shadow; just to keep from lying down and dying. The knife wasn't proving useful any more. He stuck it in the sheath and didn't take it out. In any case his strength was failing. Toward evening it seemed to come to an end.

He lay down under a huge cedar, sighed deeply, rested his head at the foot of the tree and just lay. Eventually he pulled out the knife and put it down beside him; after a while he picked it up and shifted it to a more handy position. Once more he heaved a heavy sigh.

"Yes, this must be the end."

Thoughts kept wandering around in his head which felt as though it was filled with molten lead. "What day is it today? Oh yes, the 6th . . . well, that's not bad . . . a horse would have been dead long ago. . . . I wonder if it would have been better if I had been a horse . . . sixth . . . yes . . . but God created the whole Universe in six days . . . this jungle included." A long pause, and then, "The sixth day. Yes, it is the last, the very last day of my life. . . . Yet a little longer. . . ."

He did not want to move his arms or legs, he no longer wanted to think, he only wanted to lie there on and on into eternity. Let the tall cedars continue sighing, and under the blue skies of day and stars at night recount to the clouds how one brave and dauntless . . . and let the squirrels listen in too . . . how one brave and dauntless lad, a complete stranger, overcame death five times, escaped from the jaws of a dragon and, driven by wild joy, brought his weary head here. How in his pursuit of fortune he found death. How this complete stranger blazed a trail through the wilderness and lay here among the bushes. Here, several thousand miles away near the edge of the earth. . . .

He heard the echoes of his childhood, tiny bells in the meadows, blue flowers in the fields, the roaring waters of the Vorsklo and the Dnieper, ringing girls' voices. He remembered the acrid smell of the thyme in the valley. . . .

He was lying on the hot stove and watching the flickering lamp and the flickering ikons above the tapestry. And his mother sat spinning and singing a faint melody:

*My beautiful Mother, now I am lost for ever,
Why have you sent me away where I have never been
before?*

Dear Mother Beloved, Dear Mother Beloved.

Something rebellious within him was trying to lift his head but it wouldn't move. It was being held down by a hairy, angry and insatiable local god sitting down on his chest and stopping his breathing . . . and his Mother leaned close over him. . . .

Suddenly he opened his eyes, "What is it, noises? Shot!"

He sat up. He felt faint and dizzy but the rebel within him lifted him up. Another shot, like a blast of thunder and at the same time a terrified, inhuman yell:

"Hrytsko!"*

It was the desperate cry of youth seized by the fangs of death:

"Hrytsko!"

Immediately he was on his feet. Reeling, he summoned all his strength and hurried through the undergrowth. Again this yell, this time nearer.

Summoning the rest of his strength he broke out into the clearing. There! . . .

A huge black bear was standing on its hind legs, and trying to seize within its jaws someone who, pressed into a crack between rocks, was fighting back desperately with a gun stock.

"Aha, here he is, that hairy, pitiless, fierce god of the jungle."

Like a madman he went straight for the beast, driven

* Hrytsko is the diminutive form of Hryhory. However, here the girl is calling for her brother whose name is Hrytsko.

by a drunken urge for revenge. His hand reached nervously for the knife.

The bear took a quick breath, dropped his victim and with a growl turned on the new enemy.

The person who was squeezed between the rocks let out a childlike cry . . . driven by diabolical strength the knife sank into the white collar, deep into the gullet and was twisted crosswise. He only saw triumphantly that blood spurted in all directions covering that expanse of white, and for a fleeting moment he watched the person in the crack, dressed in the strange garment of a hunter, dash towards him. That was the last thing he noticed. Everything turned black and he fell to the ground with that hairy black mass, which covered him like a blanket of night.

For a few moments there still continued in his ears the far-away melody:

*My beautiful Mother, now I am lost for ever
Why have you sent me away where I have never
been before?*

then everything was still.

* * *

The moon rose above the wooded crests and stood like a fiery shield fastened to the gate of an unknown world. It seemed to be alive, now darker now lighter; the face of a great spirit, the demon of the unknown, untrodden "Faraway". It continued to grow darker and lighter and steadily redder, while a light mist kept rising from the valleys between the crests.

Down in the valleys it lay like huge billows of cotton wool, or snowdrifts.

There was a sound of horses' hooves; three riders appeared in a clearing on a crest, like Chinese shadows on a dimly lit screen.

"Father," said a clear young voice, "how is it?"

"It is all right," replied a bass.

"Would one of you get off and tighten the cinch?"

Two of the riders jumped down from their horses. The third was carrying something across the saddle. One of the young riders quickly tightened the strap and listened closely to the figure lying across the saddle.

"Have you finished? Well, God speed, children!"

"We haven't lost the way?"

"Don't worry."

The two remounted and the group rode off like mountain spirits against a background of mist.

The silence closed in again; the strained, deceptive silence of the wilderness. It was cut suddenly by a distant roar, fierce and frightening, it rolled over and over and suddenly stopped. In reply came a fierce yet sorrowful bark. . . .

A grouse yelled in his sleep . . . deceitful sounds, crouching, rustling . . . an owl flew quietly across the moon. The taiga was just coming to life. The moon paled and hurried upwards.

4

The Family of Tiger-hunters

The song brought him out of oblivion. At first it was a sticky, woolly darkness; then there came forth the thinnest sound like the tiniest ray of light, which grew and grew.

*Oh, there flew three falcons through the orchard —
Hey, hey, hey.*

And the sound of that “Hey” was like a dreamy wave, driven on by a girl’s tender voice.

And touched the grapevine with their wings. . . .

And the girl’s voice rose in flight with the falcon in the song. It must be his sister, Natalka, singing. Yes, he must be at home, lying down, wounded, exhausted. It happened in the Kholodny Yar, near Zhabotin, how was it? Oh, yes, that brown dog of a party member tossed a hand-grenade at his feet and he picked it up. . . .

And his beloved sister, his faithful nurse, Natalochka, worried so!

Warily he opened one eye. The other eye popped open by itself and stared wide open. . . .

There was a girl sitting in front of him, but it wasn’t his sister Natalka. But she was equally pretty, and bright-eyed, slender and sun-burned.

“Father, father!” spoke up the girl happily. “He is looking already. . . . My God, he is alive!”

“Well now, that is good,” replied a strong calm voice.

It was a hearty voice that reverberated like an empty barrel: "Well, my son, perhaps you were drunk, ha?"

He was a big man, well built, with bushy eyebrows and a hairy chest peeping through an open shirt. "Took you a long time to sober up!"

In the meantime the girl was beckoning to someone:

"Hrytsko! Come here and see what huge eyes he's got. Only . . . he seems to have lost his senses . . . look at him . . ."

"Nataalka," spoke the father, "go and tell your mother to bring us a glass here. The Cossack's soul must have stuck to his ribs . . . hurry!"

Hryhory seemed to be suffering hallucinations. He rolled his head from side to side and examined his surroundings. In the corner there were sacred pictures dressed up with festive embroidered towels with a sprinkler behind the picture of St. Nicholas of the Miracles.

There were dark crosses burnt on the ceiling depicting the suffering of Christ. He was lying on a large wooden bed, undressed, and covered with a woollen quilt or cloak. There was a smell of sweet william . . . the sun was peeping into the window. The mother, wearing an old-fashioned married woman's cap and a voluminous skirt came in smiling, carrying some plates . . . Behind her came a bright-eyed girl like a turtle-dove. Near the window stood a tall, well-built young man holding a Cossack saddle.

Hryhory closed his eyes. The girl was saying something and, suddenly, there rose before him . . . what was it? That voice, that violent, mortal yell of the hunter cornered by the bear—the last impression he remembered from his former life. But that was a man, wearing trousers and a hunter's leather coat . . . Yes it was a young man.

Hryhory opened his eyes—and there stood before him a girl holding a little red glass and speaking in jest:

"Hrytsko, whom are you going to saddle? Drop it and come over here . . ."

The youth was about to hang up the saddle when the father said:

"You will go to Kiev, Hrytsko, go and saddle the horses."

"Where am I?" shouted Hryhory and tried suddenly to rise.

"God be with you, keep quiet, lie down," spoke the 'old one', the mother. She laid her hand on his forehead and gently put his head back on the pillow.

"Lie still, dear heart. Goodness me, he looks as though he was just taken from the cross . . . And you! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? It's all well and good for you, who look like well-fed oxen, but he's not fit for any talk."

"Oh, that," said the 'old man'. "He is one of our own! Have you any idea how much I knocked him around when he was slung across the saddle, unconscious and near death? And how many days has he been here fighting death? And look, he's alive! Thank God, son, that everything is all right now. Yes, everything. You know I was about to take you away to Kiev — it's not far from here — where you would have died and I would not have known who you were."

"Where am I?" muttered Hryhory, apparently afraid for his sanity.

"You are with us; with us at home, son."

The wall was covered with pictures of girls in embroidered shirts and many strands of coral beads, and young men in caps and cloaks.

"What district is this!"

"Kievsky, what else?" replied the girl. And the way she said that word, 'Kievsky' made his heart ache.

Hryhory raised himself, wide-eyed; a mixture of joy and fear.

"Perhaps you are from that other Kiev?" said the father. "Perhaps you would rather be on your way home?"

"No, no!" and sudden fear gripped him up and down the spine. No, no! There soared in his memory the Lukianivska prison, the Kiev OGPU-NKVD . . .

Alas, he had been running away all this time and here he was back again. He struggled to rise.

"Let me go, let me go, I don't want to . . . I'll go away . . ."

They held him down. He lay quietly now and pulled the covers up to his nose. Perspiration bathed his body.

The 'old woman' crossed herself and whispered through tears:

"My God, my God, the poor boy is not all there . . . what that evil is doing to people! . . ."

Everything within him urged him to run, to escape, but he pretended to be calm and enquired casually:

"Is it far to town?"

"No," replied the father, "it's quite near, about 400 versts. We belong to the Kievsky *rayon*.* And where are you from?"

Should he say or shouldn't he? "Who, me? . . . Yes, I too am from the Kievsky *rayon*."

"Oh! And which village?"

"From Trypillia . . ."

"My goodness," the mother spoke up and clapped her hands, "My dear child! Then you are not from the same Kievsky! You must be from Ukraine . . . My mother also came from Trypillia. Goodness, you are a neighbour!"

It seemed as though suddenly someone had released an all-powerful brake, the black shadow of fear crumbled, and he felt wonderfully light and happy. The people round him were kith and kin. Here, at the edge of the world, after all the frightfulness, here were his own people! They worried about him and tended him like mother, father, sister and brother. And there was another Kiev here. Hryhory rubbed his forehead and smiled, and inside a

* *rayon*, a district.

child seemed to dance to the rhythm of its own clapping: "You're alive, you're alive, you will live!" And he wanted so much to say something fitting and eloquent.

"Mother . . ." and he faltered as he looked at her, "let me call you that, for that is what you are . . . my mother."

"Not at all, not at all, dear child," and, visibly moved, she furtively wiped away a tear. By now Hryhory had regained his self-control and calm assurance:

"So you say I am home, Mother?"

"Yes, son, you are home."

"Wonderful, greetings to you from Trypillia."

"Thank you, son, thank you. How are things there, there in Ukraine? Have you been away long and how did you get here?"

Hryhory laughed.

"Now, that is enough," interrupted the master of the household. "You found some occasion for conversation! Must get well first. Hey, little squirrel," he addressed his daughter.

The girl passed Hryhory the little red glass.

"Take it, son. Those are the kind of herbs that can raise the dead. Hold it! How about something for me too, daughter!"

The girl hurried away and brought a similar glass for her father, only this time it was clear.

"This is the same, son, only yours has been prepared for you while mine is ordinary. There is a lot more where this came from and one day you and I will do it up well, you bet."

"What's made you chatter so, old man? Usually you are as quiet as a stump, and now Hurry up; the boy's hand must be aching. Drink, son, and lie down. Don't bother with this old man. . . ."

"Hold it, woman! Not everyone can perform a heroic

deed. Before leaving I want to have a drink properly. Hrytsko, are the horses ready?"

Hrytsko, tall and dark stood by and with a smile looked at his father. "Ready, father."

"Good. We are going, and you will lie here. What do they call you?"

"Hryhory."

"Did you hear that?" he turned to his son. "Good. Very good. I wouldn't have asked you but you see something happened Well, son," and he raised his hand, "Here's how!"

"What shall we drink to?" Hryhory jested.

"Just drink"

Hryhory drank. The liquor was fiery and very, very bitter. A burning stream went through his veins. The old man drank, rubbed his mustache and said:

"That, my son, was for my daughter, whom you saved for me, and for you who were saved by her. May health be with you"

Hryhory stared from one to the other. "For a daughter whom I saved? What daughter? Where is she?"

The mother brought in a plate of fish: "Eat, my son."

"Well, it's time for us to go." The old man turned to his son. He rose from the table, crossed himself, put on his cap and addressed his wife.

"Look after things for me."

He stood for a few moments near the door, thought for a while, looked at the patient from under his bushy eyebrows and said:

"You are at home here, do you understand? For many versts around there is nothing here but virgin forest and animals. There are no people. Do you understand that? I don't know yet who you are, but my house is your house, that is our law here. Even if you were not a Chris-

tian soul but some Gold* or even a Korean, you would still have the protection of that law. May fortune and happiness be with you. Good-bye."

He and his son departed.

From outside came the sound of horses' hooves and the joyous barking of dogs. "Nepra, Zalivay!" came the old man's voice from the outside. "All right, all right, we're going."

The sound of the horses' hooves passed the house and soon disappeared in the distance.

Hyhory wanted to ask about so many things, but the strong whiskey, the herbs steeped in it, and the fish which he had just eaten and all those nervous knocks which he had lived through that day made him dull. Thoughts continued wandering around in his head but tiredness, sleepiness, and the quiet of the house soon overwhelmed him. As he was finally closing his eyes he noticed the girl floating around the house, tall and proud.

* * *

The sun spilled over the table and wove golden seams over the white cover. A bear cub sat on the table and was busy grabbing its face with its forepaws trying to catch a bee which was attempting to sit on the cub's nose. He was getting angry and struck out at the air with his paw. Accidentally he hit himself on the nose and started yelling. The bee continued humming, darting among the rays of the sun but did not cease the attack.

Like the sound of a silver string the humming penetrated the sunlit quiet and into Hryhory's heart. He lay propped on his elbow and looked in front of him. Had he slept long? It seemed like eternity. But now all that frightfulness through which he had lived had disappeared into oblivion, like a bad dream. He felt light and airy. Something had happened to him which he could not quite understand, it

* Gold, a Tungus tribe.

reminded him of his childhood; no worries, no troubles, only a limitless, sunlit peace.

He looked at himself; there he was in a white embroidered shirt; he looked in front where a group of ikons decorated with embroidered cloths reminded him of those he saw in his grandmother's house in Trypillia, there in his native land from which he had been driven out, perhaps for ever. For a moment sorrow nipped at his heart.

Those were really regal cloths decorating the ikons, and there was a carved dresser, and a painted stove decorated with flowers with two cooing doves, or perhaps two falcons!

Whom did he save? What daughter? Where? When? How did he get here? He looked around; the house was empty. Near the stove stood oven prongs and pokers, and there was a strong smell of fresh-baked bread. Everything looked like home, except for the floor, which was made of boards so clean and scrubbed that it shone. Right above him two guns were hanging on a white wall; one looked like an English Winchester, and the other — a Japanese carbine. Below them there were ammunition pouches filled with rounds. On a third nail there hung a knife in a sheath. His knife. Amazing! His knife in such company. But from scratches on the wall it was obvious that a gun had hung there earlier. He spotted that because he had been acquainted with guns from childhood. He also noticed for the first time that a pair of huge antlers with caps and towels hanging from their branches were hung on the wall between two windows.

There was a sound of feet in the hallway. Hryhory pulled the cover over his head and pretended to sleep. Someone entered the room. The person approached his bed and he could hear breathing. He opened his eyes, and there, stretching over his bed, was the girl. She was hanging another gun on the wall. The girl looked down and remarked, "Oh, did I wake you?"

She leaned back, tucked in her blouse and added, "Well, how are you?"

Hryhory smiled, "Pretty."

The girl pouted, and blushed. She was pretty. There was a queer combination of unusual beauty and seriousness. She seemed as supple as a panther, and self-possessed as a princess. He looked at her and felt as embarrassed as a schoolboy. She couldn't be more than eighteen. "It has been a pretty adventure I meant to say. And what is your name?"

The girl turned red and frowned. "They just call me and call me and eventually I come. And who do you think you are?"

"Who am I?"

She smiled, "So queer. And where have you come from?"

"It's a long way off, you wouldn't even count that far."

"Oh, I know that you are from Ukraine. I know even more, I know that you have a girl whose name is Natalka."

"Silly," muttered Hryhory.

"Why silly?"

"It is true that there is a Natalka, but she is my sister. And how do you know that?"

The girl was embarrassed. "You should have heard what you mumbled here for five days, tossing around like a mad one. We thought you were going to die. You might say 'Thank you' to my mother and father and to my brother. Had it not been for them no doctors could have saved you. My father knows all kinds of medicines. Don't you get up, and don't you goggle your eyes, because you are not supposed to get up yet. Just lie there and listen."

"Well, what did I mumble?"

"My God, it was frightful. I don't know what it was all about and what it had to do with. Father was worried that there was no priest to administer the Last Sacrament. He thought it might be easier for you, because you seem to

have a great many sins. You mentioned prison cells and tribunals, and death houses, and firing squads, and," here she changed her tone to sarcasm, "beloved Natalka."

Rhyhory frowned. "Oh, that's nothing. I used to read many frightful books at one time."

Natalka looked at him with ill-concealed suspicion, fear and sympathy. "Oh, is that what it was?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, if you have read so many frightful books perhaps some day you will tell me about them. That would be interesting. Everything frightful is interesting. Is that all right?" But a scoffing, suspicious look in her eye showed that she did not believe him.

"Yes, that's all right."

"You have also wandered into our region. Perhaps you will tell me that that, too, is only in a book and not really true."

He was cornered, but he saw no reason to tell her the truth. He thought for a while and then said, "Listen . . ."

"Natalka. Yes, they call me Natalka," smiled the girl.

"And your patronymic?"

"Denisivna. But call me only Natalka, because that is our custom."

"Good. Maybe you will tell me your surname?"

"My surname is of no interest to you. It is very old, and as the Russians say, it is a *khakhol* surname."

"Well, what is it?"

"Sirktivna." The girl said it with pride. "My father was Sirko, my grandfather was Sirko, and so was my great-grandfather. They were all Sirko. And there are masses of them round here already. . . . Do you know what my father told me about you?"

"What?"

"You wanted to ask something else. Ask me Do you want to eat?"

"Listen, Natalka. Yes — I know that you all think

the most awful things about me but I would like to assure you. . . . No matter what you think, I do want to tell you that I am an honest man. Later you will know that for yourself. I would like to explain to you”

“Never mind,” the girl cut him short. “Do you know what my father said? He said that as long as you are in this house he is responsible for you as if you were his own son. He doesn’t want to know anything. And our father Well, you will live and see. Hrytsko, too. Hoo, hoo!”

And she added lightly:

“God has given you a brother you will never regret.”

“Wait! Whom did I save, and where? It was supposed to have been a daughter. Is that a joke? Or maybe it was you.”

“Yes, me.”

“No, let’s talk seriously. I never saw you or saved you in my life, so do not try to fool me. All of you seem to be conspiring. I remember . . . that wasn’t long ago — I was not out to save anyone; it just worked out that way. Some strange fellow was waving a rifle butt in a crack between some rocks but I saw clearly that he wore trousers . . . a huge black devil was attacking him and he was defending himself with the rifle butt”

As he spoke Natalka suddenly changed the subject.

“Oh, see what this thing is doing! Why, you!”

The cub, bored with just sitting on the table, had jumped on to the bench, reached up the wall and pulled down all the pictures it could reach. Now it was trying to bite into a picture frame. It didn’t seem to taste right, so he was making a special effort to knock it off the wall. The girl picked up the cub by the scruff of its neck and tossed it in the corner where it began whimpering like a baby.

“Oh you little devil! What a rascal you turned out to be!”

"I wonder what sort of people those are?" he asked, pointing to the pictures that were strewn on the floor. "Are they all part of your family?"

"Certainly," she replied, giving him a handful. She even took some off the wall and then spoke to the cub:

"So, you are crying. Aren't you a little fool! Come here, you little scamp!"

Hryhory looked at the photographs. The girl picked up the cub which was sobbing like a child, pushed a bench nearer the bed and sat down with the cub in her lap. She petted it and it stopped crying and took a renewed interest in the pictures.

They were interesting pictures of girls in embroidered shirts with many strings of corals, and wearing peculiar fur boots. There were pictures of groups of bridesmaids, and young married women in groups and singly. There was one of a whole family, a large family, grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; about forty people in all; a veritable clan! A very old man and woman were seated in the middle and the rest, according to degree of relationship, were arranged on the sides and to the rear. The children were lined up on both sides of the patriarch and his wife, dressed in their festive finery. In most of these pictures the background consisted of mountains, which was unusual for a Ukrainian family from the steppes. It was more like scenes from Carpathian Ukraine. There was one picture of about twenty horsemen with rifles slung on their backs and surrounded by a pack of huge sharp-eared dogs. Were it not for the dogs one could have taken them for a platoon of Cossacks. That, in fact, they were; Cossacks of the Ussuri.

There were pre-revolutionary photos of Cossack officials — *Osauls*,* Cornets, and Otamans of the Ussuri and Amur Cossack units. They all showed long mustaches, huge

* *Osaul*, a senior Cossack officer, Hetman's assistant.

swords and many were bedecked with medals. All had stripes.

There were also new photos, different clothes, different content, but the same types of faces; men, women, girls and boys, members of the Red Army. And there was one very unusual photo; falling snow, and in a wooden cage a large tiger with his jaws wide open. At the side stood four hunters obviously posing before the camera and leaning on their rifles. One was old and the other three quite young; and all were wearing those queer clothes—peculiar leather trousers, leather jackets and ammunition belts. Three were wearing caps and one was without, and the one without was Nataka. She was standing leaning on a Winchester with a sarcastic grin on her face. This photo disturbed him. He glanced at Nataka and stealthily put the picture at the bottom of the pile. Now, of course, everything was clear to him for here was an exact replica of the 'idiot' who was yelling in the crack between the rocks. He continued to browse through the other photographs. Nataka placed the bear cub on the bed. "He is your pal. You made him an orphan, now entertain him."

"How's that?"

"You killed his mother."

"Oh. Looks similar, has a white chest."

"Are you pretending or were you really not in your full senses then?"

"Have it whichever way you like, but even if I had all my senses then how was I to know it was his mother? It would be better if you told me about it, especially how I got here."

The girl again picked up the cub and explained briefly, "It's very simple. We were in Dragon Valley preparing a salt lick for antler hunting. We will soon be going antler hunting and then you will know what it's all about. It's a long way from here. I strayed away from the camp to shoot black grouse for stew; before long I was lost. I was

carrying only two rounds of fine shot, thinking I would be able to shoot something near by and come right back. Didn't even take a knife with me. But the game seemed to be all dead, there wasn't a thing in sight and instead of game I ran into this cub. It looked so funny that I tried to pick it up, and lo and behold, there was its mother. You couldn't see in the thicket, and I had forgotten that wherever there is a young cub there is a she-bear. I dropped the cub, but the mother came after me — she was mad, and when black bears go mad they become real devils. I tried to run but there wasn't anywhere to go so I turned and fired a round of this fine shot at her, and that did it. She would have torn me apart if I hadn't been able to squeeze into that crack between the rocks. I fired the other round too — who knows where? — and struck at her paws and muzzle. I yelled for my brother but I was too far away. For the first time in my life I was thoroughly frightened; this meant certain death.

“And then something came crashing out of the thicket. Some animal, because it did not really resemble a human being. My God, I thought, another bear! It was hairy, black, with a crazy look in its eyes and it came straight at the bear, as I thought empty handed. When the bear fell down on it I was more frightened and tried to drag the bear aside. The bear was dead and I managed to pull her aside a bit. Beneath was a man and he too seemed dead — ragged, starved and with a knife. Nothing seemed broken, but he was dead.

“Later we took everything — the cub, the bearskin and you. At first we thought we would look after you there in the Dragon Valley but my father looked you over and said that you would die there from fever. ‘We must get him home as soon as possible or he will die. At home we have the necessary things to take care of him,’ he said.”

“We rode, we flew, all night. You were delirious and shouted all kinds of nonsense. You also called your mother

and your Nataalka. Father listened for some time and said: 'He is one of us. Yes, he's one of us, he speaks our language', and he drove the horses as fast as they could go. That was all, now you know everything."

"Now I understand."

"As you see, we even brought the cub, a playmate for you," she said teasingly. She set the cub on the bed and collected the photographs.

"Wait a minute," said Hryhory. He picked out the picture with the tiger and passed it to her.

"What is all this?"

"What do you mean, 'what is all this'? That is a photograph of us with the cat, she said offhandedly.

"And why are you with the cat?"

"We caught it and took it to Khabarovsk, to the depot. There some queer characters from newspapers and from film studios came to take pictures. They had some funny equipment."

Hryhory now noticed the picture was no ordinary one but a "movie still."

"Well, what is it all about?"

The girl looked at him as though he were stupid. She walked over to the wall and took down several more pictures. More tigers, some with one, and one picture with two. They were all shown in cages with hunters around and Nataalka appeared in several of them.

"How did you manage to get him? You certainly took many photographs of him."

"Of him?"

"Yes, of that cat."

The girl frowned as she did in most of those pictures, and in an insulted tone pointed at various photographs.

"This one we caught last year; that one the year before; and that one two years before, and that one even earlier — that's father with Mykola and with our uncles. Mykola was a brother who died. And these — they are old ones.

If we collected all those that father caught with our uncles and even with grandfather, there would be no place to hang them. That's only tigers, and how about lynx and wolverine? And we do not take these pictures. We only deliver to the depot according to agreement, and the gentlemen there take those pictures. 'Look at the wonder of wonders,' they say, 'the *khakhly* are catching live tigers,' and she mimicked those 'gentlemen' who called her and her family *khakhly*.

"And how do you catch them? Do you shoot them, and then . . . ?"

"What for? One that had been shot would be useless except perhaps to the Chinese for soap. At the depot they would pay no more than a thousand for a dead one. A live one, without any defects, will fetch 12 to 15 thousand *karbovantsi*,* and all of it in trade. That is how we live. What fool would shoot them? You must get them alive."

"And have you caught a devil like that alive?"

"Yes."

"With nets?"

"No, with hands."

"Alone?"

"No, four of us — father, Hrytsko and Mykola."

"How?"

"We caught him, as you can see."

Hryhory could not hide his astonishment in the face of the incredible, but apparently undeniable, fact. What a girl and what deeds! Undoubtedly she was telling the truth, but he could not assimilate it in his mind. Either the 'cats' here were domesticated or the people here were unusual.

"But how do you catch them?"

"Well, perhaps you will stay here for a while and then you will see. Maybe father will take you along and then I

* *karbovantsi* — rubles.

will see what sort of a hero you are and whether you will call for help”

After a while she added sadly:

“Last year my brother Mykola died in this kind of hunting He was a real eagle.”

“Why do you bother with them?”

“Well! I see you must be a real hero. How do you think it could be otherwise? Death lurks here everywhere, even on the stove, so you come out and face it. ‘God is not without mercy and a Cossack is not without fortune’, that is what grandfather used to say, and we are his grandchildren.”

There she was, a fine example of Cossack blood; so young and slender, and yet so serious, so tempered and so proud. Such were his thoughts and feelings about her, but he did not show this; he teased her, as apparently was his custom with girls.

“Why should one risk one’s life that way? You could plant fields, raise hogs and chickens; after all, others do that.”

“Yes others sow; and do you think there is no risk in sowing? They can’t live on bread alone so they too must venture into other things. We do not sow for bread at all. We only grow oats and buckwheat for horses. Bread might or might not grow, but the forest is always full of animals, even ‘hogs and chickens.’ So we hunt all our lives because it is more convenient and more interesting that way, especially now. But only our family and one other catches these cats. Others are afraid.”

“I think”

Hryhory looked at the girl, and as he recalled the bear, his thoughts were tinged with fear: some day a beast will suddenly tear this beauty apart. But to her he said:

“A cat like this will eat you one day.”

Until then the girl had spoken quite seriously. Now she frowned and became angry, closed her mouth tightly

and gave him a look. She was obviously insulted by this childish remark and by the tone of superiority.

She was proud, like a wild horse that is prepared to kick to death any one who dares lay a hand on him. She frowned but did not say anything. Good manners seemed to be as much a born characteristic with her as good looks. She put the cub on the floor, collected the photographs and eventually muttered:

"Didn't I talk a lot today? Even my tongue is beginning to swell. I never talked so much before."

"It must be time for lunch," came a voice from the other half of the house.

"Yes, it is time, mother."

Her serious manner disappeared immediately, and she hummed a little song. *Yes, it's about time. Oh yes, it's about time Mother will beat me . . .*

As she hummed, she hung up the photographs and went into the other part of the house.

After a while the door was opened and in came mother with a tray covered with plates. There was also a little red glass. She laid it before him and said:

"Eat and build up your strength, son."

"Thank you, mother."

"Thank God, and get well. Our men will bring salt and then you will go hunting with them. I am sure you never saw in Ukraine the kind of things that happen here."

The little bear caught the edge of her skirt with its teeth, dragged at it and growled joyfully. It, too, wanted its lunch. The old woman petted it like a baby.

* * *

Pinks bloomed in front of the house. They were obviously well tended and were competing with native red, yellow and violet irises which spread all over the slope right down to the brook and out to the forest, and seemed to salute each other midst the multitude of other colours

in a sea of brilliant, luscious and juicy greenery. There was a big solid mass of rosy willow herb. Choke cherries were peeping from behind the house as though they had just escaped from the taiga. They stood there in full bloom like girls decked out in their Sunday best. They were guarding a small garden and an apiary with a score of beehives. Bees were humming all round the house and the flowers were giving these golden workers all kinds of work to do. The shore of the brook was lined with blooming cherries which seemed to be peering into the swift water and listening to it babble over the stones. In front of the house was an open field. One couldn't call it a yard; there were no fences and no gates. Here, everything seemed to be the front yard, all these thickets and the jungle-like forest that spilled over right up to the crest of a range of mountains which described a large distant arc around the house.

The house was old but solid, built of excellent timber with a carved porch and carvings around the windows. It was roofed with shingles and stood on the slope of a hillock with its four windows looking out on the brook flowing below. Beyond was the blue-grey crest of Sikhote-Alin.

To the right was a big shed with a hut for keeping bees in winter, a stable for horses, a cowshed, a hay stack and some other buildings. To the left was a garden fenced with one rail, and a pot hanging on the nearest post. There were potatoes and sunflowers in the garden and on the edge of the brook was another shed — a 'black' bath house.

That was all there was to the establishment; the only one for miles around. The nearest village, called Kopytonivka, consisting of several similar houses, was more than 50 kilometers away. Hryhory knew this and it made him happy. Danger from people would be minimized, and he knew that the people with whom he was living would protect him.

Mother, Natalka and he were alone. Father and Hrytsko had been away now for two weeks. Mother had

expected them back yesterday but since they hadn't come, they must be arriving today. Knowing that they were to return any time now, Hryhory did not go anywhere but sat all day on the mound of earth around the house and waited. He was tense and wondered how they would react to him; perhaps not as they did before, when he was ill. Absent-mindedly he played with the bear cub and observed the world beyond. At the moment his attention was dominated by a beetle wielded by a sunburnt girl's arm on the edge of the brook. It rose and fell and made a clacking sound and echoes responded from all around in several voices. It sounded to him like a quail beating somewhere in the wheatfield at night. Amazing!

Natalka was doing the laundry by the brook. She was wielding her tool like an expert sportsman doing his morning exercises. She was humming a song, rinsing the wash in the water and then beating it down with the beetle, whacking away with all her might. A queer girl, this Natalka; somehow Hryhory was a bit afraid of her, afraid to look her in the face. She seemed to get angry when he stared at her. He did not know how to approach her and in her presence felt like a clumsy youth. You couldn't say that she was unapproachable or that she was silly or haughty. She didn't even understand how bewitching she was, undoubtedly she didn't. She was like that unique plant which, if you touch it with your hand, will prick you with scores of tiny needles. Here she was, a girl hunter, one who had faced and overcome many frightful dangers. Yet she was like a wild deer which is afraid that she might be caught and won't allow anyone to approach her. Or perhaps she just didn't like him?

Maybe it is best to disregard her completely. Let her go on doing the washing. My God, isn't she wielding that beetle angrily? She must imagine she is beating somebody's arrogant eyes; maybe his eyes staring at her. Hryhory

smiled at this strange thought and forced his attention in another direction.

Far beyond the brook a herd of wild deer came out in the clearing. There were five of them. They stood there close together, raised their heads high and listened. What was this clashing noise and where was it coming from? Suddenly they turned and dashed off into the tall grass with only the white spots on their backs popping up now and then. They disappeared into the forest as though they had never existed.

"You should go out for a stroll, son, or perhaps you should lie down and rest. Are you bored?"

This must have been the tenth time that mother had come out on the porch and looked across the brook, over the greenery toward the path to see if they were coming. She shielded her eyes from the sun and peered with a worried look.

"It is taking them very long, I hope nothing has happened."

"Nataalka!"

"What-a-a-t," replied the girl, singing.

"Come here."

"Say what you want, I can hear you, I want to finish the washing."

"What do you think has happened to our menfolk?"

The girl replied jokingly,

"We-e-ll, what about them? They are riding somewhere."

"God knows, the way things are nowadays, God forbid."

"They are riding, mother, they are riding," Nataalka replied happily to her mother. "And if they are not riding, they are walking and leading their horses and so are a little late," and she laughed, carefree, and went on beating the clothes.

The mother laughed too:

"That's the way she is. As they say, 'a new seed' even

scoffs at her silly mother. That is all the consolation I get, son."

She came down from the porch and sat beside Hryhory. Apparently she had finished her work inside and now had some time to spare. She fixed her married woman's cap, placed her work-worn hands on her knees, and drowned her eyes in the sea of green which stretched towards the valley where the path disappeared.

"Well, we shall have to sit and wait," she said with a friendly smile.

Her face was like her daughter's. What was she like when she was young? More than likely she was like Natalka. No wonder she was so well preserved after being stuck out here at the end of the world, locked in a struggle with primitive nature. She must be well over fifty years of age but she still looked young and carried herself well. Her voice was also like her daughter's, except that it was warmer and friendlier. It reminded him of the voices of all those mothers back there some 12 thousand kilometers away. But it didn't come from Kiev province. Hryhory was certain that she was a "Poltavka" by origin. Her 'I' was soft as it is with all women of Poltava province; somewhere between hard and soft 'I'. This was to him a dear, and somehow disturbing, characteristic of the speech of the women of Poltava. He wanted to ask whether her mother or grandmother came from Zinkiv or from Lubny. She continued to gaze beyond the valley, and still smiled at her daughter's jesting and self-assurance.

"I have wonderful children, my son . . ." and her voice was so full of maternal pride.

"I always thank God for sending me such joy. And whom do they take after? They fear neither storm nor thunder. Take her for instance," she smiled as she referred to Natalka, "whom does she resemble? Give her a horse, sleigh, a rifle or dogs, and she will go where even a man will not dare. The darkest night, the fiercest frost, the worst

downpour — makes no difference. She should have been born a boy. If only God will grant her health and good fortune, because this is a frightening country and life here is frightening too. I had another son — Mykola was his name — may he see heavenly glory! If you could have seen him; he was a true eagle! Hrytsko is healthy and handsome, but Mykola was more handsome and stronger; like grandfather Sirko who could bend horseshoes with his bare hands. He was friendly and carefree like her. . . . He brought her up and taught her everything. Whenever they prepared for a hunt I used to worry about him — ‘watch yourself, be careful’ — and he would laugh and assure me:

“I will bring you a live bear on a rope, mother . . .” and he used to bring me young bears and wild cats. Things went well with him. He was brave and lucky, and yet misfortune came. I sometimes think people are dying everywhere, danger lurks and you can’t escape your fate even if you hide on the stove. But that’s the way a mother’s heart is . . . very likely your mother worries a great deal about you. . . .”

After a while she continued, “Don’t worry, son, believe in your own good fortune. You have it. I may be old and foolish but there are some things I do know. The brave always have good fortune.”

Hryhory felt like hugging and kissing her as Natalka undoubtedly would have done. He hardly restrained himself. The old woman continued with simple conviction:

“The brave are always lucky! Take us for instance. When we came here, my God, what a wild and frightening place this was! Deadly boredom, loneliness, and hardships all around; and death. A foreign, unknown land. And yet we got used to it and as you see, we managed. We overcame the wilderness, conquered this country and populated it. We are accustomed to it and now we like it. When children were born, God gave them all the qualities neces-

sary to live in this country which, after all, is their fatherland."

Hryhory listened with rapt attention and when the old woman finished he asked:

"You came by ship around the world?"

"Yes, we sailed from Odessa, when was it? Yes, in the spring of 1887 . . . all that water, dear God! And all those countries and people! But I cannot tell you all about it; one day the old man will tell you. He is not a talkative man, but once in a while he has an attack of talking and then you can only listen. He is older than I am and at that time he was already a young man so he will remember many things. He will teach you a few things here. You must be getting bored."

"No, everything here is new to me and queer."

"Queer?"

"Yes. For instance I have been looking over your house for the last few days and it seems strange to me. Inside it is whitewashed and painted in our style, but outside it has a Siberian or Polessian look."

The mother laughed. "Oh yes, I, too, could not get used to it for a long time. But it is only here that we have it that way. When we lived in the village, now it is the town of Kiev, all the houses were white washed outside just as they are in Ukraine. They used to laugh at us here — 'All this forest,' they said, 'and the khakly build houses out of clay and whitewash them.' No, the houses here are the same as in Ukraine and sometimes better because they have board floors and usually have tin roofs. Before the revolution our people here lived well. They had a hard struggle at the beginning but afterwards things improved. This country loves labour and rewards it generously. For those willing to work this was a garden of Eden — forest, gold, fish, fertile soil, all kinds of berries, there was everything. And you know how hard-working our people are. We lived well once! You should have

seen. It wasn't in this house. This one was built for hunting. Our hunters used to come here in the fall and made this the main camp for the winter.

"Yes, we lived well and my grandfather had a large family. You've never seen one like it. There were more than fifty men. He had seven sons; he married them but did not separate them from the household. He gave his daughters in marriage and took the sons-in-law into the household. His homestead was more like an estate. There were seven of us daughters-in-law and eight sons-in-law. And then each of them had children! It was a real crowd. Sirko's corner was a whole village. We lived happily. Old Sirko didn't even know how many horses, cows and hogs he had. The apiary alone had more than 200 hives. Everyone worked well so they had many things. There was room to work and to earn. They planted their fields, they hunted wild animals, took produce into Manchuria and China, mined gold, caught fish, collected berries and nuts, and caught wild animals alive. We never had to eat black bread. Even when crops failed we received flour from abroad, from Japan and America, and rice from China, and all kinds of things. And you should have seen the guns and hunting equipment our boys got! We lived here better than at home, this was our second Ukraine, a new Ukraine, my son, and more blessed. And our people called the places here by their own names — Kiev, Chernihivka, Poltavka, Ukraina, Katerynoslavka, Pereyaslavka and so on. Sometimes they were homesick. All over the Ussuri and Amur it is like home. But that's where our people settled, near the rivers, where you can grow grain. Yes, they lived well, but then everything turned topsy-turvy. Someone must have angered the Lord. New times, new ways. The things that happened made people catch their breath. The Soviet Government came and turned everything inside out.

"People changed and life deteriorated. Sirko's country no longer exists. And we spat at all that and came here so

that we could finish our lives in our own way without seeing or hearing what was going on. It's a long way from here, although for this country it is not so far, about 500 versts. Still there are few people here and the authorities don't bother you as much. Formerly, when Sirko and his sons first began hunting there was hardly anyone here, only a slant-eyed 'Mandz' or 'Gold' or whatever they are called. If you cross the mountain you will see in the distance a place called 'Khektser' — that will be Khabarovsk. Grandfather said that when we first came here it was only a shack and now it is a city. When you cross the mountain and climb the Terney or the Olga you will see the ocean. That's where we first landed and then fought our way through the jungle to the Ussuri. If you continued along the crests you could go for months and never get out of the forests, only jungles and rivers and mountains and marshes.

"We have been here now for about ten years. This brook is called Pidhoronok and it empties into the Khor which empties into the Amur. All the streams begin in those hills and flow in numerous directions. There is the Bikin, the Iman, the Mukhen, and some others which I have forgotten."

Hryhory listened to the soft quiet voice of this mother and he felt good. It stirred his blood; she was so much like his mother at home, and yet different. She showed such simple bravery, such self-assurance which was perhaps not conscious but only elemental. And there was also a freedom-loving pride as natural as those mountain crests!

That is why her Natalka was so primitively proud and untamed.

"Do you ever feel homesick for Ukraine? I suppose you do not really remember it."

"Yes, I remember, but . . . if you feel like it perhaps you will tell me about Ukraine and how people live there today. I would love to hear it. I often recall my childhood in my native land. My mother used to miss it terribly.

That's probably why she died. She always asked that she be taken home to die and be buried by her parents. This sorrow creeps over me too when I remember my mother. But I love this land too. I grew up here, bore my children here, and buried four of them. I buried my father and mother here too. I couldn't bear to leave this land but I also long for the other. I remember mother's stories of those cherry orchards, those wide steppes, quiet rivers, bright starry nights, and other things about which she spoke and which I saw myself even though I was still small. . . . For instance I have lived a lifetime here and have never seen a cornflower. There, in Ukraine, I used to weave crowns out of them and periwinkle and clove pinks on the night of Ivan Kupala. They don't grow here, except for a bit that was brought from Ukraine by some settlers. It grows here now and smells and reminds us of that Ukraine. . . . Sometimes memories of that quiet sunny native land crowd themselves in the mind and then I would like to fly there. . . ."

Hryhory felt pain in his heart. He wanted to tell this mother that the quiet, bright and sunny Ukraine no longer existed, that the cherry orchards had been cut down, the rivers were flowing mud, the steppes were drenched in tears and the bright skies had turned ominously dark. But he thought, better that she should love it the way she remembered it. The mother continued to speak her thoughts:

"Yes, son, you will return there. You have no roots here and never will. Besides, times have changed and you are different."

Hryhory wondered why they assumed that attitude towards him. After all he hadn't told them anything and they knew nothing about him except that he wasn't a local inhabitant. It also surprised him that they did not ask him who he was and how he had strayed into the forest. After all he could be some thief or criminal. It is true he had talked during his illness, but could they believe that? Yet he could tell from their sympathetic attitude towards him

that they guessed something; but because of their native good taste, as often happens with simple people, they did not ask any questions. That touched him deeply and he was grateful to them.

The sun had reached its zenith and was pouring hot waves over the earth. The temperature was at least 95 degrees. The mother suddenly rose.

"It is time to eat. I am afraid they won't be home today. I hope everything is all right."

"They are coming, mother. They are coming," shouted Nataalka in a happy, ringing voice.

The mother raised her hand to her eyes and looked at the path. Hryhory rose suddenly, catching some of the tension. He glued his eyes to the path way beyond the valley, but there was nobody there. "Where does she see them? Where are they coming?"

The mother couldn't see anything either. "Where can you see them? Who is coming?"

"Our menfolk are coming, mother! Just help me to hang the clothes quickly."

"Where do you see them?"

Nataalka was laughing as she approached with an armful of clothes which she put down on a log near the choke-cherries.

"I haven't seen them yet, but I know."

"Don't play the fool, daughter. What do you mean you haven't seen them, but you know?"

"When you have lived in the forest as long as I have you will learn," and she laughed heartily. "Oh, mother, I didn't mean that!" And her mother scolded:

"Have you lost your senses? Your mother has spent a lifetime in the forest and she says: 'When you have lived as long as I. . . .'"

Nataalka continued to laugh. "I wasn't talking about that, mother. . . . They are really coming. Do you want to know how I knew? A magpie brought the news on her

tail. . . . Zalivay barked, way in the distance, and I heard him. That is all there is to it. They will be here in an hour, or two at the latest."

As though to confirm her words a small speck appeared on the path where it first became visible as it crossed a bald, sunlit hillock. A dog! It was followed by a second and a third. They ran ahead for a bit, then turned and playfully ran back over the hillock.

Hryhory was duly impressed. One must have some hearing to hear a dog barking two hours' walking distance away. And besides, to have recognized that it was Zalivay and not another dog! That girl had good reason to poke fun at him.

The mother laughed, waved her hand and hurried into the house.

"I haven't time now, daughter. Let Hrytsko help you."

"Then give him the line. But he might fall off the cherry tree and kill himself." She seemed quite serious now and was frowning.

Hryhory went into the hallway, brought out a long line tied in a bundle, untied it, and approached the large choke-cherry trees.

"Do you want it high?" he asked.

"Right at the top."

Hryhory climbed the tree and tied the line fairly high. Then he picked up the other end and asked: "Where do you want it?"

"Around that hill," she tossed her head in the direction of the blue mountains, without turning.

Hryhory pulled the line towards the shed. "That darned girl!" The line was too short. He pulled at it angrily and it broke in the middle.

"Well, such a good line, and he broke it."

He couldn't tell whether she was really surprised or just sarcastic, because it was a really stout line. But then she added sarcastically:

"You haven't had your lunch yet! What will happen after you have eaten. . . ."

Embarrassed, Hryhory joined the two ends of the line, tied it to the cowshed and, without turning, walked off.

"Where are you running to? Mother told you to help and to obey older folk. But perhaps you had better go and I will do it myself before you tear something."

Hryhory walked to the brook, picked up all the washing, brought it up and laid it on the log. Nataalka didn't even glance at him. Casually but deftly she continued hanging out the clothes on the line, on the branches and on the fence rail. Hryhory looked at her askance, smiled to himself and went off to the brook.

After a while the dogs came dashing into the water and barking joyfully. They ran straight to Nataalka and almost knocked her off her feet.

The yard was filled with the sound of the girl's laughter and the barking of dogs gone crazy. They spun her around, jumped above her head in an effort to lick her face, especially that beautiful Yakut dog called Zalivay.

"Mother, please call them off, or do something, or they'll spoil all the washing."

But the dogs had now noticed Hryhory near the water. They had passed him before, but now they barked madly and rushed at the stranger. If it had not been for Nataalka they might have torn him apart. As it was they growled for a while and turned back to the girl. The girl scolded the dogs laughingly, "don't touch him or he will tear you apart with his hands."

There was a sound of horses' hooves on the path. Five heavily loaded horses came into view. In front came the old man, not just an old man, but a bewhiskered old giant, tall and broad, red-faced, with a hairy chest showing through an opening in a white shirt. He wore top boots, a well-worn cap, padded trousers (in spite of the heat), a

hunter's knife at his side. A short rifle was slung to the saddle of the leading horse.

At the rear came Hrytsko. He was as tall as his father, a handsome giant about twenty-five years of age. He was wearing an old Army jacket, the same kind of top boots, a cap on the side of his head, with a thick growth of curls showing from underneath. There was a knife at his side and a shotgun slung over his back.

They laughed heartily when they saw Hryhory.

"Ho, ho, my son, you are frisking around already," boomed old Sirko as he waded across the brook. "We have brought you something."

Having crossed the brook, the old man stood with his arms outspread for an embrace. Some invisible force almost made him dash like a child into the old man's arms, but he controlled himself. They embraced each other ceremoniously like a father and son, and kissed according to the old custom.

Hrytsko simply stretched out a stout hand and greeted him, smiling. They looked amazingly alike, the same build, the same age, and similar in appearance. Two Hrytskos. Even Natalka's eyes had tears in them when she looked at them.

"Two bears! Look at them, mother." But mother had already seen it and came out of the house quickly to greet them.

"We will soon see how well you shoot, son. This is for you." And the old man handed over the present. Hryhory was holding a brand new rifle.

When they were unloading the horses old man Sirko added,

"You'll have a horse too, son; this bay. Well, old lady, how about some dinner?"

Of course the dinner was all ready.

5

Target Practice

Next morning they cleaned their weapons. According to Sirko's orders they were preparing for a long hunting trip.

"When you start out hunting, all your weapons must be in perfect order."

This wasn't a joke and they were preparing carefully, as though they were going to war. They sat in front of the house facing the sun, spread everything out on the grass and started working. Each cleaned his own rifle. Nataalka and old Sirko had Winchesters, Hrytsko had a Japanese rifle, and Hryhory his new one. In spite of that, he took it completely apart; he wanted to see if everything was in order as well as to get some practice — perhaps he had forgotten how to do it.

Old Sirko watched carefully from the side to see if the rifle was in good hands. Then he gave a satisfied smile, and as he worked he recounted how this 'toy' came into his hands.

"You mustn't think, son, that this is an ordinary rifle. One might say that it comes from the greatest general — yes, from Blucher* himself." And the old man described how they signed a contract with the OKDVA (Speciar Far

* Blucher, a Soviet marshal, commander-in-chief of the Far Eastern Army; perished in the purges in the late 1930's.

Eastern Red Army) to deliver venison and wild boar meat and other things. And how he met there with Blucher, whom he knew from the Civil War when, together, they had fought the White counter-revolutionaries and the Japanese. Well, this Blucher, overjoyed by an unexpected meeting with this old veteran of the revolution, gave him this rifle. He ordered some high official to bring it from the stores, "as a gift to a veteran of the revolution and the most outstanding hunter in the whole USSR." And having handed over the gift with due ceremony, he invoked: "Take it and don't betray it. I am passing this heroic weapon into promising hands." The old man closed one eye and for some reason laughed heartily. After a while he added:

"The devil guessed well! He is a great man; one of our people, that Blucher."

Hryhory could not help laughing, but for a different reason; or perhaps it was for the same reason as the old man. The thought had come to his mind:

"How often life itself creates situations that you could not possibly imagine. Yes, this is no ordinary rifle and it certainly fell into promising hands. Would he fulfill expectations . . . ?"

He raised the rifle and looked towards the sun through the barrel, which showed a shiny spiral reflecting all the colours of the spectrum. He weighed it carefully in his hand for balance.

Natalka looked askance, with a sceptical twist to her lips.

"Whoever behaved that way with a rifle? Why does he peer into it like a magpie into a bone?"

She was handling her Winchester like a veteran soldier; had it completely apart, checked it, cleaned it and oiled it, and was already assembling it.

Hryhory reached the conclusion that he had a good rifle. It was an older make and therefore exactly and

cleanly finished, and it had never been fired. All he had to do was break it in. In the meantime he felt he would like to play a joke on Natalka, who seemed to be jeering inwardly at him. He continued to fumble with the rifle and apparently couldn't manage to put it together. Natalka was now blushing because of his ineptitude.

He wasn't fooling the old man, however, who went along with the game and asked:

"Have you ever fired a rifle? Do you know how, hm, do you?"

Hryhory scratched his head and muttered:

"I've never tried; perhaps I do know how"

Finally they finished cleaning and re-assembling the rifles and began packing their ammunition.

When everything was ready, old Sirko looked across the valley and then turned to his son:

"Run out there to the hill and take some chalk with you."

Hrytsko knew what was coming. He brought his horse out of the stable and rode out to the hill on which grew a row of old cedars. It was about 600 metres away. After a while he came back.

"Now we will do a little target shooting," he explained to Hryhory. He seemed to remember something, went into the house and came out with a new case which he handed to Hryhory. The case contained a pair of Zeiss military field glasses.

Hryhory fixed the glasses on to the spot on the hill and he found that animal heads had been drawn on the cedars. He also found that the right side of the binoculars was blank.

"Those are good glasses, but one of the lenses is spoilt."

"What is a lens?" said the old man.

"It's this glass."

The glasses belonged to Natalka and she now took them away with the remark, "These are perfectly good glasses."

After a while the old man took the glasses from Natalka and gave them back to Hryhory.

"You, son, will watch while we do a bit of pasting. If you see anything interesting, tell us."

At his command they all lay down in Army style, Natalka on the left, then Hrytsko, then the old man and finally Hryhory. Even the dogs lay down in a row, stuck out their tongues and pricked up their ears.

"Ready! Each one will fire five rounds. The right hand stag head belongs to Natalka and the rest in order."

"Do we fire together or take turns?" enquired Hrytsko.

"Take turns. Natalka first."

She glanced sideways at Hryhory, who was peering at the targets through the glasses, then in quick order she fired five rounds.

Hrytsko followed her firing as rapidly.

Hryhory watched carefully and couldn't see anything except that after the last round something flew up on a nearby tree.

Old Sirko followed Hrytsko. He took his time and after each round muttered, "There goes another darling."

Natalka, who had been carefully watching her father shooting, remarked gravely, "You've ruined the tree, father, and it was still growing."

Hryhory fired last. Although he had fired at many a target he was now on edge. This was an unusual test, especially with a new rifle and against marksmen such as he had never met in his life. He set the sights at 600 and took several careful aims.

Natalka's remark, "You see, that's the way it's done," saved the day for him and he became taut as a bowstring. In rapid succession he fired five rounds.

After the last round, everyone, including the dogs, dashed madly across the valley, old man Sirko on horseback. Natalka reached the cedars first. She looked over the stag heads drawn on the cedars and turned to her father. "I

told you you ruined the tree, look!" There were five holes in the head, one next to the other. On her own target was a group of four in the middle and the fifth was high up in the horns. Hrytsko's target showed only four bullet marks. Hryhory looked at his target and his heart sank. There wasn't a sign of any bullets, but when they came close to his target they found that about a foot above the head there were five bullet holes that could have been covered with the palm of the hand. The back of the tree was one gaping hole.

"There's the one who really ruined a tree. Beautiful rifle, beautiful, thanks to Blucher." Old Sirko spoke gleefully. "You're a good shot, son. This rifle seems to carry a bit high, but you'll fix that up."

When they got back to the house the young people did some trick shooting. Old Sirko watched them for a while and then could restrain himself no longer. He showed them "how he used to shoot at one time, when he was young." He took out of his pocket a few copper coins and asked Hrytsko to toss them up one after another. As Hrytsko tossed a coin up the old man quickly caught it in his sights, fired, and the coin would disappear, and you could only hear the whine as the coin was driven by the impact of the bullet. After each round the old man remarked with a sigh, "That's how I used to shoot when I was young."

This was a happy preparation for what was to be a long time in the taiga, a long trip followed by serious and dangerous hunting.

The Virgin Forests of Sikhote-Alin

The horses had only one day's rest before old Sirko decided they should start preparing for the hunting trip. The others did the work; he restricted himself to planning, to suggesting and occasional 'heys'. The 'others' meant

mainly mother and Nataka who prepared supplies, packed them in sacks and large and small bags. There was flour, candles, sardines, bread, sugar, compressed tea, jars of oil and honey, cans of spirit, matches, flints, needles, thread.

Mother kept telling Nataka:

"Watch, this will be here, that will be there"

They checked the tent, cut foot cloths, repaired the top boots and hunting clothes, cleaned army mess tins and field spades. They even included some cheese-cloth with needle and thread, whatever use that might be to the hunters.

Hryhory was going too, so he helped in every way he could, even though old Sirko kept muttering: "Leave it alone, son. That's not a man's job. It is different once you are out hunting, but here there are others to do that"

But Hryhory enjoyed taking part in these unusual preparations, which gave the impression of a long-term expedition. There were ammunition boxes, guns, horse-shoe nails, mosquito nets, shooting sticks, an axe, a saw and many things he had never seen before.

The preparations lasted a whole day, and departure was set for the following day. At daybreak Sirko's household came to life. Four good horses — a grey, a bay, a black and a chestnut — stood near the porch. The loads were carefully distributed over each horse. When everything was loaded and strapped down they went inside to breakfast. They ate quietly and quickly, while the old woman served them solicitously.

"Perhaps you would take me with you. I will be bored and lonely," she said.

"Then come along," said Nataka.

"Yes, come along, and who will stay home?"

"What are you cackling about?" spoke up old Sirko. "You will be bored, eh? Then you will appreciate us more when we come back."

"As though I didn't appreciate you now Eat well. What is the matter with you, Natalka? Eat, my child. You too, son (to Hryhory). Don't look at them, eat well . . . when you get out there you won't have these things. The devil knows what you will eat there. Probably something the dogs wouldn't eat here."

Hryhory laughed and ate enough for three just to please her. The others weren't doing too badly either. The table was covered with a cloth and set as though it were Easter. They drank fruit liqueurs and ate sardines with vinegar; then hot borsch and *pyrohy*,* meat and potatoes. Then *pyrohy* with rice, meat and beans. For dessert they had honey and stewed cranberries.

After breakfast they stood up, crossed themselves before the ikons and prepared to move. The old man was giving his wife 'orders' as to what she should do if anything happened, and what should be attended to. Just before leaving the house they sat in solemn silence for a few minutes, then:

"God be with us!"

They bade good-bye to the mother.

There was just a suggestion of a rosy hue in the East when the troop marched out from Sirko's homestead. The three huge hunting dogs led the way. The two Hryhorys followed, with rifles slung over their shoulders, both wearing top boots with the tops rolled down, and good light hunting clothes. Then came two packed horses, the grey and the black, then came Natalka wearing clothes like an airman's, made out of 'the devil's skin' and carrying a leather cap in her hand. The other two horses followed. In the rear came old Sirko, using a shooting stick to walk with. He was wearing top boots, a pair of greasy old pants, an old short coat and an old-fashioned cap probably as old as Sirko himself.

After crossing the brook they turned east and began

* *pyrohy*, dumplings, a favorite Ukrainian dish.

climbing a narrow path, rising slowly at an angle along the slopes towards Sikhote-Alin.

Old Mrs. Sirko stood on the porch, now and then making the sign of the cross in their direction. She accompanied them with her eyes as long as they were in sight. Before they disappeared in the jungle Nataalka turned and waved in the direction of her mother who was no longer visible. The air was fresh and cool as is usual in these regions in the summer. Mist stirred above the valley, and above the brook below, and crept into the breaks between hills. It rose slowly as though out of a deep sleep.

Against the foreground of the chimeric walls of Sikhote-Alin the rosy hue kept rising up the sky.

"It will be a clear, hot day," said Hrytsko. No one commented.

On both sides of the path there grew masses of flowers like roses except that the blossoms were only about one-tenth the size. Hryhory became acquainted with these when he first set foot in the bush but he had only recently learned that they were called *kiprey* and that they were perhaps the best honey providers in the whole world. He also knew that in this area there were many hillocks which were bare of trees and covered as thickly with these flowers as the steppe is covered with wheat. Local beekeepers would sometimes carry their hives 100 kilometres to such locations.

The dogs ran forward along the path, then stopped and waited for the men and horses. They would play around Nataalka or the old man for a while, and then dash off again. Sharp-eared, broad-chested, they looked as fierce as wolves. Two of them were grey with brown spots, and one was brown with a black streak along his neck.

"Do you know anything about dogs?" asked Hrytsko when the dogs ran back and began playing in the glade, grabbing each other with their frightful, huge jaws.

"I know a little about ordinary dogs."

"What ordinary dogs?"

"Well, hunting dogs, like hounds. . . ."

Hrytsko laughed: "I don't know those, but have you ever seen any like these?"

"No. Those frightful things are probably good for — looking after prisoners."

"Well, you should know that these are priceless dogs. First of all there aren't any others like these in the whole country. Hunters such as Golds, Tungus and Yakuts usually have dogs; they even ride them and perhaps they would even hitch them to a plow if they knew how and if there was anything to plow, but there are none like these. Those two grey ones — Zalivay and Rooshay — are Yakut Huskies and the brown one, Nepra, is a Gold Husky. One important point is that they are hunting dogs. The three of them will seize a wild boar by the 'seat of his trousers' and hold him until you can come and finish him off with a knife. But even that is not the real point because there are many hunting dogs. The most important fact is that these dogs are tiger hunters. As a rule there isn't a dog in the world who will not run to your feet whimpering from fright at the very scent of a tiger. But not these dogs. I think they would tackle the devil himself. Father trained them that way from pups. Therein lies their real value. Without these dogs we are nothing; with them we can venture anything. And how intelligent they are! Look, they understand that we are talking about them. Watch their faces."

"Zalivay!" called Hrytsko, and the huge, broad-chested Yakut ran up and searched his eyes. His general appearance was that of a German Shepherd but his paws were massive, his chest like that of a boar, and his clear sparkling eyes betrayed tremendous reserves of strength, courage and devotion. Hrytsko patted his huge jaw.

"This is Natalka's pal!"

On hearing the word 'Natalka' the dog stopped, let the men go by and waited for his mistress.

"He would tear the heart out of anyone who threatened

her. I once made a move to strike her and she shouted 'Stranger'; you should have seen that! Some time ago he was ripped by a boar. You will notice one of his legs is a bit crooked. It was broken and his belly torn. Father gave him up for lost but Nataalka pulled him through. She took as many pains with him as with a human being, and he is used to her. He will not forget that as long as he lives. Many people have wanted to buy him. Some have offered as much as fifteen thousand but father wouldn't hear of it. Once he did suggest selling him, but you can't always tell whether he is serious or just joking. But, my God, you should have heard Nataalka; 'You had better throw me into the bargain, in that case,' was her reaction."

Zalivay came running to the front. Perched on his sharp ears was Nataalka's "Dynamo"* helmet, fastened under his neck. The dog moved proudly and solemnly.

"That is one of their jokes. But Nataalka has occasionally sent him home from the taiga. He will deliver anything you give him, and will bring back whatever he is given. He has never lost anything, or had it taken away. As far as he is concerned no one can take anything that belongs to Nataalka.

"I'll tell you how they taught him to hunt tigers. Nataalka would put her shawl or shoe under a tiger skin when he didn't see and would then say, 'Oh, my God, Zalivay, help me, look!' It was frightening to watch him. There would be a cloud of fur flying out of that skin. The others are well trained, too, but he's their leader. Without him they would be like Russian soldiers without a general."

The bush grew thicker. The path led through thick tall grass, weeds, and through impassable walls of branches and vines. Heavy dew drenched them as though somebody had poured it through a sieve. By the time they reached the next crest they were wet through and through. The young men waited for the others. The sun was blinding

* Dynamo, the best known Soviet sport club.

them now as it rose over the top of a distant, grey, serrated crest. It painted the steep bluffs in the most varied hues, like a gifted artist. Hryhory caught his breath at the sight.

Natalka's head was wet and big dew drops were perched on her nose and eye lashes, but her eyes sparkled with happiness. She stood and looked at the sun. Her face blossomed out like a rose and looked as inscrutable and unconcerned as these jungles and squirrels and the sun itself.

"Well, shall we rest?" suggested Hrytsko as he watched water oozing out of his footwear.

"No, now that we are as wet as this we should continue as long as the gadflies haven't started," said old Sirko. "We have a long journey ahead of us."

The path divided here into two directions.

"Take the left one," ordered the old man.

"Aha, we are going to the Sky Blue Valley," said Hrytsko. He walked ahead as he explained to Hryhory. "Sky Blue Valley is quite far from here. There we have the best salt lick and it is best for antler hunting."

"Would you please explain to me what a salt lick is?" asked Hryhory.

"Don't you really know? Ah yes, well a salt lick is a salty piece of ground which *isubras* eat."

"And what are *isubras*?"

"Why, *isubras* are the ones with the *panty*."

"And what are *panty*?"

Hrytsko laughed suspiciously. The path now led across a clearing. There was more room, the grass was sparse and there were few trees and thickets. When they came to clearings like this the two Hrytskos walked side by side.

"Don't laugh at me and don't be surprised. In my lifetime I have hunted ducks, geese, rabbits, wolves, foxes, curlew, woodcock and hoopoe but. . . ."

"And what are woodcock and hoopoe, and those curlew or what have you?"

"All right then," laughed Hryhory. "Now you had better explain everything clearly so that I can understand."

"Fine. Salt licks are spots in areas that have been burnt over, or on bogs in the hills. Occasionally fires have burnt out stretches over a hundred versts. In the case of these hill bogs the sides of the hills are often salty earth. These are salt licks. The *isubras*, the deer and the moose like to eat that soil especially when they are growing new antlers which are called *panty*. The *isubras* go mostly to the salt licks on burnt ground which is open and safer. They go there only at night, during the summer when their antlers are growing. These antlers of the *isubras* and the spotted stag are very valuable. The spotted stag is now almost extinct. The *isubra* is not a spotted stag, he is greyish brown. There are many of them here and they look . . . well, you will soon see for yourself."

"I still don't understand what *panty* are."

"Well, now! The male *isubra* changes his antlers every year. In February or March he knocks off the old ones and during the summer new ones grow again until mating time in the fall, when his antlers are once more large and beautiful. Then the males fight for the females. While these antlers are growing they are soft and possess some secret power as a medicine against all kinds of diseases. The Chinese are experts in these matters. These young antlers are sold to China for good solid gold.

"Now you know what *panty* are and why the *isubra* is so valuable. The hunting of these animals is now strictly controlled. You can't shoot them either for meat or for hide, only for these *panty*, and only during one month. And only those can hunt them who know their job and who have special permission. Father says that at one time everybody shot this animal recklessly. It was very plentiful. Now do you understand? It is difficult to explain it clearly but you will see for yourself, and then you will know."

"Hold on! You say that the salt licks are naturally salty soil. But Mother and Nataalka said that you salt them. . . ."

"Certainly. The soil becomes exhausted. Take, for instance, an excellent salt lick which is extensively known and used by animals and which is also well fitted out and handy for antler hunting, because on a new salt lick, even if you find one, you won't do any hunting for a long time. You see, antler hunting means shooting the male *isubra* for their *panty*. In order to make it possible you have to organize and equip the new salt lick. You must build a well-concealed shelter where you sit and wait, and from where you shoot. Since you do this hunting only at night the shelter has to be very close. But the *isubra* is a clever beast; you don't fool him easily. You might camouflage the shelter perfectly but he will not come near for a long time. It might take a year or two until he gets used to it so that the shelter no longer makes him suspicious. That is why old 'safe' salt licks are the best. And you have to keep adding salt so as to keep the animals coming. This spring we took half a ton of salt to the Sky Blue Valley alone. Is it clear now?"

"Clear."

"We are used to things here, we grew up here and everything seems straightforward to us. But there must be many things that are baffling to you. There are some things I wonder about. For instance, the highland bog; water flows down, but here you have a marsh high in the hills. And what a marsh! It is some twenty versts long and so bad that if, God forbid, you slip into it you will never get out. Once a whole expedition got lost. It strayed into this bog at night and that was the end. Now why is it so?"

Hryhory began to explain to Hrytsko what caused these bogs. He told him about the perma frosts and other factors that brought about these queer phenomena. Hrytsko listened, surprised and somewhat embarrassed:

"There you are. You have been fooling me all along. You know the answers and yet you ask."

"Oh no, much of this is a Chinese puzzle to me."

They continued thus, walking and chatting. Hryhory asked about everything and Hrytsko answered willingly betraying the deep native knowledge of the hunter-naturalist in topography, geography, plants and animals and the techniques of hunting, fishing and trapping. He was a true child of the taiga. He couldn't imagine himself in any other environment.

Hitherto, apart from his father, Nataalka had been his only friend and companion. But they had spoken little — too much of their experience had been in common. Their conversations usually consisted of a few brief words.

Nataalka walked a score of paces behind, separated by the horses. She could see the young men talking with animation, and could make out their individual voices, but she did not draw any nearer to them.

The sun was beginning to burn. The thickets were still cool, but whenever they emerged into the open the sun peppered them with hot rays. The bush was as quiet as a cathedral. Here and there a woodpecker could be heard or some bird would fly near by. But there were few birds in the forest and as though to fill in the void, some kind of animal flew from tree to tree. It rose from a tall pine and, spreading out, it dropped down, gathered speed and then came up again and latched on to a poplar and scrambled up to the top.

"What is that, Hrytsko?"

"That is a flying squirrel — a half-sister to a squirrel and a chipmunk."

Once Hryhory saw a group of tall, graceful animals relaxing in a sunlit glade covered with a luscious growth of heavy grass. They looked at the cavalcade and didn't move.

"What are those?"

"They are deer."

"Surely not so tall."

"Why, are there smaller ones?"

"Yes, and are these stupid or timid?"

Hrytsko laughed. "You should try and find them in the autumn or the winter. Right now they are having a good time because no one bothers them in summer. In these parts they are usually left alone even in the winter and that's why they are not afraid."

The deer watched for a while then slowly turned and with a few graceful leaps disappeared.

"There are masses of them here as well as other animals, except that you can't see them. It's not so bad with the deer, especially if they have not been scared, but others are as cautious as the devil. They can see us all right. You might see what appears to be a dried branch sticking out and you could stand there for an hour and it wouldn't move, just a dried branch so far as you are concerned, but in fact it is a prong of a moose's antlers, or an *isubra*, and the animal itself is behind a stump or a log just peeping with one eye, and it can disappear in the twinkling of an eye. You've got to be patient, crafty and brave if you want to hunt here."

From a distance there came a humming sound and it increased as they moved on. Presently, towards them flew columns of what seemed horseflies except that they were greyish-black. Hryhory looked around and saw that the sound was really coming from the rear, where whole columns of these flies now hovered over the horses.

"The gadflies have come," said Hrytsko in disgust. "They are a real menace. They don't give an animal any peace in the daytime — any animal in the forest — and we are still a long way from the resting place at the spring."

The men stopped and waited for the horses who were madly swishing their tails, kicking, waving their heads and blowing. The dogs were flicking their ears and snapping

viciously. The gadflies kept coming in clouds; they descended indiscriminately on horses and dogs, dug into their skin, but they left the humans alone.

"You take the roan and I'll take the black!"

They walked beside the horses and fought off the gadflies. Wherever they struck with their hands there was immediately a splash of blood from the squashed blood-suckers. It was impossible to keep up with the attacking horde. Almost before they descended they had punctured the hide and had their fill. Nothing seemed to be of any use; the more you killed the more came.

"This is bad. Go and find the tar, daughter," ordered the old man.

They found the tar and covered the more sensitive spots on the horses. The old man mumbled,

"This is bad. It's still a long way but we'll have to get there or they'll eat us up."

They started out again. The tar maddened the gadflies and they now attacked the humans. They continued their assault upon the horses, getting into their eyes, their ears, nostrils, mouths, and even their tongues if the horses happened to open their mouths. Because of the tarred parts their attack was now concentrated on small areas and these were literally covered with armies of gadflies.

Although the dogs suffered too they did have considerable protection from their thick coats.

"Can you explain this?" said Hrytsko angrily. "Today these black things are causing havoc; then they will disappear and yellow ones will come; then blue ones that are very tiny and very fierce. Do you have them at home? No? Well, you are a very fortunate people. Here you can't ride in the daytime. The wild animals suffer terribly. Right now the *isubra* is somewhere in water hiding from the pest with only his mouth and ears sticking out. And the harm these gadflies cause, especially to deer. Sometimes you will shoot a buck in March and when you skin it you

will find masses of larvae stirring under the hide. The eggs were laid under the skin, sometime in summer, and they hatch in the winter. In March they begin stirring and the skin is covered with lumps. Eventually the larvae cut a hole in the lump, fall out and become these devilish gadflies. Such a hide is of course useless; all holes, like a sieve."

Everybody was engaged in beating off the gadflies with their hands, which were now covered with blood. The path turned downwards and in time the party reached the bottom of a deep ravine. Here it was cool and semi-dark. A little stream could be heard falling over stones, apparently engaged in conversation with them. The number of gadflies diminished considerably, and it was heavenly compared with the hell they had just left behind. They stopped here to rest and await the hour when the hordes of flies would settle down and they could proceed. The young men unpacked the horses, led them into a large thicket and lay down on the rocks.

The old man began making a bipod and Nataalka picked up a Winchester and started off along the water course.

"Are you off to scare bears?" Hrytsko laughed.

"Wait a minute; come on, Hrytsko, let us go with her after partridges!"

They picked up their shotguns, Hryhory a double-barrelled one, and caught up with Nataalka. The valley was dark and wet. Huge flat rocks, stumps and fallen trees were all covered in grey moss.

For a while they walked but found nothing. Then they decided to separate and see who was the better hunter. Hryhory went to the right. He climbed the crest and went down the other side, always carefully checking landmarks so as not to get lost.

A squirrel chattered above. Hryhory looked up for a long time trying to spot that happy little beast somewhere near the top of a cedar. He examined every branch, every

cone, but he couldn't find it. He could hear a tiny noise, a scratching, but still couldn't locate the squirrel. When he looked down he looked around but could no longer fix his position. He began searching in his pockets for a piece of paper to make a marker when he heard a shot. This was followed by a flutter of wings and a pair of partridges flashed by and sat on a dead poplar tree. One stretched his little crested head and stood absolutely still, and the other walked up the branch. Hryhory raised his shotgun and fired twice. One partridge fell down and fluttered for a moment and the other, apparently badly wounded in the wing, went off sideways and eventually fell. Hryhory noted the peculiar-looking tree near which the second bird fell, and went off into the thicket to pick up the first one. He then made for the tree but when he got there the bird was gone. He searched for a long time until he noticed some feathers on a branch. Then he searched thoroughly near by and eventually found the partridge in some heavy undergrowth.

It was high time to return but for the life of him he could not tell which way to go. In searching for the partridge he had turned at least ten times. Now he was completely dis-oriented. For a while he walked left, then came back, and walked right, and came back again. Where the devil should he go? He couldn't very well shout. What a hunter! Went off a few yards and got lost! He started off again and thought he should be descending by now and be near camp, but it wasn't there so he turned back. The more he tried to find his way out, the more he thought he was hopelessly lost. He came out in a cold sweat, not with fear but from the thought that he would shame himself for life and that at any time now they would start searching for him. He took himself in hand, tied a handkerchief high on a bush so that it would be visible from a distance and began walking in a spiral. He came to the spot where the first partridge fell and broke off the top of a bush and

peeled the bark to make a marker. From here he started walking in another spiral and finally walked out into a clearing. Phew! this was the way he came, there were definite marks in the tall grass so he started downhill. Then he stopped and looked around and listened. Was he lost again? And then he heard the cracking of the underbrush and saw Zalivay running with his head down following Hryhory's footsteps.

Hryhory stood still until the dog disappeared and then went off quickly in the direction from which the dog had come. 'She obviously sent him to search for me,' he thought. 'It's a good thing we didn't meet.' And then he heard voices, heard the crackling of a fire and smelled smoke. Natalka was saying, "Obviously he's got lost," and Hryhory thought there was a note of concern in her voice. "He wouldn't get lost," said Hrytsko. To which the old man replied, "You don't say! When I was forty I got lost right next to my own house."

"Hrytsko, let's go and search, or at least fire a shot."

"Why? After all you sent Zalivay, he'll find him and bring him back a prisoner."

"Oh, oh," shouted Hryhory and calmly walked up to the camp. Everyone laughed. "We have already plucked ours. Hand yours over."

Hryhory sat down by the old man and started plucking the birds.

"And where is Zalivay?" wondered Natalka.

"Why, he was with you."

Just then Zalivay came running carrying Hryhory's handkerchief in his mouth.

"I wonder what was chasing our hunter that he lost his handkerchief!"

Hryhory only blushed. While the dinner was cooking they took off their footwear, washed their feet, hung up their top boots, washed their footcloths and hung them up

to dry. They watered and fed the horses and cleaned their guns.

After dinner they rested for a while, then packed the horses and started out again.

Towards evening they crossed a large bog, climbed another crest and came out in a clearing over which they proceeded northward for some time. They moved quickly so as to reach the familiar spring before nightfall where they could camp. By now everyone was getting tired. Hryhory was perspiring freely and sweat poured into his eyes. Thirst was getting the better of all of them, especially after a good dinner. Their water bottles were empty.

In addition, mosquitoes started annoying them. Nataalka was prepared. She pulled down her helmet, covered her ears and only had to shoo them away from her face. Besides, they were used to mosquitoes.

Hryhory felt as if someone was beating him with nettles. He scratched one spot after another and felt the swellings rise. His face was pock marked, and there were blisters between his fingers. The horses were breathing heavily and snorted in an effort to ward off the mosquitoes.

6

A Meeting with the Moroz Family

Twilight was descending quickly as though trying to prevent old Sirko from reaching a suitable spot for the night before total darkness, a spot in some valley with a blessed stream now so indispensable for the tired travellers. Sirko knew that the nearest such place was about ten kilometres away so he led the party as fast as possible.

They were not destined to reach such comfort. Suddenly Sirko's group stopped. Coming along the path towards them was another party moving just as fast, obviously trying to cross the hilltop before nightfall and reach a valley with a stream where they could settle for the night. The two parties met at the very peak of the crest.

It was the most unusual occurrence. Such things seldom happened in this uninhabited boundless sea of green.

In front walked an old man with a stick in hand and a pack on his back. Behind him came several heavily loaded horses, three or four people and a few dogs. Riding side-saddle was a young mother with a baby in her arms. A young girl walked between the horses and occasionally swatted them with a branch to drive off the mosquitoes. She was well proportioned, bare-legged, and her face was streaked so heavily with sweat and grime that it was impossible to tell what was her natural colouring.

In the rear came a lanky young man with a black moustache, a rifle slung across his chest.

The meeting was a great surprise to both parties. The first to greet each other were the dogs, and the people followed.

Hrytsko was beside himself with surprise and sheer joy when he recognized their friends.

"The Moroz family; I swear it's the Morozes! May you be stricken by a deer's tail, as father would say. Hey, pug-nose, where are you stumbling to so fast? Stop!"

"Ah! . . . why, of course to see you; and how are you, bridegroom? And why are you in such a hurry? Are you going to propose?"

There were peals of laughter, and repeated expressions of surprise and joy.

"The Moroz family!"

"The Sirko family!"

Morozes and Sirkos had met. One mountain never meets another, but two old, famous families could not pass each other by, even in this endless virgin forest.

Hryhory watched this unusual scene with keen interest. Morozes were visiting with the Sirkos; and where?

"This is the Moroz family," Hrytsko explained hastily, and then turned his attention again to the sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued grimy girl. "They live on the Bare Mountains behind the devil's stove. The old man is Natalka's and my godfather. That one is his son-in-law, that one is Hanna Morozivna, married, and that one is Mariyka, sharp as a tack as you can see. We haven't seen each other for about a year, not since we danced at Hanna's wedding."

"Hey, Mariyka, where have you been rooting with your nose that you got it so dirty?"

"Why, I was looking for you!"

The old men doffed their caps and greeted each other solemnly according to taiga and Cossack custom. The women were greeting each other with loud kisses.

"Hold your kisses, Mariyka; take it easy, pug-nose, I will be right over!" called Hrytsko.

"Tiu, tiu, so that's the way you are! And with that face? Go on back, there is my horse, ha ha ha!"

This bare-legged girl, made up in sweat and grime, proved to be a lively blonde. She was jabbering like a magpie to Natalka and her eyes were darting at the young men. She even stared at Hryhory and then whispered something to Natalka who smacked her face.

"Oh, go ahead and kiss him," said the young married woman as the other girls helped her off the horse. She was young and beautiful and full of youthful spirit. "Have pity on him, look how jealous he is."

"He can go to the devil. He might bite me. Listen to him neigh!"

The young people went on joking, laughing and teasing. Even the quiet, lanky son-in-law joined them.

Meanwhile old Moroz and old Sirko stood on the path and talked. They were old friends and even related; each had godchildren in the other family. They had migrated together to this country, and had lived in the same village for many years. Eventually they separated and now seldom saw each other. They were happy over this meeting and inquired about life in general and where they were travelling.

The Moroz family was taking a short-cut home from Komsomolsk. Hanna had been visiting her older brother's family there (he was now in a concentration camp), was delayed, and gave birth to her child. They had gone to bring her home from the camp hospital ("what an awful place it is, God forbid") and to settle some business matters. Old Moroz had a contract with the camp to supply game for the directing personnel of the concentration camp — "the lords want meat." There and back, they had now been travelling for twenty days.

"My God, what is happening now in this world!"

Moroz shook his head sadly as he told them about Kom-somolsk, and all the frightful things that were happening in that town of prisoners.

Night fell before they became aware of it. It was too late to travel in either direction so they decided to camp there for the night. They unpacked the horses and placed the packs in a large half-circle. In the centre they made a large fire, and hung their guns and ammunition pouches on the branches. A tent was pitched for the young woman with the baby, and the horses were tethered near by before being let out to graze. Then the men took their spades and went in search of water.

The problem of water was difficult, perhaps insoluble at this height. Their only hope lay in digging. They dug several holes about five feet deep but found no water. Their clothes were sticking to their backs from perspiration but all they came up with was damp soil. Hoping against hope that some water might trickle in eventually, they returned to camp.

The girls were sitting with open mouths, and licking their parched lips. The few drops of water that remained in one of the flasks had been given to Hanna but they hardly did any good.

The early period of elation was now gone. The unquenchable thirst killed all signs of good humour as drought kills a flower. They could do nothing but suffer in silence. Perhaps some water would trickle into the holes. . . .

Lying flat on the ground in a supine position, Hrytsko tried to ease the silence.

"Grandpa Moroz, give me your Mariyka. That pug-nose can't possibly be of any use to you."

"Take her, take her! . . . But what will you do with her, son? You will find her difficult to handle. You see how she kicks up her heels with me."

"Oh that's nothing. See how quiet she is with her mouth wide open. Hey, Mariyka, are you expecting rain?"

Memento Mori

The Sky Blue Valley, the purple mountains, and the lush virgin forest were bathed in dazzling morning light, displaying all the colours of the rainbow. Billions of drops shimmered on everything with miniature suns scattering light on the broad leaves of oak and hazel, on grass and flowers, on the thousand-year-old, moss-covered trunks and stumps and on the tops of lofty cedars and poplars. They shone there like drops of fire, which now and then let go and fell down, scintillating among the trunks and streaking through the blue coolness of the deep shadows of the thicket.

A heavy dew covered everything, beading and weighing down blades of grass, and clinging to the petals of flowers. The stillness was supreme. Not a leaf or blade of grass moved; all was rainbow-shimmer.

Natalka stood on the footbridge with a gun and bending down a little looked into the water, immovable, watching a brown trout that for the last two days had become the centre of attention of their whole colony and the object of a contest between them. They had decided to hunt it down. What a large trout! It made its lair among the great rocks in the depths and rarely visited the shallows, disturbing the hunters, but disdaining all kinds of ruses; it vanished as soon as steps were heard on the bank, as if

sensing peril. The problem in this unusual hunt hinged on the fact that it was hard to ambush the trout, and still harder to shoot it in the water, as only a vertical shot could find its mark. Shot at an angle, the bullet would hit the water, ricochet, and whiz away in a frenzy, as if from the pain of having been shot into the water. But the trout could not be outwitted by a vertical shot nor by one aimed at an angle.

Natalka made up her mind to get him. It was in her character that when something took possession of her heart she could not be deflected from it. Now she was possessed by the trout. Standing there like a statue, lifeless, she peered unwinkingly into the depths. Reflections of the waves played on her face and eyes as if trying to make her smile or spoil her hunt.

In a similar pose and also holding a gun stood Hrytsko on a rock that projected far over the water.

Hryhory had already given up this kind of sport. It was not because it required the patience of a Chinaman, but because the morning was so bright and perhaps because of the reflections of sunlight that played over the face and eyes of the girl, chasing each other like dabs of quicksilver. He sat on the overturned boat in the middle of the yard filled with sunlight, his chest exposed to it, and looked at all that dazzling world. Stillness hung in the air and stillness in his heart and all was shimmer, shimmer.

No genius could describe the rich symphony of this brilliance and spectral medley and that joy, the tempestuous joy of living and flowering, nor those unseen wings that grew there in a heart. . . . And even more so that resurrection, that coming again to life in this world and not in the world of boredom, brutality and despair — all that remained behind as in a dream — but in a world of rainbow brilliance, limitless, joyful peace and happiness. He had a strange feeling. It had remained with him for many days now, ever since he found himself in this

primitive, unspoiled, half-fabulous world and had become a part of it in spite of himself; part of this brilliance and medley and joyful peace, and all this symphony of life beyond which, it seemed, there was nothing else and never was. This strange feeling concerned the past. It had never existed. Yes, there was only a dream, a hideous nightmare. A misty fiction, a semblance of life. He had been there before he was born, not as a human, but as some different kind of being. Then all of a sudden!

What was it? Distant thunder? Wind? Again. . . .

Hryhory jumped up, feeling the violent beating of his heart.

The wind grew into a hurricane with lightning rapidity. And then came a mad roar, and thunder shook the earth; the wind flew over the thickets and the whole Blue Valley, shaking gleaming suns from the trees, caused a virtual rain of stars. . . .

Shaking the earth, the thickets, skimming over the cedar tops, roared machines, huge monsters, black against the sun.

Aeroplanes! Six . . . eight . . . eight four-engined monsters.

The dogs yelped and ran, then, gathering on a small hill, began to bark furiously, and Rooshai sat wolf-like on his hindquarters, lifting his head and letting out a dreary howl.

The airplanes thundered over the camp and flew low over the valley bending down now one wing, then another. Must be looking for something. Eight strange, huge birds flew over the blue valley drowning everything with their roar and underneath them, over the greenish-blue carpet gleaming with dew, sailed eight shadows at first large and black, then grey, violet blue, blue. Reaching the end of the valley the airplanes turned around and flew back low, still bending down their wings alternately. Further . . . further.

Dumbfounded, Hryhory stood in the yard as if rooted to the spot. He felt the violent beating of his heart in his chest as if he had been cast from a high cliff to the ground below. A welter of feelings, uneasiness, surprise, violent movement took hold of him. It ebbed slowly and in its place there came a foreboding of something sinister. Primitive instinct, as in Rooshai, woke up and predicted calamity.

He shook his hair, knit his brows and stood thus in the yard, watching the blue horizon where the planes vanished in the sunlit distance. He was as if hypnotized.

He did not even notice Natalka, who stood close to him and watched with him, eyes wide open. There was anxiety in her eyes as she pressed her hand to her breast.

The airplanes did not stun the girl. She was surprised, and that was all. Something else, indeed, startled her, some instinctive reflex, intuition perhaps, or an incomprehensible fear — who knows?

She looked at Hryhory's knitted brows, grimly set jaws, and tried to quiet her heart with the pressure of her hand.

And the morning was still sunlit, shimmering, displaying pearls, and rainbow hues, a smiling, golden morning.

Tungus Pyatro Dyadorov

The same day there came to the camp yet another unexpected guest. It was about dinner-time when the dogs began to bark and plunged into the thicket. Natalka stopped them with a shout and they came back, lay beside her growling and listening to something in the forest that covered the mountain slope.

Someone was slowly climbing down the steep slope, taking hold of the bushes. He had on a fur hat, padded trousers and a coat of deer hide tied with twine; a

cartridge-belt slung over his shoulder, a knife and a gun completed his attire. He used his gun for a staff.

"Look, look," wondered old Sirko, "Pyatro Dyadorov, the old son-of-a-gun!"

The guest disentangled himself from the bushes and approached the group, beaming broadly with his whole square, slant-eyed face. Short of stature and with a beaming face he approached with sure steps, as if coming home, and was glad to be there.

"How do," and he thrust his calloused hand at everybody.

"How do, old fellow," and he closed his eyes from happiness when old Sirko embraced him and shook his hand, the good old friend. "This is Pyatro Dyador," and he turned the Tungus to face the boys, "the best hunter in the world. . . . Well, well, a good guest!"

"How do, Nataalka. . . . How do . . ." he hesitated before Hryhory and looked enquiringly at Sirko who nodded, "He's one of us, too."

"How do, captain," and he gave his hand to Hryhory who squeezed it. It was the first time he had ever met a Tungus, but he squeezed the hand in a friendly manner, liking the slant-eyed, naive and childish face. He only wondered why Pyatro called him "captain."

"Everyone they meet the first time who looks important or a Russian to them, they call 'captain'," explained Sirko.

The Tungus leaned the rifle against the tree and, wiping the warm perspiration from his face, sat down on the log. Watching all of them with his little, slanted, smiling eyes he rested. His head was covered with a thatch of blond hair, the upper lip and chin decorated with a few hairs of the same colour.

Then, without haste, he fished out a tobacco pouch and a pipe, filled it with makhorka and lit it, handing the pouch hospitably to the others. Sirko filled his pipe too.

"Well, how are you getting along, Pyatro? Tell us,

why do you wander around? Why don't you hunt for antlers?"

"Seek airplane." He spoke, like all the natives, a funny broken Russian. "Seek airplane," he repeated resignedly, and sighed deeply.

"What airplane?"

"Fell down. . . . Fly little, little and fell. . . . Seek."

"Why did it fall down? Let it rot, what do you care?"

"Not enough powder . . . powder burn airplane fly. Powder no more, airplane fall. . . . Kaput. . . . Fly, fly, and ch-sh-sh-ik!"

He showed with animation how it did "ch-sh-sh-ik" and fell straight down to the ground, and clicked his tongue.

"When did it fall and where?"

"Ten and one day," and he helplessly moved his hand implying that no one knew where it fell down and that nobody saw it fall.

"Seek."

"Why do you look for it? Let it rot there."

"Have to. Chief many shout soon . . . soon greater chief."

And then Pyatro explained that even if the airplane was not his own, he had to hunt for it. Everyone had to do it. He had already travelled hundreds of miles during these ten days and all for nothing. . . . And now, being near the spot, he had come to visit with them.

"How is the antler hunt? All right?"

He sighed regretfully and nodded his head. His hunt was lost. Not allowed to hunt. They had ordered him to search, and all the others too. Many people were thus roaming the forests looking for that puzzling airplane in gullies and thickets in that immense area. Nobody saw how and where it fell nor even what that "airplane" looked like. They had alerted people in all the taiga settlements

scattering them in all directions to search and not return until they found it.

"Well, then, you'll never return home," jested Sirko, "deuce take it!"

The Tungus sighed, moved his hands helplessly as if to say "What can I do?" and added: "Chief order . . . shout quickly . . . mad quickly." He held his tongue for a while, smacked his lips and shook his head in despair, "Antler hunt lost!"

Everyone sympathized with him. They asked him to have dinner with them, to rest and stay overnight. The Tungus refused. He rested a few minutes longer, then saying good-bye to everyone he put his hat on, took the rifle and, pocketing his pipe, vanished as mysteriously as he had come. There were rustling sounds from the thicket, and then silence.

"Well, I declare . . ." Sirko broke the silence and then spat, perhaps on the airplane or perhaps on those "chief" that "shout quickly" and nodded in the direction taken by the naive forest man with the face of a child. "A golden character, an excellent hunter! He has to bear such a cross. It's not enough that fate has blessed him with a 'dear' wife. It's added an airplane besides. What a silly affair that 'airplane' is and what crazy chiefs!" Sirko sympathized with the Tungus with all his heart.

"He lives by hunting . . . a big family and a wife, a beauty. Some Russian woman. Good looking . . . a beautiful daughter of Satan, but God forbid. . . ."

"How did he win such a beautiful wife, when he is himself so plain and simple?" asked Hryhory, suddenly feeling uneasy about those airplanes that were supposed to be looking for a lost airplane. Yes, his heart was heavy. . . . He felt that he was a fugitive, that he was running away, but . . . was he being pursued? "How did he win her?"

He was asking at random, like the others, unable to

envisage how this beauty would some day cross their own path of life.

"It was this way . . ." and old Sirko told how this Pyatro Dyadorov won the most beautiful girl among all the Old Believers* and how he suffered for it. . . . "Poor man, innocent as a child."

"There was a girl, Fiona they called her . . . Natalka, go and see if the horses are safe! It sounds as if Dun has got entangled in the hollow. . . ."

"I know that story, father," and she shrugged her shoulders mockingly, but got up and, calling Zalivay, went away, "they'll talk all kinds of nonsense, let's go."

"Well, she was rather indiscreet with young men . . . and then it happened. . . . Pyatro was dying for her, worshipped the ground she trod on. It happens that way sometimes. . . . And so he married her. . . . And she's like a queen and he . . . see what became of him. . . . Serves him right. . . . It's as if a goat had mated with a cuckoo. . . . She's a shameless hussy. . . . Pyatro, as you see, 'seek airplane' and his wife most likely entertains a big chief," and Sirko spat.

They listened to hear if someone else was coming.

The thickets were silent and quiet. Who would think that this forest ocean was filled with important events, that such a great number of people were searching there and that, somewhere there, an airplane had plummeted down?

They felt that someone else would visit their camp in the Sky Blue Valley about the airplane, or that something might happen. Hryhory was excited while pretending to be calm.

But no one came and nothing happened. Soon, even this happening was forgotten, sunk in the green rustle and flood of sunlight. It was rubbed out and vanished.

Thus echoes vanish, rolling over mountains and thickets, growing weaker somewhere beyond the Blue Valley and

* Old Believers, a Russian religious sect.

fading into silence. Thus the moon glides over the waves at night, splashing and fleeing away with the waters. . . .

Time passed dreamily over the limitless green ocean, bathed in sunshine and full of exuberant youth, accompanied by the call of birds and animals and mighty cedars up above and the mysterious whisper of leaves, embellished with flowers.

Time passed over the thickets, ran through the veins forcing the blood through and making the heart tremble like a leaf in diamond dew drops under the sun's rays.

Youth was on its way and nobody bothered. It was life itself marching triumphantly. Life like a shimmering, sunny expanse of the limitless, flowery Sky Blue Valley.

A Bit of History

Then there were two rainy days. It was not an ordinary rain but more like an African deluge. Old Sirko was in a good humour. Two days before he had watched the sky, sniffed the air, felt some "twinge" in his nose and had suddenly aroused everyone to a feverish activity, preparing a snare, a brushwood dam across the river. It was secured to the rocks by firmly tied logs that stretched across the stream from one bank to the other. The dam was supposed to be a fish-catching device. A weir-basket was put in the middle, its mouth turned downstream. This was because in the summertime fish seek the shallows upstream, and in winter go downstream searching for deep pools.

In big streams the dams are large and the weir-baskets huge, sometimes big enough to hold a quarter-ton of fish. Old Sirko told all this in snatches as they were building the dam and constructing a new weir-basket. It was then hung up on a tree. After a heavy rain the fish would seek warmer water and then it would be the right time to set it.

And to be sure the rain came, proving that old Sirko's

barometer was reliable, and had not made a mistake in its forecast two or three days ago. When it rained everyone sat on the porch in holiday mood and watched the heavy streams from the sky pour over trees and bushes, knocking down leaves from the aspens and old cones from the cedars on their way to the ground and flattening the blades of grass in the valley.

"The Girl," a dreamy waterfall, no longer whimpered but sobbed mournfully, swelling like a sea. The water in the river roared, rising higher and higher. Stones that had stuck out of the water before vanished one after another under the murky flood.

Old Sirko was very glad. "It's God's blessing. It will wash the earth, clean the foliage, obliterate tracks, bring a new order. Hunting will be good, and fishing too."

There was plenty of leisure but they were not bored. They could stay half a day at a time watching intently without moving a muscle, and it was a joy now to sit on the porch or in the house listening to such music from the heavens. The young ones felt dreamy, and appeared gloomy but glad, while the old man was happy. The rain fell like a deluge producing thousands of sounds.

It was thunderous at the beginning. Lightning flashed intermittently and the thunder rolled among the mountain tops, ending in sudden crashes. Then streams of water poured down, making the earth shake under the impact. Old Sirko would cross himself: "God be praised, let's hope it does not pass us by. It must have hit someone who had sinned too much. . . ."

The thunder rolled over the Sky Blue Valley, raising smoky wisps. Then the rain changed its tune, it became a steady downpour. It came down with great force murmuring and rustling like innumerable belts in a huge transmission.

The river swelled up, boiled, moving through the liquid lace as in a mist. "Will our dam hold out?" was

the only worry Sirko had. "I've only seen rain like this in India long ago when I was young."

And filled with reminiscences, to the accompaniment of the rain, old Sirko told of his strange voyage around the world, about life in Ukraine long ago, and about the inhospitable country where, led by fate, they later landed. . . .

The old man grew talkative. A complete, extraordinarily fascinating book could be written about the Sirkos' lives in the Poltava district, close to the famous city of Pereyaslaw, where his parents lived. His grandfathers and great-grandfathers had lived in that land too, used to go to the Zaporizhya* and thence to Crimea and Turkey. They sailed in little rowboats across the sea and brought fear to everyone, and quite often they became slaves on Turkish galleys from which, however, they usually managed to escape.

Much later their grandchildren sailed over the same Black Sea. They left their native land with tearful farewells and waved their hands and caps for a long time from the sea, sailing to strange lands far away in search of a better life. They passed by the Turkish coast, through the Bosphorus, saw Istanbul and other places where their forebears had died on hooks and stakes for daring to terrorize the sultan and his subjects. . . . And then, through some canal, they passed into another sea and went around the world. They were soaked in Indian rains, dried by hot Ceylon winds, drank water in Bombay and shed tears in Singapore. Sailing around China they lay in heaps on the bare decks and gnawed their fingers and lamented. But they lost neither faith in better luck nor their sturdiness. . . . No. no!

Thus they sailed on, becoming salty sailors.

And when they came to the wild country near Japan and disembarked, they cursed it heartily. Day and night,

* Zaporizhya, a town in the Ukraine, also the district "behind the Dnieper rapids," the centre of the Cossack territory in the 17th century.

awake and asleep, they thought of their native land. About half of them died in the beginning and the rest got used to the new land after a while. When this happened, they prospered beyond their dreams.

In this way . . . the old man told the story in detail but in his dreamy style interspersing it with good humour. His story of days gone by was listened to like a fairy tale by the descendants of the famous Sirko family, the old man's son and daughter, and by the descendant of Hetman Demian Mnohohrishny.

It rained hard all the time. Then patches of azure began to appear over the Sky Blue Valley.

Revolt and Capitulation

Hryhory nursed in his heart the malady that struck him, love for a whimsical forest girl, Natalka, and was struggling with himself. He loved, but hopelessly, it appeared. And so he fought this sickness with all the persistence of a sane reason. He appealed for help to his sober reason and his sturdy nature, and tried to judge himself. His reason opposed his heart:

"Hey! You silly bunch of muscles! What have you to say in this matter? Have sense! Do you realize who and what you are? Can you guarantee the next day? Have you any right to jeopardize the happiness of others? Have a heart! Your egotism is your own business. Shut up! Drop dead! . . . And don't bother me any more, please. . . ."

His heart longed to be near the waterfall and Hryhory would go and spend long hours sitting there, as if in a court, where Reason was the prosecutor. But . . . even if his heart seemed to agree with his reason and gave in under pressure of brutal reality, it did not feel any better and did not cease moaning.

And so he struggled with himself and did not know

what to do. To follow the usual course and try to gain friendship, to woo, charm or deceive he did not dare and could not do. Besides, all the proven methods of world-famous lovers were ineffective in this case. This was different. After the rebuff he had received the first day, he did not dare any more. And she, it seemed to him, was quite unaware of what was happening to him. She was a child of unruffled repose. Very likely she did not even understand what love was. And then who and what was he? What use would he be to her? In the position he was, he had no right. Who was he? A beast hiding in the thicket from the hunters. He had no right to live, no passport. A beast! He might be tracked down tomorrow and he would have to break through the thicket with his head, or face them and invite certain death. If she should respond to his feelings, it would be a great misfortune for both.

Thus he suffered. But if someone had suggested that he should leave all that and go away, he would not and scarcely could have done it. No, he would not, because he was happy beside her. He felt how his blood boiled and surged merely at hearing her voice. That voice re-echoed in his heart with pain and torture. And this was happiness, painful, but great, almost unattainable to reason. So reason had to surrender.

Listening to the murmur of the waterfall he remembered its name and the charming legend about the Udeg girl and scoffed at himself: "This should happen to you. . . . But if you'd become a waterfall no misty water would fall, but rocks, indeed."

Forest Nymph

Hryhory endeavoured to forget himself by observing the outside world, especially during leisure hours. He had an innate capacity to see things because he had grown up

in natural surroundings and enjoyed nature. The plant and animal world had an inexhaustible number of secrets, and every day brought new surprises. Hryhory would lie in ambush between logs hours at a time, and watch an ermine bustling under a steep bank. It looked funny in its summer fur, reddish brown, like an old man in comparison with its magnificent winter raiment. It would pop up from the ground, examine a pile of pebbles, hesitate over a handful of earth pellets brought up by an earthworm, climb on to the roots and run up and down. He was very busy. . . .

Hryhory tried to remember all that he had once learned from biology, botany and ornithology and explain all this, relate all these phenomena to some logical basis. He remembered Pavlov's theory of reflexes, and wanted to find in it all some order and sense.

Sometimes he cautiously followed a doe with her fawn for miles, moving like a shadow from tree to tree or from bush to bush, curious to see how that fawn was behaving in its new environment. It was especially interesting when the fawn, finding a frog, would stand over it with its legs outspread, and watch it for a long time. The fawn's long-lashed innocent eyes, like those of some beautiful girl, would register genuine surprise. Then, getting impatient, it licked the frog with its tongue, exactly like a little child. The frog leaped as if stung and the fawn skipped even higher, still on the same spot, whether from surprise or whether from mad enthusiasm it would be difficult to say.

At one time, roaming the woods far from the camp, he found the tracks of a boa on the river bank. He had read a lot about this great reptile of the constrictor family and had heard many stories of it, but had never seen one. He found it. It was really the dry skin that was shed, lying like a huge hose among the branches. The boa itself must have been somewhere in the neighbourhood. Having cast off its old clothing there it surely could not live far away

because this operation took place as a rule early in the Spring when it emerged from its winter habitation. There was a rustle in the grass, and some movement from the direction of the river. Hryhory dashed around to see what it was. More rustling and a splash, then silence. . . . Cautiously and quietly, so as not to scare it, he moved the bushes, and bent over to see. Suddenly he felt like someone who had received a hard blow under the heart. He gasped with excitement and embarrassment.

On the rock across the river, bent down like an osier, her nude body gleaming in the sun, stood a wood nymph wringing out her wet tresses. A silver stream of water splashed down to the ground. Natalka, naked and beautiful, stood there like a wood-nymph. Her arched body shone with gleaming drops in the sun. . . . Hryhory shut his eyes and, making a sharp turn, slunk away like a thief.

Oh, God! How could he? What if she saw him? Fool! Idiot!

He roamed the woods for a long time. He was aroused. He did not dare to return to the camp until they began to call him. Natalka's voice was heard too. Cupping her hand to her mouth she was trying to out-shout Hrytsko. There was mockery in her soprano, accompanying her brother's bass! "Engineer, ahoy!"

At breakfast Hryhory avoided looking at Natalka, trying to concentrate his attention on his food, but without success. He looked at his hands and saw a wood nymph wringing her hair, all a-shimmer. He frowned and tried not to look in the direction of the girl. Natalka watched him with innocent eyes. Then their eyes met accidentally. Hryhory felt a twinge of conscience and reddened. Natalka looked at him quietly for a while and turned away.

Could she possibly have seen him?

No, it couldn't be. Her clear eyes showed only pensiveness and surprise.

"You're not sick, son?" asked the father, noticing that Hryhory was ill at ease.

"No, no . . . it's just . . . that I remembered something."

"Don't give it a thought. To the dickens with it. Let Lenin think. . . ."

"But he died a long time ago, father, they say, he lies in the mausoleum now."

"So much the better. He has nothing to do now, so he may lie and think about many things."

Laughter.

In the evening of the same day the three of them sat in front of the house on the log that served as a foot-bridge across the river. Hryhory, at Hrytsko's request, was telling about other lands, forests and steppes, limitless as the sea . . . about Spring with skylarks, nightingales, cuckoos, hoopoes and countless other song-birds . . . about quails in wheat fields and many other things that he missed so much, and he imitated the birds' songs and calls.

The cuckoo's call he managed brought old Sirko out of the house, much surprised. He called like a quail or a hoopoe or whistled like a nightingale . . . not perfectly truly, but close enough.

Natalka looked at him from one side, wondered, but did not believe, that birds could sing like that.

Hrytsko stood up and went away, remembering some unfinished business. Hryhory grew quiet. He felt helpless, sitting there alone with the girl. The blood rushed to his temples, his heart beat furiously as it had when he first found himself facing a large audience before a speech. When he spoke, he did not recognize his own voice.

"Natalka," he whispered, "why are you so. . ."

The girl glanced at him from under her brows as if she were splashing cold water into his face.

"What's wrong with me?"

"You never speak to me, it's as if you were angry. . . ."

He felt it was a foolish observation.

She did not respond at once, but kept silent, lowering her eyes. Then she said:

"Why should I be angry? A silly thought. . . ."

She sat on the log, her hand resting on it close to Hryhory. He covered her hand quietly with his own, as if unintentionally.

"Oh!" the girl shook herself nervously, and snatched her hand away. Then she jumped to her feet and went quickly away.

When she disappeared, Hryhory wandered aimlessly along the river bank. Then he waded into the river and sank his head into the water. He tried to calm himself like this.

At the Mouth of the Mukhen

The hunt for deer antlers was coming to an end. It slipped by like a single day. Preparations for departure were under way. Good-bye, Sky Blue Valley! They had had good luck, God grant they would have the same luck next year!

Sirko and Natalka saddled the horses, loaded antlers and other goods, and departed, leaving the rest of the camp-breaking to the boys.

Hrytsko and Hryhory, following the instructions they had been given, constructed a raft out of tree branches, put four barrels of pork on them, tied the boat (loaded with hay and covered with tents) behind, and sailed down the River Mukhen.

After three days and many more or less serious mishaps, they arrived at the river's mouth. There, where the Mukhen joins the Amur, stood a trading post of the Far Eastern Fur Trust.

The man in charge of the post, red-headed, with large

moustaches, Mokieno by name, noticed them from afar, recognized Hrytsko and twisted his mouth in welcome.

"For the love of the Sultan! Who is this?"

"Cousin Hryhory," was Hrytsko's reply.

Mokienko asked no more questions. It was not customary here to ask too many questions, because all that mattered was not who, but what kind of man an individual was — good or bad.

Mokienko was an old-timer, hospitable and friendly, but conscious of his own dignity. The Sirkos did not deal with him, but he knew them well, having at one time been a groomsmen at their wedding. He respected them and gladly agreed to help them out.

They left the pork with him to be shipped on the first boat sailing upstream to Khabarovsk. The barrels were sealed and properly addressed. Then the bill of lading was filled out with all the necessary details and sealed in an envelope. Mokienko attended to all this; he was thorough though he could only scribble, and did not like writing at all, preferring other work. But in this case it was necessary to do a service for a friend.

He was descended from a family of hunters and liked hunting better than sitting around at the post.

The boys stayed at his home overnight. Mrs. Mokienko, middle-aged, friendly and good-humoured, treated them royally. She asked a great many questions about their home. She was bored. Her sons had gone to hunt deer, and her daughter was taking a commercial course in Vladivostok. She showed the boys her daughter's snapshots, a brunette like her mother. Some snaps showed her in hunting-dress, some in a beautiful deer *dokha* (winter-coat), and some in ordinary city clothes — a beautiful girl certainly. Her mother was very proud of her, though secretly she grieved for her.

“Oh, God, where is that Vladivostok? The child is suffering from all that learning.”

She grumbled at the “old man” because he was bent on “ruining the child.”

Fall and Winter in the Taiga

When the Grapes Ripen

Summer was waning. It passed away like one bright day and the Fall was at hand, golden Fall, when grapes ripen in the taiga, when their clusters, filled with red juice, weigh down the vines, radiating the absorbed sun and passing it on in gleaming dew drops.

After the deer-antler hunt, the boys remained home only five days, when they mowed the grass in the old apiary six miles from home "to earn their meals" as Hrytsko put it jokingly. When they had had enough of this they both went to the head waters of the river Iman.

Old Sirko was busy at home with Nataalka, collecting honey. After that they planned to take the antlers to the post and to make some preparations for the winter. The boys had to attend to certain business on the Iman with which Hrytsko was quite familiar.

During this time Nataalka seemed to be more estranged from Hryhory, and avoided meeting him. Purposely or not, it amounted to the same thing, but she passed by and was somewhat pensive, as if sad. So Hryhory was glad to wander away. Let time take care of it, and perhaps it would heal itself. When the boys had left, taking Nepra and Rooshai with them, Nataalka became even more sad.

Sometimes she felt so bad that she was even angry with Zalivay. The dog wanted to go with the others, but his mistress would not let him.

And sometimes there was a sudden change, and she did foolish and mischievous things like a child. She would jump with Zalivay from rock to rock in the river until one or the other fell into the water; she would play with him, throwing sticks or jumping over a high rail, each trying to outdo the other. She was a little girl again. At other times she would stand on the log and, cupping her hands to her mouth, would call out to the wood nymphs, teasing them by shouting sonorously and then listening to her voice repeated scores of times. Zalivay, getting into the spirit of his mistress, would also bark and receive an answer from a score of dogs at the same time. He was excited by the effect and tried to run there, convinced that there was a whole company of dogs.

At times she vanished for half a day or so, lay down somewhere or roamed the woods and came home with damp eyes, so quiet and docile and gentle.

Mrs. Sirko watched her daughter sadly, but did not say anything. She realized that the girl was maturing and felt lonesome. The girl was at an age when she did not know herself what she wanted. The mother had been like that once, too.

So Mrs. Sirko suggested "Perhaps you would like to visit your aunt in Kiev? You remember you went last year at exactly this time, when the grapes were ripening?" thinking to herself: "Let her have a little fun among other girls and boys!"

Natalka embraced her mother and laughed.

"No, mother, there is nothing to see there. I want to be near you."

"Since when have you become such a mother's pet?"

"No! Why does everybody think I am so moody and cranky? Am I like that, mother?"

"Well, no, but you are not one to hold on to your mother's apron strings."

"That's not fair. Sometimes I am sorry for you. We go here and there, and you always stay at home. You feel lonesome, don't you? As I feel sometimes when I am away from you. . . ."

"My dear child," rejoiced the mother, "Perhaps you should go and see your aunt?"

"No, no, mother!" and Nataka hugged her mother and whirled her around.

The Gay Adventure

The boys rode south, following the slopes of the Sikhote-Alin. It took them all of four days to reach their destination. Besides rifles, food and what not they had also two scythes minus the handles.

Where the Iman is joined by the wide and boisterous tributary of the Aramu, beyond the small streams of Ulakhez and Sanchykhez, there was a little hut, Sirko's old camp near a spring. The boys settled there and led a care-free happy life like two Robinson Crusoes. The taiga around was empty, there was no human habitation within a hundred miles with the exception of an occasional "manza" (hunter). Only about sixty miles upstream there was a small settlement of the religious sect of Old Believers, called the Dydy. Downstream almost as far as the railway line, more than 120 miles away, there was only wilderness. Beyond there were many lumbering camps, but they were vacant in the summer, reviving only in the winter-time when the lumbering season was under way. But it was there.

Here there was a vast emptiness in both summer and winter, because there was no lumbering, except when some expedition went upstream or some Old Believers passed over the ice to the town of Iman.

All around was virgin forest, untouched, like no other in the Zeleny Klyn. The vegetation was almost sub-tropical, thought Hryhory, observing the flora. He remembered the geographical map and concluded that they were somewhere along the same parallel as Sochi or Sevastopol.

They stayed there. There was no hurry; they roasted in the sun, fed mosquitoes and botflies, fished for fun and sometimes shot ducks for exercise. There were plenty of ducks. They would sit in a row on a gravel spit, between rapid water and bushes and preen themselves. The boys shot only the farthest ones in the row, those three to four hundred yards away, considering it poor sportsmanship to shoot those close by. Especially interesting was a duck called "kloktusha", a Japanese duck, covered with odd feathers.

Between idle moments and amusement they worked at mowing hay in the forest glades and low-lying places and prepared snares for the winter.

The work was not tiring, food was both good and plentiful and they really had a vacation. Counting the days at the beginning by making notches they soon grew tired of it and decided to follow the good old rule of *laissez-faire*.

Thus a month passed and autumn with clear skies, chilly mornings, hoar frost on blades of grass, and cobwebs over all, crept, unnoticed, in. The grapes were ripe, but the sour berries set their teeth on edge and they could eat no more.

The time for departure had long passed and they would have been gone already, for the old man must be grumbling, but Hryhory was bitten by a viper as they were haying, and had to cure himself. Hrytsko was scared and Hryhory himself was at a loss what to do, but did not show it. The viper was one of the moccasins, a very poisonous kind. Hryhory tried all kinds of measures so familiar to those who have never been bitten by snakes. First of all he made

a tourniquet of his belt above the knee, which made the leg turn blue in about five minutes. It was the liverish colour which alarmed Hrytsko still more, and drops of blood oozed out of the bite. Then Hrytsko was ordered to open a shell and cover the wound with powder, but hesitated to fire it fearing that it might tear the leg away. It was a sure but dangerous operation. At last they agreed to use less powder, and Hryhory put a match to it. There was a flash, and everything went dark in front of his eyes. He did not cry out, but paled a little. They waited. The leg was swelling and hurt badly, chiefly from the tight tourniquet. Having no other means, Hryhory, guided by his audacious but deep trust "that nothing could harm nor ever had harmed him so far, and this time would be the same," put a compress on and took off the belt.

They continued their haymaking, having first put on their shoes. The leg swelled toward evening so badly that Hryhory could hardly walk.

The next day it was still worse. Hryhory vomited and lost his appetite, but forced himself to eat. Hrytsko was in despair and demanded their immediate departure, but Hryhory quieted him and kept himself under control. For four days his body battled the poison. It was a tragic situation for Hrytsko to look on and be unable to help in any way. He wanted to go to Iman, to return home, to go to Dydy to see a sorceress, and he wanted to act at once, but his comrade quietly but resolutely refused all these plans. He scoffed and would not budge. Hrytsko, though stubborn himself, gave in. The confident, unruffled attitude of his friend quieted him. The result vindicated Hryhory's stand; nothing happened to him. Four days later he was well again. But a lot of time had been wasted.

Before the Great Hunt

Heavy snows were followed by frosts. The taiga put on new raiment. Autumn in this land is golden, but short.

Winter had already begun in October. A squirrel hunt was at hand, a busy season for hunters, the time when squirrels and other fur animals are taken.

It would be out of place to dwell here at length on the subject, to describe how lynxes, polecats and wolves were trapped, or how wild boars were shot. It is enough to say that this was done. They started with the migrating squirrels, hunting them in thickets and gullies and took thirty to forty skins a day. This lasted for two weeks. Following the animals, they penetrated into unexplored regions. Migrating squirrels are those that wander in huge armies from one region to another looking for better feeding grounds, passing through valleys, crossing great rivers, on and on. The hunters go after them when their fur is at its best.

But this was not all. They were waiting for the real hunt, a hunt to make the nerves tingle, but a very profitable one. The squirrelling over, they returned home and drew lots as to where they should go. Father and Natalka drew the Sky Blue Valley, and the boys drew Bikin and Iman. So Hrytsko and Hryhory were together again. First they went to Iman.

They dressed according to the season, putting on deer shoes and pants made from deer hides, and laced with leather thongs to prevent snow from slipping into the shoes. Beyond this, their attire was almost the same as in summer, because walking in thickets makes one hot even in a temperature of fifty below zero. But they took along deer wind-breakers to put on in camp, especially at night.

While hunting, Hryhory tried to forget everything, his fate, the uncertain morrow, forcing himself to look ahead and to forget everything else. It was better not to think, to live as long as possible, to breathe and see sunshine over the dazzling expanse of snows, brace up to the winds, and listen to the murmur of the cedars. Quite often, listening to that murmur, that winter's tale, admiring the beauty of

the animal, he forgot that he had to shoot the squirrel. This was quite fortunate for the squirrel because, as a rule, it escaped from its enemy.

At first the hunt was not very successful. The snows were deep. Though there were a lot of nuts on the cedars and hazel bushes, squirrels were scarce. Migrating squirrels in passing through the region also carried away the local species. Polecats deserted the woods in the fall because mice, their natural food, were few and the animals wandered into the plains to look for them. They sometimes found tracks, as if someone had stuck three bunched fingers into the snow, but it was almost spring, when there was less snow. Rooshai's search usually ended in failure, because the polecat burrows into the snow and wanders there among logs and boles.

The boys lifted all the snares they had set in Iman, prepared during the summer, and moved back to Bikin. It was a more promising place.

Old Sirko and Natalka had also returned to Bikin. Hunting in the Sky Blue Valley was quite good, but Natalka had set her heart on going to Bikin. She dreamed about Bikin. . . . It was supposed to be a much better spot. They scared a few wild boars in the Sky Blue Valley and trapped three bobcats. Natalka caught one alive.

She chased it for a long time on skis, turning it towards a meadow where there were no trees for the bobcat to climb and get a much needed respite. The animal was already tired out and the girl caught up with it easily. Being cornered, the bobcat turned on its back, presenting a front of sharp claws in defence, but to no avail. Natalka pressed it down with a long ski and it was all over.

But she had no luck with this bobcat. It bit Natalka's foot in the camp. Her involuntary cry brought Zalivay, like a demon. The dog pounced at once at the culprit and tore

him to pieces. Nataalka was not sorry. She had little interest in anything, she was anxious to get to Bikin.

After the meeting with the boys at Bikin they hunted together. Nataalka was happy. She played like a child, acting in a silly way when she should have been serious. She seemed not to know what it was to be afraid. With Hryhory she was subdued, almost frightened, but he had grown used to this. He was glad she was near.

The Price of Friendship

Once Hryhory went on a squirrel hunt with a shotgun. Roaming here and there among the cedars, scanning branches, he did not realize that he was going farther and farther away. He stopped frequently to watch squirrels busy with cones, remembered the chipmunk he had robbed before he found himself in the taiga. How was the poor fellow getting along now?

When he realized it was quite late and time to return to the camp, he suddenly heard snapping and a suspicious rustling. Looking in that direction he saw a whole herd of animals searching for something. Hryhory considered for a moment, then, noticing a huge fallen tree close by, he climbed on to it. In another moment the place where he had stood an instant before was surrounded by wild pigs. They rooted under the snow, grunting and smacking their jaws, chewing cedar cones to get at the nuts. There was a host of them. One, as big as a bull, remained always in the centre, and all the others scurried around him as he towered above them like a mountain. Hryhory guessed that this must be a "tusker," the leader of the herd, of whom many terrible stories are told. He regretted that he had only a shotgun, no rifle. To use the gun would make it worse — a boar is not a squirrel. The tusker, sensing a human being, grunted furiously. The bristles on his razor back rose like spines on a hedgehog. Gaunt, deep-chested,

large-snouted, he was a dreadful monster with tusks projecting above the upper jaw like knives. To shoot in order to scare them away was impossible, because a boar cannot be scared. On the contrary, it would only enrage him sufficiently to charge the enemy on the log. His tough hide would shed buck-shot like peas.

But the boar did not see him — Hryhory was sitting too high for that. Hryhory was well clad, but not well enough to be enthroned for long in such a high place of honour, while the pigs were in no hurry. They grunted all around him, having found a large quantity of food. If only Sirko and the others were here, they would have a merry time. The tusker nudged the log a few times and Hryhory felt it trembling. He was scratching himself, the fiend!

It began to snow, and a wind arose.

At last Hryhory could contain himself no longer — those damned scratchers! He discharged his shot-gun right into the tusker's face thinking "I'll frighten him, knock his eyes out."

The shot certainly made an impression; the mad boar, stung by the shot, became furious, smelt the enemy, roared and hurled himself upon the log. He certainly would have crushed it but suddenly an unexpected thing happened.

In a twinkling, the whole herd, including the tusker, rushed away, fleeing from something, and disappeared as if by magic.

"A tiger! That's it!" From the stories told by Hrytsko he remembered that in this country a tiger is sure to follow wild pigs, stalking them and thus earning his food.

The possibility of meeting a tiger with a shotgun in his hands would not be a pleasure. He knew that the "cat" is afraid of humans and never attacks them first, but . . . he might be hungry. . . .

But there was no tiger. In any case he could not see very far in twilight and through a driving snowstorm.

With the narrow choice of dying in the claws of a beast and of certain death from cold on top of the log, Hryhory waited but a few moments, listened cautiously, and, climbing down, walked away.

But where was he to go? The wind whirled the thickly falling snow, darkness. . . . Not until then did he realize what a fool he had been. Not only was he not armed properly, but he had no matches and could not make a fire. He went stubbornly ahead, but soon lost all sense of direction. Considering his desperate situation, and recognizing the fact that he had gone too far and could not find his way back at night, he decided to wait until the storm had abated. To keep himself warm he began to tread the snow around a tree. This went on for a long time. He tried several times to light a fire — but all to no avail. He plucked cotton from his jacket and stuffed it into shells from the gun and fire. He thus used up all the shells but there was still no fire. He cursed the cotton which was soaked with sweat; it would smoke for a while and then die out depressingly.

When the storm slackened a little he went straight ahead until he was tired out. The storm began to rage again. He sat between three cedar trees and decided to wait till morning. He concentrated all his will-power on keeping awake well knowing that should he fall asleep he would not win this foolish contest with the elements. In spite of this he dozed. It was merely a strange kind of doze, because he thought of many things. Then he was awakened by a touch. He roused himself, some huge beast stood in front of him, licking his nose.

“Zalivay!”

The dog barked joyfully. After a while a figure, all white, covered with snow, came near. Nataalka! She must have waded through waist-deep snows, she was so exhausted and winded.

“Alive?” she asked, catching her breath.

"Yes," he answered, with restraint.

She breathed hard for a long time and then said angrily — "Who would go out at such a time? Have you no sense at all?"

That was all she said. It was obvious that she had made the long trip without a stop, without skis, in darkness, through the thickets. And the storm raged on.

They stood for a while and then moved away. Wading in deep snows for a long time they lost their way once more. Nataalka had not followed Zalivay, thinking she knew the way better than he did, and now she realized that they were lost. Utterly exhausted, they could go no further. They were forced to call a halt.

Finding a big rock in a thicket, Nataalka chose a sheltered place under a roof of intertwined branches covered with snow. There was no snow there on the thick carpet of moss heaped with leaves and dry weeds. She sat down helplessly, leaning against a tree trunk. Hryhory hesitated, then sat down beside her, and Zalivay lay down at their feet. To start a fire was impossible because Nataalka had no matches either, had not thought of it when she set out.

So they sat there.

At daybreak the storm had subsided. The girl, tired out, slept in a sitting posture.

Only in the wilds, in a cruel environment, is there a genuine human solidarity that performs heroic deeds like daily chores, as if they were a duty, and no one ever dreams of calling them "heroic."

The sleeping girl, unaware, leaned her head against Hryhory's chest and slept like a child in her mother's lap. She moved in her sleep, taking up a more convenient position as if on a pillow. She slept soundly, her face turned up a little and her head nestled close to his shoulders. Hryhory sat there, afraid to move and wake her up. Let her sleep!

Dawn broke. Quiet.

The girl was dreaming of something and smiled. Some strange dream roamed under her eyelids, moved her brows, and warmed and softened her mouth a little. Hryhory looked at her lips, and struggled with himself. An overwhelming desire to kiss those lips took hold of him, to kiss her gently, as a mother kisses her sleeping child. Only once. She would not feel it. And he, like a thief, listening to her breathing, kissed her gently, gently. Only once.

The girl opened her eyes, her eyelashes fluttered, showing surprise, then fear. She instinctively touched her mouth, still burning from the kiss. . . . Then she flared up. . . .

Jumping up she hid her face in her hand, turned and rushed away forgetting her rifle. Zalivay followed her.

Embarrassed, caught in the act, stunned and shamed, Hryhory watched her departure in bewilderment. He cursed himself. This was the first time he realized how much harm could be done by a single kiss. Fool that he was! He had acted towards this proud and innocent girl in a very brutal and insolent manner. But he thought she would not feel it. This made him an even greater fool, a petty thief.

Knitting his brows, he sat there and did not know whether to go or not. Then he finally set out, taking her rifle along with him.

The camp was quite near. It was plain that they had circled a great deal the previous night, and had almost reached it, they were so close.

Natalka, angry, waited at the edge of the clearing. She looked straight ahead without turning. It was obvious that she had not liked to return without the rifle.

Hryhory quietly set the rifle against a tree and went away. "A petty thief!" He turned aside, and wandered around a little.

He did not return to the camp until he heard from afar Natalka's gay, vibrating laugh. . . . She was already

fooling, and playing with Zalivay. . . . Capricious, incomprehensible girl.

After that, the hunters started for home to get there in time for the Christmas Eve celebrations.

Christmas in the Primeval Forest

They travelled practically without rest for one day and one night, and then again for a day and a night. . . .

"Christmas Eve will be the day after tomorrow," mused old Sirko and was impatient. How did they happen to be so late? This had never happened before. And he pushed on.

Deep snows, no trails; no matter what you do, you cannot accomplish the impossible.

They had no rest, ate and slept on the way, both horses and humans. They would have flown if they could, but instead they dragged along in snow up to their ears.

Sirko counted again and again, trying to fool himself, and seemed to be lost in his own calculations. No, it is today for sure, today is Christmas Eve. He was right the first time. And they still had far to go.

A blue, cold evening found them on the way, wet as mice from sweat and from the pools caused by ice breaks in the shallows which they sometimes met travelling over the frozen rivers.

Instead of home they reached some barracks at the head waters of a tributary of the Bikin.

Old Sirko was surprised and bewildered — new barracks! Lumbering had at last reached this far. Strange! But this could not be a branch of the Bikin lumbering collective.

They stopped by the barracks, to have a little rest and to dry their clothes, because after wading through the pools of water their shoes were wet. It was an odd thing to get the feet wet on a frozen river and at such a low

temperature, wading as they were knee-deep in water. But it happened, all kinds of things happen in this amazing country. When the ice gets about a yard thick the shallows freeze to the bottom. The pressure of water from upstream causes cracks in the thick cover and the water flows over the ice lower down. Unwary travellers have to wade in slush sometimes with tragic consequences. But these travellers had plenty of experience.

They dried their shoes in a hurry and fed the horses tied up by one of the barracks. The building was filled with people, collectivized farmers fulfilling their state duties of forest exploration. Across the river there was another barrack, but one filled with the "repressed," prisoners exiled to this lonely place.

Having watered their horses, Hrytsko and Nataalka tightened the saddle girths, tucked away oats and made other preparations for continuing the journey. The skies were blue and cold. The forest, hedged by walls of rock, was sunk in a gloomy, expectant silence. Hryhory was scanning the other bank of the river as if drawn there by some mysterious power. He could see in the twilight someone going around with water pails. There was a watch-fire inside the stockade, and someone was sawing fire-wood by the barrack. Then the sawing stopped. Someone called —

"Orlov!"

"Yes, comrade-chief! What is it?"

"Tell those hussies . . . tell those good-for-nothings to saw faster, I am famished."

"Yes, comrade! Hey, you. . . . Stop your dilly-dallying!"

The saw went rasp . . . rasp. . . . The blue, cold sky and wilderness . . . wilderness. . . .

Suddenly the silence of the intense cold was broken by the young, sorrowful voice of a girl, gentle and lonesome as the call of a lapwing:

*Where, oh where have I been
Led by my sad fate?
Even my smallest tracks
Have been covered with snow.*

And a second voice, as young and sorrowful, helped out, clinging to the first like one cornflower to another:

*. . . The places I trod,
Where I have suffered,
Mother, dear mother of mine,
Now I am lost forever! . . .*

"Shut up!" and the wicket closed.

Hryhory had never used brutal invectives, but he could not restrain himself now. God be merciful, it's Christmas Eve today!

"God, oh my God! Are you there in the skies, or should one look for you and challenge? Oh, God! Don't you see all this?"

The skies remained blue, blue and indifferent, the mountain tops and rocks gloomy as impenetrable stone walls. The thickets were limitless and strange, with waist-deep snowdrifts, impassable. There were no roads or trails . . . no kin, no letters from home. . . .

Hryhory left the place with a sad heart. His feet were heavy as if filled with lead or rooted to the ground. He felt as if he could not move them. He stood there, his gaze directed across the river, instinctively taking off, then putting back, his rifle on his shoulder. Everything was ready for departure but he did not budge and, as if hypnotized, looked into the darkness across the river. No one knew what was going on in his mind. Nataalka's voice brought him back to reality.

"Well!" She stood before him and uttered that "Well!" angrily, her eyes showing a gleam of suspicion in the starlight. "What's the idea? Do you have to be called?"

They started off. Snow crackled under the horses' hooves. Hryhory plodded behind followed by the rasp of

the saw and the lapwing's mew, his constant companions in the limitless crunch of the snow.

It seemed as if they were fleeing from something new, or perhaps they were merely trying to overtake something, perhaps yesterday, no, Christmas Eve — the Sirkos hurried without rest. . . . And they caught up with it.

It sometimes happens that one can overtake the previous day, but this phenomenon takes place only in a wilderness like that, where there are no calendars, where a human being is a calendar to himself and records time according to his ability and necessity, where an hour or a day is of no importance, where the saying "All is nothing in comparison with eternity" fits better than anywhere else.

Old Sirko was wrong in his calculations. They had arrived home on Christmas Eve, because *kutya** and other preparations awaited them. Or perhaps old mother Sirko had made a mistake. But very likely no one was wrong, since nothing like that could be checked there.

At any rate they were not too late, but came home exactly on time.

A hot steam bath was waiting for them at home and *kutya* and a sheaf of grain in the corner, a dreamy oil lamp in front of the icons, a table covered with a festive table cloth and a Christmas Eve atmosphere, as there had been during Hryhory's childhood.

First of all the three of them took a thorough steam bath as is provided only in the wilderness. Hryhory, strong as he was, could not endure what Hrytsko and old Sirko were taking.

They left their outer garments in the house and, taking switches made of birch twigs, rushed in the fifty-below temperature to the bath house, situated on the river bank about 160 yards away. It was a small cabin fitted with a

* *kutya*, Ukrainian Christmas dish, made of wheat, honey and poppyseed.

wide shelf around the walls and a stove built of native rocks with a big kettle inside.

The rocks were as hot as coals. Old Sirko and Hrytsko enthusiastically rushed at them and poured water on them, and soon the steam was so thick that they could hardly breathe. This might seem like cruel torture or an inquisition to a European, but they enjoyed it, sluicing each other with very hot water and then climbing on the shelves where they flogged one another with birch switches, unmercifully. They splashed themselves with cold water and then again with very hot water. They rubbed their skins with soaked bast like emery paper and once more flogged each other. Then they ran out into the snow, rolled in it, playing like little children, father and son. Climbing once again on to the shelf, they again used the birch twigs on each other. This is the steam bath as it is administered in the wilderness.

Hryhory watched them and laughed: "Soon I'll get used to this, too."

In spite of everything he had a good steam bath, too, without resorting to all that terrible torment and he felt as if he had washed away all his sins.

The Sirkos celebrated Christmas, preserving all the old customs; there was *kutya* on Christmas Eve, accompanied by the soul-stirring and romantic ritual which Hryhory remembered so well from his childhood, including carols.

There was a knock at the door very early in the morning.

"Am I allowed to recite verses?" someone asked from the hallway.

"Come in!" said the mother, sitting by the stove.

The door opened and the reciter, dressed in holiday clothes, entered. He took off his cap, smoothed his hair and began to recite the time-honoured verses, so skillfully composed. Hryhory had never heard them before:

"Christ was born to bring joy to the world. After Adam's sin He was born in Bethlehem and in a stable,

not in a house, which is a wonder. A bright star, beautiful and round, rolled over to Bethlehem, there stopped, she knew just where, and illuminated the stable all around. Shepherds from the steppe ran to Bethlehem bringing lambs as gifts, played on their pipes, greeted Him and went back to their herds. And holy angels, winged, wonderful, sang so heavenly that we were born, grew up and married, but never heard such singing: An ox and a donkey stood by the manger; they also recognized Christ, fell on their knees and breathed on Him, because they knew who He was. And three Kings brought gifts for Christ from the Far East, laid them there and greeted Him in high-flown literary style: 'Pray, bless us also, that the rye may have a good yield, and that there may never be a day that we may not live in heart's ease.' Old Joseph was glad to see them, accepted their gifts and said: 'Sit down in our stable and we shall treat you with what God has sent us.' Then he brought them each a mug of spiced brandy and a cup of neat brandy. The kings sipped all that, and fell asleep where they sat. And a heavenly angel, holy and graceful, whispered to them in their sleep: 'Hi, beat it home and don't go near Herod, even if, when you saw him yesterday, you promised to visit him again and tell him the great news.' The kings woke up, crossed themselves, turned eastwards and went home."

These were the verses which old Sirko recited, and to which Hryhory listened with great admiration. He had heard many sets of verses recited, but never one like this. Then, later in the day Hryhory memorized it all, taking a great fancy to the ending, seasoned with good folk humour, telling how God punished Herod for the massacre of little children:

"God dealt Herod a severe punishment for shedding the blood of innocents. He felt very distressed and sick, green spots appeared around his eyes, his upper lip grew black as a dog's tail, so that he did not dare to persecute

Christ. The diabolical rascal did not want to lead a peaceful life and was lost without trace like a dog in the market place."

Old Sirko took upon himself this duty because there was no one else to do it. Perhaps the bears might have done it! And Christmas without mummers would not be Christmas.

Then the Sirkos exchanged good wishes and sat at the table. There was much to feast upon and a great deal of merriment. . . . Then they rested. At noon they had a real celebration! What quantities of fruit, liqueurs and meat were consumed!

In the evening they were visited by carol-singers: Nataalka in a beautiful dress which Hryhory had never seen before, the flowers in her hair tied up with a blue ribbon, and a necklace of coins around her neck; Hrytsko in his Sunday best, both with deer coats thrown over their shoulders and bespangled with snow.

They sang and everyone began to join in because they had feasted well that day. Even Nataalka, who had never touched brandy or any other kind of liquor before, had drunk three glasses as a toast to her mother, her father, and all the others and she was blooming like a poppy.

Hryhory sang too. His initial gaiety, however, gave place to longing, then deep anxiety. Perhaps it was the effect of the brandy, but it was as if someone had let a black curtain down. His heart felt heavy, so heavy. . . .

9

Khabarovsk Raided

On the third day after the Christmas holidays Hrytsko and Hryhory went to Khabarovsk.

“To deliver furs, to renew contracts for the first three months, to get ammunition — that’s a very handy thing to have! And, most important, to get permits from the game inspectorate for different kinds of guns, especially for a new kind of rifle. . . .”

All this was to be done by Hrytsko, according to his father’s instructions, and Hryhory volunteered to help since he had a burning desire to see once more that world which was forbidden to him. What was happening there? He realized that it was dangerous in the extreme, but this fact made it so much more attractive — it offered a chance to play blindman’s buff for a while. The thought of challenging fate and trying her out fascinated him.

Either — or. . . .

In reality there could not be two alternatives. There was only one, followed by a black void. He realized that.

And it almost happened that way.

They saddled their horses, the sorrel and the dun, loaded the sacks with furs, oats for the horses and food for themselves and rode away.

“As if you were going courting,” jeered Natalka, watching the boys with envious eyes as if they were really

going to woo some princess, two such handsome creatures, such magnificent princes, dressed in perfectly new hunters' "uniform," sewn and embroidered in native style, wearing deer-skin shoes that were wonders of their art, girdled with cartridge belts, and above that luxurious deer-skin winter coats. These were long with stand-up collars; their heads were covered by roe caps. Their sunburnt faces, seasoned by wind and frost, were as if chiselled by an artist out of cold metal, as an ideal model of male beauty.

Two young princes, two heroes. . . . Shouldering their guns in the manner of Cossacks, they mounted their horses and disappeared.

They rode to the railway station of Lazo through thickets drifted with snow, over hilltops and bare valleys, as the crow flies, through bushes and dried weeds. Having nothing to do on the way they shot pheasants and black grouse, firing at them on the wing as they flew, alarmed by the trotting horses, from under the snow where they had taken shelter from the cold. This method of enduring intense cold is practised by all, wild creatures and humans alike.

Some places actually teemed with these birds, especially pheasants. This sub-tropical bird has adapted himself wonderfully to this grim land, has multiplied and lived sumptuously here in the summer in luxurious thickets, remaining there in great numbers, having grown accustomed to cope with a temperature of fifty degrees below zero. Well, the black grouse was destined by God to live here, he was in his element, for which he was specially created.

The boys enjoyed this very much. It tickled their vanity to shoot certain kinds of birds, in this case cocks only. Flying suddenly out from under the snow a brilliantly feathered cock whizzed straight up like a bullet, about thirty yards, and then, levelling off, flew parallel to the ground. This manoeuvre made him a very poor target for

the hunter. But it made the shooting more exciting. Shot on the wing, the fine-feathered cocks flew back into the snow shedding some brilliant-coloured feathers.

And so, riding along, they hunted like true sportsmen.

They reached Lazo in three days, having collected a few dozen birds on the way. Tying the birds' heads together, they hung them from their saddles.

About five miles this side of Lazo, they arrived at the camp of an acquaintance, Kim-gi-Soon, gave all the birds to him as a present and camped there, leaving their horses, rifles and other unnecessary things.

Kim-gi-Soon was a good old friend of the Sirko family and always received them with great hospitality. They were always welcome guests, perhaps because of their own generosity and hospitality.

The boys stayed over-night at his place. The evening was spent in celebration, the boys treating Kim-gi-Soon to brandy and meat and all those Christmas delicacies that mother and Nataika had stuffed into the bag, remembering this good Kim-gi-Soon.

This celebration was so enjoyable to Kim that when the boys had already gone to bed, he still sat on his "kan" or heated flagstone floor and sang in his falsetto voice the only song he knew, which he had learned so well from the Red Army soldiers stationed on the Manchurian border. It was a Ukrainian song "Unhitch the horses, boys," which Kim called "Ryus song" and it was very popular all over the Far East.

Hryhory listened to it in great amazement. Kim-gi-Soon never suspected what an extraordinary impression his drunken falsetto singing was making, what a number of thoughts it called forth. Only in the mouth of an alien, and such a distant one, does a native song acquire some special meaning and sense.

Funny, gay and naive Kim-gi-Soon.

Leaving their horses behind they continued their trip

on the train. It was here that the civilized world began, the world of machines, electricity and radio, the world of "social construction," briefly the world of the "final phase of building up socialism in one country."

The "Fuel and Timber" Express

This was not Hrytsko's first trip to civilization, but even so he felt a little helpless, not as at home as he was in the primeval forests. As a consequence, Hryhory had to take the initiative, otherwise they would never have got on the train. Express train No. 1, Negorelo-Vladivostok, passed, then postal express No. 41, Vladivostok-Moscow, too, but there was no chance to board them. There were no local trains, they were all long-distance trains, and tickets on them were either "reserved" for various "responsible" personages, or given as a "favor". Since our two travellers were not accounted "responsible" they could not get on the train.

There were a great many "irresponsibles" and they decided to wait for an express of their own, a half real and half fantastic "fuel and timber" express, as someone in gay mood once sardonically described it. This was the name applied to the famous and exclusive (of its type) train No. 97, Vladivostok-Moscow. Something like this could only exist in that land of socialism and, at that, only in a district of the "limitless" multinational "motherland" such as this.

At last towards evening this "express," famed throughout the Far Eastern Provinces, Eastern and Western Siberia and the whole USSR, appeared. It was already twilight, and since it was dark both inside and out, everything seemed even gloomier. Moving heavily, the train coughed a few times as if afflicted with a bad cold, and stopped.

The train was very long, about fifty cars, half of them

boxcars and the other half postal cars, all of them, however, functioning as passenger cars. It was not loaded with "fire-wood" but all the cars were so crowded with passengers that human hands, heads, and even feet, stuck out of windows as if from platforms. Dark, without a single light, the express hummed or rather buzzed like a beehive, yelled, sang and coughed, cursed masterfully and wailed like a child.

Express! Not an express, but a whole republic on wheels.

Hrytsko and Hryhory made an attack upon it because it was impossible to get on it in any other way. All those inside protested vehemently at anyone getting in, and expressed their rage in foul invective, using any and every means at their disposal to stop the intruders. They gave the impression of having deliberately chosen this kind of sport to keep themselves warm in the intense cold.

"Follow me!" commanded Hryhory quietly, sensing the familiar situation which he had experienced and become accustomed to a long time ago, and remembering all the rules and standards of behaviour in this civilization embracing "one sixth of the globe" and all its peculiarities, that make you a lost sheep if you don't know them.

"Follow me, together!"

Heeding this command both of them exerted their ox-like strength, and they were followed by many others who, as if using a battering ram, battling hard, broke into the car. Those that were lucky enough to gain entrance with the boys' help began to abuse not those who were in but those who were shoving them from the outside. They would not let them in, throwing foul invective like mud into their faces as if they were lunatics. Original customs! Outlandish customs!

But this train had even more surprises in store! No reservations or tickets were needed to board it. Theoretically there were tickets, but it was practically impossible to

apply any rules and nobody bought tickets. Everyone went when and wherever he wanted to go. But since there were no tickets no one could complain about the train and it went as its fancy directed. When it wanted to go it went; when it wanted to stop it stopped, and sometimes stood for hours either at a station or somewhere in the bush or on a dead-end siding. Since tickets only existed in theory, ticket-collecting was only possible in theory, too. With the exception of those who boarded the train in Vladivostok, none of the others bothered to buy tickets. The only difficulty lay in getting on the train.

When that first step had been taken, one could be sure of never being bothered for a ticket. The train was always so packed, that, indeed, no conductor or ticket-collector had ever succeeded in penetrating farther along the train than a third of its length.

The car in which our boys found themselves was exceedingly crowded and dark, perpetually noisy, and filled with foul air spiced with acrid *makhorka* smoke. The boys sobered up and penetrated into the crowd, settling comfortably. Hrytsko did not have to stand on his own feet on the dirty floor, but was held up as if by some miracle.

In the meantime the train whistled, hissed and screamed, jerking the cars until peoples' ribs rattled, then started and crept into the darkness. Then, when the passengers were jolted a little, the boys adjusted themselves with more comfort.

The noise, the broken phrases, jokes, snatches of song and curses made them feel strange. Hryhory had an impression that he was at home. The car expressed itself in all the dialects of his language, those of Poltava, Kherson, Chernihiv, Odessa. . . . Someone shouted: "To hell with you!" reminding him of the distant Podillya.

All those on the express had probably always spoken those dialects. The greater number of the passengers came

from Ukraine. And although this express was on the Vladivostok-Moscow run, it was, nevertheless, by virtue of its language, songs and everything else, Ukraine, extra-territorial Ukraine, "a ship without a helm and sails."

Someone was talking about Sakhalin, "be it thrice cursed by God," where their whole district was "recruited" into the fishing industry. Another group, also "recruited" to Dalstroï, "the damned," listened and responded with strong, peppery words and immortal Ukrainian humour,

Seasonal workers! Recruited, contracted and "planned development" workers with wives and little children. . . . They had been sent from place to place over the whole "socialist motherland!" They built socialism. They were the ones who built socialism.

"They went there with lice in the seams of their clothes and are coming back with lice in handfuls."

"They worked hard, but all for nothing!"

For days, weeks, months they wandered like this, enduring filth, cold and hunger. . . . Inspired, they first went east; mastered by despair and apathy they returned west, replaced by new ones. Wave after wave of such seekers of better fortune, forced and "voluntary" enthusiasts, shifted hither and thither. They conversed, quarrelled in the same tongue, sneered, sang and cursed sullenly and sarcastically everyone and everything.

A thin baby voice wailed in the darkness hopelessly, endlessly. It cried like a nestling, and bending over the baby a weeping mother's voice tried to comfort and hush it. "What's wrong, dear? . . . well, stop, please . . . got a headache . . . Oh, Lord! Well, honey . . ." and suddenly in mad despair: "Hush, damn you! Hush . . . or I'll" and she burst out weeping, hopeless and forgotten.

The baby moaned in pain.

"Well," said someone's sullen voice with a Kuban accent, "we arrived. A whole week we spent idly in the sleet and rain, without shelter, in Vladivostok. Before the

contracts were signed they treated us generously but after that, having us in their power, they threw us on to a rubbish pile. Cattle are treated far better . . . damn them all and their lousy 'constitution!' ”

“And they rooted us out,” whispered someone, unburdening himself of his sorrows that can be measured only in darkness. “They did! Threw us out into the snow with little children. My God! ‘You’re a kulak,’ they said. Mother died in Pechora slave camp and we five, her sons, scattered to the four winds. . . . Three went to Northern Concentration Camps . . . Well, let them . . .” his teeth gnashed.

A sad girl’s voice, singing . . .

“I worked in the Donbas,” said some young man impudently and gaily. “Nothing doing. ‘Show us your passport,’ they said. Fools! If I had a passport I’d be a people’s commissar, but a better one . . . couldn’t help it . . . went to Arkhangelsk, Kamchatka, Tashkent, and always the same damn thing, ‘release’ from the village soviet they want. Devil take them!” and he sighed sceptically. “Great country, but too damn crowded!”

“What news from home?” worried some woman. “How are they?”

“Do you know?” someone spoke loud, as if to a deaf person, “Serge was executed! The horses died in the collective, and they said ‘saboteur!’ ”

“But,” hissed someone, trembling — apparently sick — on the top bunk, “when people died out in the whole district, don’t worry, then they didn’t look for saboteurs!”

“Well, hush, hush my sweetheart,” moaned the mother.

A peasant girl was sitting there quietly. She remained silent amid the general hubbub, and then her voice emerged as if from muddy water, as an accompaniment to the baby’s wail, but more subdued —

*Whoever shall read that letter,
He’ll know all my heartaches. . . .*

"Hush, dear, hush!" pleaded the mother's voice and she clung to her child like the wild marjoram in the field.

Hryhory listened to all that noise, his teeth on edge, his head swimming. Things he had started to forget, all the tragedy of his people, lay like a great burden on his mind and played upon his heart.

His whole motherland was like this, on wheels, smashed, broken, deprived of individuality, filthy, diseased, in despair! He clenched his teeth till the jaw muscles bulged out.

The train rattled on, shuddering convulsively in the darkness, and made long stops at stations and some side-tracks.

At some station two individuals with lanterns pushed in.

"NKVD," there passed a murmur through the car.

Where conductors and controllers were powerless and too scrupulous to penetrate, these two squeezed in and were at home; they were looking for something. They peered into people's faces by the lantern light, stepping over them like logs.

Hryhory waited calmly, prepared for the worst. He realized now how foolish he had been to show himself without documents. But before he had had time to analyze this, a lantern was thrust into their faces, first at Hrytsko and then at himself. They were examined from head to foot, but luckily, it was the beautifully embroidered deer-skin coats and shoes that caught the attention of the inspectors. They left the train, perhaps thinking that these two were some exotically dressed "responsible" officials, chiefs of village soviets or directors of gold mines.

At the station of Krasnaya Ryeckha the express stopped on the devil knows what track among a sea of freight cars picked out by the reflections of light from distant lanterns.

Another train pulled in from the opposite direction and stopped on the next track. Hryhory's heart trembled. Pale

faces pressing against barred windows looked out — the echelon!

On the other side of the “express” there was a similar train going in the opposite direction. Car platforms were patrolled by men armed with triple-edged bayonets. Someone called from the left over the express to the train on the right.

“Hello, countrymen! Where are you going?” and the fellow laughed mischievously.

“To the Far Eastern Camps, and you?”

“To the Northern Camps! Ha, ha, ha!”

They pushed their hands out through the iron bars, waved at each other and laughed. Laughter was the only thing left to them. What incredible madness stalked through this land, where trainloads of prisoners were moved from one end of the world to another in opposite directions. And no end was in sight.

Khabarovsk - Amusing and Saddening Adventures

The city was enveloped in a haze of microscopical ice particles that glittered in the sunlight. A fifty-below-zero temperature chilled the pedestrians whose hurried steps produced all kinds of creaking and clumping sounds. The city was built on hilltops shaggy with hoar frost. Smoke-like wisps of vapour rose from horses, people and dogs alike and settled on them as hoar frost. Everything was wrapped in clouds of vapour, creaking, grinding, hurrying.

Khabarovsk was the capital of this Far Eastern land, this capricious Eldorado.

The boys walked along the main thoroughfare named Karl Marx Street. City residents, officials, workers and soldiers, Russians, Ukrainians, Chinese, Koreans — all hurried along with their noses tucked into their collars, colliding with each other. There were men with brief-

cases and civil servants with planchettes and military wallets thrown over their shoulders.

Automobiles with chains on their tires rattled alongside sledges drawn by reindeer — the Golds had come to the city. Mangy reindeer with big horns, scabby dogs with sharp pointed ears and tiny, exotically dressed women sitting on the sledges drew the attention of the city dwellers. They crowded around, watching, because they had never seen anything like it. Statistics show that there are very few natives and “old timers” in this capital, they are mostly drifters, changing all the time. Here the population flowed like water in the Amur, coming and going, settling nowhere.

People came here voluntarily, as Party or Trade Union representatives. Unable to endure the rigorous climate, they gave up all the advantages or conveniences offered by some central authority and fled away. These fellows, having tasted a little of the exotic and bizarre, returned home to sit by their *samovars* and tell tall stories about this capricious land and its wonders.

The reindeer drew the sleighs apathetically, followed by a great crowd of gawkers. All the pedestrians who went to work carried tin dinner pails as well as all their miscellaneous belongings. Once someone made up a riddle about the city that runs like this: “Three mountains, three holes and a hundred thousand stew-pots and briefcases — what is it? Khabarovsk.”

But Hryhory liked the city, perhaps because it reminded him very strongly of Kiev. Locked under thick ice and covered with ice hummocks the wide Amur flowed around it. A broad main street which began at the river bank had modern buildings on both sides. It was short, but looked European, almost like Khreshchatyk in Kiev. Some buildings were really beautiful, five or six storeys high, and built in the modern fashion. A number of buildings were under construction. It looked as if the tall scaffolding

might fall apart any time, revealing beneath them enchanting structures.

The city looked as if it were suffering from a housing shortage, because large tarpaulin tents were spread on the ruins of the old church, looking like huge Kirghiz tents. Some people lived there, close to the Amur, in the freezing temperature.

The boys window-shopped in front of the "Gastrom" looking at all the masterpieces of the "All-Union Food Industry:" wines, canned meat, hams, sausages, chocolates and candies, some wrapped in tinfoil and others without. Then they looked at the window display of "Dynamo," a sport association, showing all kinds of goods used in athletics, sport and hunting, beautiful new double-barrelled shotguns, blank cartridges of all sizes, shell-loading equipment, telescopes and so on. All for hunting. This was supposed to be a supply base for all the modern explorers where they could buy things cheaply at wholesale prices.

In the State Liquor store there was Lenin's portrait in one window and Karl Marx's in the other — both made up of bottles. Hryhory laughed: "Up till now I didn't know they were such drunkards. How great and creative is the genius of the builders of socialism! It acknowledges no limits and does not stop at anything."

Having nothing else to do they went on looking round the city trying, at the same time, to find where they were supposed to do their errands. First of all they had to go to the Far Eastern Fur Trust, but they were not in a hurry, for it was quite early. They looked at the window displays and the crowd looked at them.

After the two boys appeared on the main street, the exotic reindeer and the Golds suffered an eclipse, quite put in the pale by two aurochs who, surely, must have come from the blue Khekhtsy that hung so romantically on the horizon. Legends were told about it in Khabarovsk,

but no one from the city had ever visited it. Old maids and girls were especially excited. Some even tried to catch their eye, winking, staring, or talking loudly to their companions, making some remarks about them and laughing.

The faces of young girls, reddened by the cold, breathed warmth, youth and carefree boldness. And in general these Khabarovsk people were strange, as if everyone knew everyone else and all were friends. A teen-aged girl with her briefcase and books under her arm faced the boys, staring at them, and with mincing steps unceremoniously measured them from head to foot.

"Boys, will you be kind enough to tell me where you bought these things, and where I can get them?" and she pointed to Hryhory's embroidered buck-skin shoe with her own little shoe. "Devil take this cold! In our Odessa. . . ."

Hryhory offered her his shoes as if he already knew the girl from "our Odessa", as if they had come to this part of the country together. And the girl from "our Odessa" was gay and talkative. She was "Khetakhurovka."* an enthusiast, who had come in light shoes direct from blessed, sunny Odessa to this over-publicized and romantic Far Eastern land.

The boys could not sell her their shoes. Hrytsko promised to get the girl a pair, but not in Khabarovsk, but in the taiga — shoes specially made for a girl, wonderful buckskin shoes, if only she would visit them. He even told her how to reach the place. The girl was most appreciative; she said she would go there without fail, she would like to have the shoes very much. . . . Hryhory laughed.

The girl, who had at first begun to talk in Russian, at once changed to Ukrainian as soon as she heard Hrytsko who, by the way, could not say a word in Russian correctly, and she was glad: "Countrymen! Good heavens!" So they came to complete agreement, until Hryhory ex-

* Khetakhurovka, a Soviet girl who followed the example of Valentina Khetakhurova in going to live in the Far Eastern Land.

plained the geography of the taiga to her a little, and she, realizing the impossibility of visiting them, burst out laughing and pushed Hrytsko in the chest and called him "an absolute bear!"

"That's right. Why do all the girls call us 'bears'?" wondered Hrytsko, turning to Hryhory, "I mean Nataalka, Mary, and this. . . ."

"What do you mean by this?"

Hrytsko looked at the girl, who was hopping like a sparrow on a twig, and laughed outright. "This" proved to be a chemical engineer. She had come to build something great. . . . Just now she was angrily hopping in the cold, radiating youth, good health and inexhaustible energy from rosy cheeks and large hazel eyes.

"Khabarovsk is filled with new people like me. We're all new, 'twenty-five thousanders,' 'Khetakhurovkas,' Red Army, those sent on a mission, on a contract, engineers and officials. All of us are cold and we have a close fellow-feeling. Funny people, funny city and funny Far Eastern land!"

Funny, indeed, enough to make one weep.

The boys were not selling their buckskin shoes, though they were really sorry that they had none to sell ("Why didn't you bring some girls' shoes along, just in case?") But the girl helped them out, telling them which way to go and where to turn to find what they wanted. She even accompanied them part of the way the better to direct them.

At the corner of Karl Marx and Plyusninka streets they parted. The girl stamped her feet, standing there for some time, pointing with her finger and shouting, correcting their route.

The quiet air, dried up by the cold, only needed movement to make one feel comfortably warm. But different individuals have different ideas about cold, and react to it in a different way. Taiga hunters are one

thing and city dwellers are another. A hunter is able to walk in cold weather over hills and valleys with only a light jacket on and not only feel no cold, but actually get hot and perspire as if in a steam bath; his jacket gets covered on the outside with hoar frost from the perspiration passing through it. It's quite a different story with city dwellers who are not used to cold, being arrivals from other lands. But they, too, become acclimatized. Hryhory noticed the girls in the streets. Some, regardless of appearances, wore ugly felt boots and thick stockings to keep out the cold while others, whether from poverty or vanity, continued to wear thin silk stockings and soft slippers; but they remained in the cold as little as possible, slipping quickly from building to building.

In the Far Eastern Fur Trust the boys parted with their furs, renewed their contracts and were paid a whole lot of money. Hrytsko was asked to enter into competition with some unknown person. He accomplished this by putting a cross just to get rid of them. "Who could and would dare to compete with the Sirkos? Ridiculous!"

Then they set out to attend to their main business, that of locating the State Inspectorate of Hunting or, more properly, the chief regional inspector, Ivan Potayuk, a good friend of old Sirko. Ivan Potayuk had visited the Sirkos quite often, sometimes coming during an antler hunt on all kinds of investigations, and they were his guests whenever they happened to be in the city. He always assisted them in all the formalities connected with such delicate matters as permits to hunt deer for antlers, or to catch raccoons, or to carry certain weapons. Just now they wanted to get some triple-barrelled rifles.

The office of the inspectorate was in a bank building in the centre of the city. It had moved recently to this new location, which was why Hrytsko could not find it. The building was supposed to be a skyscraper, the tallest and

finest building on the main street, with a large sign in front. Following this description the boys found it easily.

It stood across the street from the offices of the Provincial Executive. This pride of Khabarovsk, a grey, six-storey-high edifice in the American style was decorated in front with large letters — “The Far Eastern Bank.”

Potayuk, a short but energetic fellow, with a very sharp nose, sat by the table under a large map, his Kuban cap on his head, because he prized it very highly and hardly ever took it off. The map was marked with the figures of different animals and birds. He greeted the boys warmly, but he seemed ill at ease and was frowning.

He asked about the “old man”, about the deer and squirrel hunts and a great deal of other taiga news in which he was very interested, but it was apparent that he had something else on his mind. During the conversation he leaned towards them and suddenly, unable to keep to himself the uneasiness that was preying on his mind, informed them in a perplexed whisper: “All the highest officials have been arrested . . .” and he named a commissioner of the foreign trade commissariat under whose jurisdiction this inspectorate was, and the directors of the Far Eastern Fur Trust, and even the chiefs of the provincial executive and the provincial committee of the All-Union Communist Party. “Well, in general . . .” and Ivan Potayuk waved his hand rather hopelessly.

It was real news to the boys to hear that this world was afflicted with an epidemic of arrests. . . . It was not local, but widespread, the whole “sixth of the world” was affected. But they did not care very much, except that they were sorry for this good fellow.

They expressed their sympathy by an eloquent silence, and told him of their business in the town. They were in a hurry to be done with it, and leave at the earliest opportunity.

“All right,” agreed Potayuk, “but . . . as you see,

there are some changes. Everything has to go through the NKVD. Wait a moment!"

He lifted the receiver, thus connecting himself with the NKVD exchange, called some number, greeted someone and spoke, explaining the matter. "A well-known hunter, you know . . . so much the better . . . has a permit for exporting raw materials and must have a certain kind of gun. According to regulation so and so he must have a permit to buy it and he petitions. . . ."

The receiver produced some squeaks and clicks to which Potayuk listened attentively, his face frowning more and more.

"Well, that's that!" He hung up the receiver and, pushing his cap angrily over his eyes, stood by the window and gazed at the fantastic designs which the frost had traced on the window panes.

"There . . . They want you to apply personally. You'll have to go, boys; I'll write an application for you and you'll file it and wait for an answer. . . . Don't say that you have guns, but only that you want to get some, understand? Say that you have a contract to hunt wild pigs. . . . I think the old man has a contract for that. Yes? Well, I know. Now you need a permit to buy guns and to use them. If they ask how you are managing now, only mention those guns that are covered by permits. Is that clear? Do be careful, Hrytsko!"

While he was giving these instructions, Potayuk filled out an application. "Hand this to them. Room 133, second floor. Go this way. . . . And be careful!" He paused. "Then come back to me. If you can't, give my best regards to your father and tell him to watch out. Alas," he rubbed his brow, "nasty times. Devil knows what's happening! You're used to living there like sovereign kings. . . . My best wishes to Nataalka, the scamp. Say that I'll come a-courting. . . ."

He joked for a while, shook hands firmly with Hryhory

and at the same time looked intently into his eyes. Hryhory withstood that look and smiled back. Potayuk smiled too.

"A great lad!" the thought flashed through Hryhory's mind, but he didn't say a word. Potayuk rubbed his forehead, wanted to ask something, but seemed to change his mind:

"Well, on your way. . . ."

They went out and made for the NKVD.

Hryhory walked side by side with Hrytsko, determined to risk a prank — a dangerous visit. Some devil inside was urging him:

"Go ahead, after all what is it? . . . To hell with them!"

The NKVD was located in a large new building at the corner of Kalinin street. It formed a large six-storey crescent on that corner, and though it was not yet finished it was already occupied.

Statuesque guards stood at the colonnaded entrance. Dressed in long overcoats with fur coats on top, holding rifles with fixed bayonets, they looked exactly like those posters which were supposed to illustrate the might of "the first dictatorship of the proletariat in the world."

Hryhory, with Hrytsko, walked up the steps to the vestibule. He walked in a proud yet insolent manner, sweeping away his steps with his long coat like an imperial lady with her train. They walked past the guards who stood like statues — the embodiments of power, secrecy and the uncompromising vengeance of the so-called "revolutionary legality."

In the vestibule Hrytsko stopped, grabbed Hryhory, and pulled him to one side. This product of the taiga, this primitive, straightforward young man was as sensitive as a wolf; like a wild, freedom-loving, proud mountaineer. He looked hard at Hryhory and spoke sharply: "Go away! . . . Wait for me out in the street."

Hryhory wasn't either superstitious or weak-willed. He

did not believe in devils or evil spirits but he believed firmly in intuition, in subconscious perception and in animal instinct. . . .

He stood for a moment and watched Hrytsko mount the stairs. Eventually he overcame the stubborn urge to follow, and obeyed that friendly yet uncompromising command: "Go away!"

He turned slowly and went out, past the guards and into the street.

Half an hour, then an hour passed — he became uneasy walking up and down at the corner. He was fully aware how suspicious this looked and that it might end very badly — imagine loafing around on a corner opposite NKVD! It would have been better if he had gone upstairs. He turned back to the NKVD building and was just starting up the stairs when Hrytsko came out. His eyes warned Hryhory, and he approached the latter without any signs of recognition — a tactful hunter, a true hunter!

Hrytsko was aware at the moment of his hunter's role, warned of the nearness of beasts of prey, and he moved carefully on the margin between safety and real danger — a tiger hunter! As he passed by he winked and whispered: "Walk off to the side, behind me."

They walked that way for a block, turned right and then left toward the Inspectorate of Hunting.

Here Hrytsko put the declaration on the table and took a deep breath: "They refused it."

"Yes," said Potayuk, evidently not surprised. "Well, and . . . ?"

"And they refused. 'You don't need it! Hunt as you did before,' they said."

Potayuk was silent. He frowned for a while and then burst out in ironic laughter:

"Listen, Hrytsko . . . And who is this one with you?"

"He is a relative of ours here. I gave him a winter coat and deer shoes. He is one of us!"

"Good", — and he smiled openly at Hryhory. "So they won't let you have it?"

"No, they won't."

"They say you don't need it?"

"Yes."

"Well, the devil take the fools. Think of it! . . . It is not for me to teach you and your father. Do you understand? . . . My greetings to all. Prepare yourselves well for another hunt next summer. I'll come to feed the mosquitoes. . . ."

They thanked him for his trouble, said good-bye, and went out. Now that their business was all taken care of they remembered how hungry they were. They had a bag-full of money and a rucksack filled with food but they wanted something hot. They wanted to eat something special, something worthy of the capital, something cultured. After all, they had travelled a long way to get here!

"I know," said Hrytsko, "let us go to the Japanese!" And so they set out for the Japanese restaurant somewhere out in the suburbs. On the way Hrytsko recounted his adventure with the NKVD.

"Brother, the place is full of officials! It's frightening. I went in to see one of them and soon there were some ten of them — they had heard that a 'distinguished hunter from the taiga, that Sirchenko, son of the most distinguished Sirko' was there. The devils! How do they get to know these things? Of course, much has been written in the newspapers; they even showed us in the kino. And they chattered among themselves: 'Did you read that? Did you hear this? Did you see the pictures in the . . .?' And to me: 'Is all that true?' I pretended to wither under all this attention 'Of course — Yes — I don't know. . . .' And they: 'You see he is completely wild. Yes — no culture, no newspapers, no theatres. What do you do there evenings and holidays? Probably drink!'

'Yes. . . .'

'Tell us, did anyone come to your place?'

'No. . . .'

'Think hard, try to remember.'

'Aha, someone did. . . .'

'Who?' and they seemed to be all ears.

'A militia man from the *Uniongold* last year. . . .'

'No, we mean this summer, or fall, or now in the winter. Think for a minute.'

I thought: 'You silly striped chipmunks!'

'No, nobody came.'

'A stout fellow!'

'Certainly — And so we humbly ask for a permit. . . .'

'Did you meet anyone in the forest while hunting?'

'Apart from animals, nobody. . . .'

Confound them! Why are they so interested?

They talked like that with me for about an hour, and pointed out continually: 'If you meet anyone, ask him who he is, and remember, if he seems suspicious inform the officials.'

'Which?' I wanted to ask, but I only agreed.

'Well, that's a good lad! . . . Do you smoke?'

'No. . . .'

'Do you drink whiskey?'

'Yes.'

'They treated me to some kind of womanish drink and repeated over and over again that I should be careful and attentive. They talked about 'citizens' duties' and about rewards for sincere effort. . . .

'But they still returned the declaration 'Not possible! Dumb oxen! Who in the world would seriously ask them for a permit? We have lived a lifetime here without asking their permission, and we don't propose to ask for it now. . . . Either we are the masters here or we are not.'

As he spoke Hrytsko waved his arms and raised his voice, forgetting that he wasn't in the forest now. Hryhory had to calm him down. He also had to guide him by the

arm because Hrytsko did not know how to walk on sidewalks and did not recognize any rules for movement on the street. He insisted on jay-walking, and had it not been for Hryhory he would have found himself on several occasions under the wheels of one of the trucks that dashed back and forth, clanging their chains.

Eventually they reached the Japanese restaurant located in a suburb that was known as "Ukrainska Slobodka." This suburb was as old as Khabarovsk. Its name indicated not only the original founders but those who formed the bulk of the present population of this suburb.

The restaurant was located at the town end of the suburb. The young men barged in, hungry as wolves, anticipating the taste of exotic food. Even the depressed and down-at-heel appearance of the place did not affect their mood. The place looked like the hut of the poorest Old Believer. Wooden walls without paint or whitewash stuck out their naked ribs which were stuffed in between with moss and rags. Plain benches against the walls and equally plain wooden tables without any covers reminded one of a barracks. . . .

A Japanese stood in the doorway leading to another room. He was the only exotic thing about. The perspiring window panes wept copious tears which dripped from the sill.

They ordered the best the Japanese had to offer. After a while a Chinese youngster trotted in and placed before them two large earthenware bowls filled with macaroni in a sauce. It looked just like a bunch of tangled white thread. There were no spoons, knives or forks, only two thin wooden sticks.

They looked at each other and at the bowls but found no suggestion as to how to begin. Hryhory tried to pick up the tangled mass with the sticks but it slipped off and dived back into the juice. He repeated this experiment several times without success. Hrytsko had the same results.

"The devils!" he said. "We have been here before but they didn't give us anything like this."

The pangs of hunger and the hopeless task before them drove them to despair. Perhaps that Japanese was already laughing at them, the devil, and saying, "Look at the wild men!"

In the meantime two Chinese men had come in and sat down at another table opposite. They chattered first between themselves and then with the Japanese. Lo and behold, they too were served this flax fibre in juice (this must have been the only thing available here) and the young men watched carefully to see what would happen.

The Chinese handled the situation swiftly in a straightforward manner: they leaned over their bowls, and using the sticks in one hand like elongated fingers, they lifted the tangled mass to their mouths and sucked in the whole mass in one breath like a stork swallowing a frog. And then, twisting very rapidly with the sticks, they made a fountain out of the juice and sucked it in; that was all there was to it. They finished what remained by tipping the bowl up and drinking from it.

Encouraged by this example the boys did the same thing with the macaroni, and it proved to be quite easy, but they could not manage the fountain part of the performance.

"Hey, Hrytsko, you need a thousand years of culture to be able to do that! — Bah!"

They gave up trying, tossed the chopsticks aside and simply drank the juice.

The Chinese youngster brought in green tea in small porcelain cups, without sugar, and at no extra charge, but they didn't stop to drink it — they paid the bill and went out.

All that cost them only 50 rubles each!

"A whole calf . . . you could buy a whole calf for that!" laughed Hrytsko when they reached the street.

Hryhory, too, was pleased with this incident. After all you must pay for exotics and those chopsticks must cost something! As a result Hryhory named this restaurant "The Tavern of the Dead Cat."

Still, hunger is hunger, and even more so when it comes from the taiga. The problem of food remained unsolved.

They went into some kind of a buffet which was also a tavern. It was filled to the brim with people, but as far as food was concerned there was only some kind of salad, whiskey, *anissovka* and some candied sweets. They ordered the salad, a glass each of *anissovka* and two portions of candy. The man in charge of the buffet himself served the great masters.

They drank the *anissovka*, smelled the sour food and tossed the candy under the table, paid three times what it was worth and walked out in anger.

In desperation they went into a barbershop and had themselves shaved and powdered, looked themselves over in the mirror and had a good laugh — "It's obvious why the eyes popped out of the girls' heads!"

Then they went into the *Gastronome* which they had seen in the morning but had forgotten. There they found things out of fairy tales; all kinds of wines, whiskey, caviar, chocolate, candy. . . . Here they loaded both rucksacks. Loaded like camels they went out into the street where it was getting dark. There was a frosty mist in which bloomed lamps that looked like dead dandelions surrounded by frosty haloes. Somebody hurried off in the mist — and the snow screeched underfoot — the problem now was where to settle down to devour these luxuries they had just purchased.

The *anissovka* went to their heads, and they felt light and airy. From across the street came the sound of brassy music. It was a restaurant, all lit up and humming like a nest of hornets.

"Let's go!" commanded Hrytsko as he tilted his cap to

a rakish angle. The street was grey and forbidding; and there, inside, it looked warm, bright and sheltered. They might as well go the whole hog!

At the entrance to the restaurant stood—a general—not a general—a decorated commissionaire. He looked at the boys, and hurried to open the doors through which they could hardly pass with their coats and loaded rucksacks.

Inside was another more elaborate commissionaire with gold braid and lanyards, gold buttons and a beard like Skobelev. How had that beard been preserved for 20 years? He took their belongings. . . .

“Do they have beer here?”

The ‘General’ looked at them, smiled into his beard and replied in their language:

“There is, boys! — Beer and whiskey and women. . . . Let me have your vestments. God forgive, those are some fur coats!”

He hung their “vestments” on a hook and gave them their tags. Then he showed them which way to go.

“Where are you from, grandfather?” Hryhory could not resist asking as he combed back his hair. The old man gave him a crafty look, winked at him, and without saying anything opened wide the door.

The young men walked in, no, floated into the restaurant.

Everyone who was in the restaurant—dancers, drinkers, smokers, jokers—everyone turned. The fury of the foxtrot died down momentarily and against this background of pale, exhausted and dissipated faces, the two guests looked like people from a heroic planet rather than from this smoky, squalid earth. They might have been characters who had just come down from the screen during the showing of an epic film—of pirates or cowboys; or perhaps emissaries of some unknown tsar of these much-talked-of but little known Ussurian forests. Apart from the clothes, the thing that caught everyone’s attention was their

faces which looked as if they were moulded out of red bronze into which were set eyes which impressed you with their concentrated strength and brilliance.

Hrytsko walked lightly, without paying attention to anyone, and peered over their heads — trying to spot the prey.

The band leader waved the baton, the oboe barked like a dog, everything quickened, but none danced — as though in deference to the new arrivals. The women seemed to take the measure of their partners and quickly looked over to compare. . . . Some man, urged on by the instinct of a male, made some sneering remark, and someone laughed. . . . In the meantime the two young men had reached the centre of the room, paying no attention as though they were in the middle of the forest, and now they stopped, looking around for a place to camp. They didn't even notice one of the bare-backed women trying desperately to attract their attention. "Oh, the bears!"

Only when they had reached their selected place did Hrytsko react: "Did you hear? That must have been about you. I wonder why all the girls call us bears?" They had selected an empty table near the window and were making themselves at home. A waiter arrived: the orchestra broke into a tango. . . .

Hryhory turned the menu upside down and addressed the waiter: "A carafe of wine! Two whiskies! Two caviars! Herrings in vinegar, twice; beefsteaks, twice; cabbage and onions, twice; scrambled eggs with 5 eggs and bacon, twice!" All this was in the form of a command. The waiter goggled. "All that at the same time?" "If you please, all at the same time." "Right!" And he disappeared behind the buffet where you could hear his happy voice repeating the orders — twice, twice, twice.

He came back with the wine and the whiskey, but the boys did not touch it but continued to swallow their saliva as they felt the claws of wolfish hunger inside. Hrytsko let his eyes wander over the room which was now spinning in

the midst of a tango. He saw the girls with bare arms and backs but he didn't react. All he could think of was F O O D. Hryhory was studying the menu and recalled his student days in Kiev and some of his student pranks.

The waiter eventually came back with a huge tray covered with plates and dishes . . . now the young men dug in. They had a drink each and then went at the food like two bears.

Things became brighter when the first pangs of hunger were satisfied. Everything was new and surprising to Hrytsko. For example how did those dresses stay on the girls? Furthermore why did they and the men walk around, swaying the way they did ? Must be a game of some kind, he decided.

Activity increased all around them; a holocaust of sounds and bodies, painted lips, chalk-white noses, lean hungry-looking men. . . . The banjo bleated like a goat, the crooner sounded like a stuck pig, and there was somebody making a noise with little sticks which sounded like the thumping of a rabbit competing with a woodpecker; there was whistling and ringing and the leader walked, swaying, up and down; it seemed as though they were all drunk and behaving wildly. Between the guests and the orchestra it looked and sounded like a mad, furious lascivious rhythm.

Hryhory watched this and his frown grew — he seemed to be under a black cloud.

The waiter came again and they ordered wine and beer; they ate and drank, and it all seemed to be going to their heads. The waiter brought two more dishes, dishes which were sizzling over bluish flames. Hrytsko was amazed. Wasn't that funny? Strange, those city people, selling fire on a platter!

Opposite them sat two girls behind a little table. They had ordered black coffee, drank it slowly and just sat there and stared at the two men. One of them began making

eyes at the men and the other just stared with wide-open, misty eyes which showed neither surprise nor animation. Other girls in the room were being asked to dance, they were flirted with and brought back from the dance floor, pale-looking but apparently happy. They would sit down behind a table, eat, drink, laugh, and then rise and dance again, only to return later even paler than before. But nobody seemed to notice these girls and nobody invited them to dance. The two young men didn't notice them either, instead they just sat, drank, and ordered such delicacies as preserved apricots or crabs.

Somewhat intoxicated by now, Hrytsko spread himself out on the chair and laughed out loud. "What a circus! We should get it out our way, out to the forest, eh?"

He was beginning to see double. Roused by the drinks and by the sights in this room he laughed over and over again without knowing why.

Hryhory, on the other hand, looked grim. The more he drank the grimmer he became. As he observed this array of half-naked women his heart was seized with a great pity. He felt as though someone had stepped on his heart with a jackboot. Someone tossed a paper flower at him and some woman was ogling him from across three tables, but he took no notice. He ordered cognac and drank, but even that had no effect, instead he was being overcome with a feeling of sorrow. He looked at this painted, pretentious, dissipated collection of humanity; at this exhibition of feminine beauty and masculine pride and honour; and clenched his teeth. He was being filled to overflowing with disgust and negation. He had been trampled upon, pushed aside from the stream of life; crossed out, and by whom? Before him moved wave upon wave of perspiring painted and powdered human flesh — the builders and reconstructors of the world, impotent builders of empire galvanized by alcohol . . . aristocrats! masters of situations! . . . Lords and rulers! . . .

Trash! All these dolls with their Alphonses, so-called commanders, pompous "responsible persons" pretending to be "European" — all that was low-down trash, now moving around the room with their emaciated knees stuck between the women's. And all these spittle-covered, shop-worn girls and women with blue-black rings under their eyes, and eaten away by alcohol, lust, perfume and syphilis. . . .

Through the stormy jazz he imagined he heard Zalivay . . . a happy excited bark . . . and in reply came the silver tones of Natalka's voice . . . she stood on a sunlit plank spanning a brook and with her face raised to the blinding sun she laughed in gay abandon . . . and there she stood again in the rays of a rainbow above a waterfall, proud as a queen, free as the wind, happy as the sun; she waved her hand towards the top of a cedar . . . the forest queen, proud and untamed, beautiful and pure like a goddess, his queen! And . . . not his . . . his pain and his sorrow. . . .

Perspiring, pale, stupid faces came back to focus and one of them was shouting: "Maestro! Foxtrot!"

And again couples rose quickly and the senseless storms continued. Hryhory went on with his grim, calculated drinking. Apart from that he and his painful thoughts were far away from this place.

One well-developed female, overheated by wine and suggestive dances, dashed up to the young men and with flirtatious eyes invited them to dance. She stood there swaying in front of them. . . . Hryhory glanced at her then turned to Hrytsko:— "Go ahead." Hrytsko roared, the very thought that he should go out there with that woman to hop around and look silly brought on a laughing spell.

"No, no," he muttered finally and poked Hryhory under the table. The woman did not take her eyes off Hryhory. Eventually she caught his eye, winked at him — then stopped; her eyes opened wide, and unable to solve

the problem she turned and almost ran, shivering as though from cold. . . .

Only then did Hryhory notice the girls who sat opposite drinking their humble coffee. When the well-developed one finally gave up they looked at each other and laughed, then continued to stare at the men. Hryhory noticed them now and began taking them in out of the corner of one eye. He watched them sip their coffee. Both were pretty. One seemed inclined to flirt; the other was sad-looking. They looked tired and worn. . . . Apparently things were not going well with them and this coffee was to take the place of a meal which they could not afford. . . . Their clothes were old-looking and mended over and over again, and they wore heavy old boots which they hid under the chairs. One wore a pair of rather ancient stockings and the other a pair of man's socks which left her legs bare. No wonder they weren't being asked to dance. Besides, their whole manner seemed to indicate that they were peasant girls.

Then Hryhory caught a phrase; and there rose in his mind the picture of the train loaded with childish tears and desperate maternal anguish; and that song about "the tiny hazel leaf"—that poverty and suffering on wheels. . . . The girls had spoken in Ukrainian! And he felt as though someone had snapped a whip right across his naked heart: yes, there they are; daughters of "de-kulakized" parents, scattered over the Siberias. They were the ones fleeing for their lives! They were trying to save themselves from hunger and cold, from lawlessness, and death—at the price of their beauty and youth and self-respect.

Hryhory took himself in hand and he suddenly remembered that the train left at about 1 a.m. and it was now eleven. Hrytsko was all for more drinks but Hryhory would not let him, though he himself now felt like getting completely drunk so that he would not have to remember

or see or hear. He also felt that, slowly, he was approaching that blessed state.

The clock struck twelve. Half an hour to the station and half an hour for everything else. The train was at one. . . .

Hryhory rose, followed by Hrytsko. They kept themselves under control, but things were doubling up and tripling before their eyes.

"Hrytsko! Go to the cloakroom, collect all our belongings and go straight outside. Wait there. Is that clear?"

"Clear," and Hrytsko went as Hryhory proceeded to pay the waiter. He then waved to the two girls and went out. It seemed strange — his feet kept to the floor but everything else moved away at peculiar angles.

He met someone at the door — he was on his way out and the other person was coming in — and they couldn't pass. A chimeric figure doubled itself in Hryhory's eyes — bars on the collar — a blue-topped military cap — of yes, two of them! — two noses. . . .

Hryhory wondered. Is there one, or are there two? He blinked his eyes — yes, there are two! Two at once — funny! Somehow it looked familiar. . . . Hryhory stood back and laughed, then frowned and clenched his jaws.

"Who stands in the way? Hey, there! . . ."

The figure stepped aside and Hryhory marched off to the cloakroom. He gave 'Grandfather Frost' a rouble and went out in the street. He didn't notice that the figure at the doorway stood frozen to the floor watching his departure.

Hrytsko was waiting outside. They slipped their coats on cape style — to allow the alcohol to escape — and walked off slowly. The street was cold, still misty and almost empty; only here and there the crackling sound of feet on snow could be heard. The street lights glimmered through the rainbow-like haloes.

Don't Go Barefoot

The young men had gone half the length of Karl Marx street and had passed the Far Eastern Bank when Hryhory sensed that something was wrong and that they were being followed. By that time the effect of drink was wearing off. He immediately recalled the "chimera" of the earlier part of the evening. "What the devil? Who could it be . . . probably the military."

"Bend down, Hrytsko, and see whether someone is following us."

Hrytsko stumbled, leaned over and looked backwards.

"There doesn't seem to be anything. What is it supposed to be? . . ."

"Put your coat on properly or you will freeze to death. That's it. Hang the rucksack over your shoulder and take the weight off your arms; so. . . ."

Hryhory then dropped his coat, bent over and looked. . . .

"Yes, we are being followed, a tall chap in a dog fur coat and a cap with flopping ear flaps. . . ."

"—Well, Hrytsko! Keep calm and quicken the pace. Don't look back."

"What is this all about?"

"Nothing. You know how a tiger stalks wild boars? We are being followed. . . . Don't lag behind; stick close to me."

They walked quickly. The street suddenly became crowded with people emerging from a cinema theatre. The two young men merged into this crowd and then turned sharply to the left into a side street. "Stick close to the wall."

And without the slightest warning, Hryhory pushed Hrytsko in the side and the latter reeled into an open gate. There they stood dead still.

A moment later a figure dressed in a dog fur coat,

and wearing a cap with flopping ear flaps came running past them. Like a hound. . . .

They waited for a while until the crunching footsteps in the snow faded away. Then they turned back to the main street and set out at a fast pace.

In order to reach the station they had to walk the length of the main street, across a square, across some empty lots, through a bazaar, and finally for about one kilometre through the suburbs. Their coats were getting in their way so they took them off and carried them.

They crossed the large square with its monument to Lenin in the middle. With his hand raised high Lenin seemed to be trying to impede their progress. He was pointing in the opposite direction as though intending to lead them off their course. After they crossed the open lots covered with weeds, they set their course to the corner of a street which ran parallel to the railway. They had just crossed the ditch and stepped out on the street when out of the darkness there emerged a figure. "Hands up!" and Hryhory found himself facing a pistol.

Slowly Hryhory lifted his arms and at the same time kicked at the pistol, which went flying over the head of the holder and into the snow. At the same time Hrytsko struck with all his might right at the ear of the attacker. From the other side Hryhory kept him from falling with a similar blow and then kicked him straight in the chest.

The unsuccessful Pinkerton coughed and was dashed into the stone wall behind him.

"Don't go around barefoot," hissed Hrytcko as he moved in to finish off the attacker, but Hryhory stopped him. "Don't bother with him, he's just small fry. Let's go."

They picked up their belongings and ran off to the station.

They reached the station from the opposite side, and came straight out on to the railway tracks. Just then a freight train was moving off south and they boarded it

on the move. They found themselves in an empty car, and settled down in a corner to catch their breath. When the train crossed the bridge over the Ussuri and picked up speed Hrytsko burst out laughing, "What kind of a devil was that? What did he want, eh?"

"What did he want?"

"Yes."

"Probably wanted to rob us. . . . **Must have seen all** the money we have. . . ."

"Certainly got what was coming to him, poor devil."

Hryhory was silent, his mind was working madly in an effort to find a logical explanation for what had happened. He couldn't figure it out; perhaps he had rudely jostled the man standing in the doorway?

That must be it! At any rate he was sure he had scared him, he remembered that. He even might have said something, but he didn't think he had. He strained his memory trying to remember who that man was, but it seemed like a disconnected dream and he couldn't make any sense of it. He must have drunk quite a lot.

Or perhaps someone really wanted to rob them. That was possible . . . but his instinct told him that it was not so, and that this incident concealed a great danger. Finally he waved the whole thing aside. "I only hope that we haven't signed that fellow's death warrant. . . ." They undid the rucksacks and ate their supper. Later they huddled close together in a corner and dozed. The freight train went on without stopping until it got to Lazo in the morning, where the two young men got off.

They made their way to Kim-gi-Soon's place, saddled their horses, ate a quick breakfast, had a drink each and started out. As long as they were in this world of civilization they felt uneasy and in danger. The incident of the night before had acquired a secret meaning of incomprehensible content. They were in a hurry to get back to their own world, and not until they had returned into

the taiga did they breathe freely. It restored their good humour, their self-assurance and peace of mind. Here they were at home! Here they were the masters!

As he listened to the greeting of whispering cedars telling their eternal story, or recounting the incidents that had happened during their separation, Hryhory felt a rising tide of overpowering primitive joy and the sense of invincible strength within him.

"Oh, ho, someone is manoeuvring against me. . . . But we shall see. . . . We shall see!" As long as he was here there wasn't any power on earth could smoke him out, or could take him alive.

Not knowing any other way of releasing their animal-like joy at being back they galloped their horses, shot at stumps and fallen logs, and yelled like Asiatics.

"Yes, we shall see."

* * *

Back home, Hrytsko told Natalka of their bachelor escapades, about the painted girls, about the music, the rouged lips, the peculiar dances—about the whole "circus." She sat sorting stag hides, preparing them for deer shoes, inspecting them closely, especially the four that came from the *isubra* who was driven crazy by lust and died. She listened to her brother's tale and grew very angry. She wasn't even pleased with the gifts they brought her, but when she was alone with her brother she questioned him closely about their doings, about the queer musicians, dancers and the painted ladies, and she listened carefully with sparkling eyes trying not to miss a word. What a peculiar world that was! Did they too dance? Why, certainly they danced! These interesting ladies even flirted with them; and Hrytsko showed her how interesting these ladies were. It finally emerged that it wasn't they who danced with the half-naked ladies but the stupid townsmen. They only sat, watched and drank.

Hrytsko gave such a masterly description of this "circus"

and of those townsmen and imitated them so well as he pranced up and down the house that Natalka burst out laughing and insisted that some day she would see these things for herself. She was specially amused by the account of the "great gentleman" whom Hryhory pushed out of the way at the door, and by the "robber" who fared so badly at midnight. She was only sorry they had not brought the pistol.

"There you are, two fools, two complete fools, two stupid bears; couldn't dance with the girls, couldn't bring the pistol to her for a present, instead they brought a lot of trash as though she were one of those painted girls. Who, in God's name picked out those candies and chocolates and combs?"

"I did."

"Then you are a fool."

"And Hryhory did."

"Then you are two fools. Complete utter fools!"

IO

After Cats

"Well, what do you think, children? Shall we go?" asked old Sirko, hesitating to make the decision himself whether or not they should go after "cats". "Too bad Mykola is not here."

"Never mind father," said Natalka solemnly. "There are still three of us. We will go," and she said this with assurance and determination.

Old Sirko thought for a while, looked at Hryhory and grinned. "It's a special kind of business," and he slowly shook his head. "I have news. Two 'cats' have been seen near Iman. They say there are a lot of boars around and naturally wherever you have boars there are 'cats'. That's how that shepherd lives. But you see. . . . What do you say, my lad, um?" he asked Hryhory and again grinned.

The old man was looking for support. He had never wavered before, but now he wavered. The fourth one was missing. Mykola was missing. Hryhory was a good lad but this was the first time. . . .

Hryhory looked him straight in the eye, and although he wanted to say with the same determination as Natalka 'we will go' he did not think he had the right to decide.

Sirko continued his thinking. It was a very serious matter. A 'cat' is not a rabbit or a fox. . . . Now that Mykola was not with them who knew whether it would

work? Old Mrs. Sirko was worried and tried to dissuade them. "Let it rot. Haven't you got enough? Are you tired of living? May the devil take the 'cats'. For heaven's sake stay home."

This decided the matter. The old man waved his hand. "Well, let us get ready. God is not without mercy and a Cossack is not without fortune. We'll try our luck. You will take Mykola's place, young man; do you think you can do it?"

"I'll try," said Hryhory, "but. . . ."

"I know, I know, son, never mind I'll prime you a bit, but you are pretty well primed already."

And so they decided to go.

Mother Sirko was worried but kept quiet. After all, would they listen to her? The worry smouldered in her heart and now and then she wiped away a tear. She recalled the events of last year when they brought her son with a cracked skull. . . . My God, as though from a war. The damned 'cat' had seized him with its jaws. May it be for ever damned!

Natalka tried to comfort her mother, "Don't worry Mother, after all this isn't the first time. We'll soon be home. We'll just go out for a while and return. There aren't any 'cats' around anyway . . . they have all run away."

And the old lady blessed Natalka and the others as she had always done at such times. "People are dying here at every turn; if the 'cat' does not get him, he gets lost or drowns in the bog, or freezes to death, or a bear or wild boar rips him open, or he just catches a cold; and so gives up his spirit to God."

They dressed differently this time. They wore padded trousers and short jackets with vests made of heavy elk rawhide and gloves made of the same material. They also took several spare pairs of belts also made of tough hide.

In a word, the accent was on skin and hide even to headgear.

The horses were loaded lightly, a tent, an iron stove, food, spirit, marlia, fodder, rope, wire and a good axe. They took the dogs, four pairs of skis and set out. They rode most of the way, getting off only when they had to plough through snow drifts. Sometimes they followed paths but usually they went cross country, across ravines, down winding slopes and straight through the bush. The horses often slipped and fell and eventually they had to cut grooves in their front shoes. The reflection of the snow from the sun was blinding. The taiga stood frozen into stillness, and only the writing of large and small paw tracks in the snow informed those who could read that the place was far from being deserted. When they became cramped from sitting in the saddle with the temperature at 50 degrees below zero, they dismounted and put on their skis. In the open places Hryhory, Hrytsko and Nataika raced each other, or flew down the winding slopes until the wind whistled in their ears. Once in a while one of them would have a ski fouled by a branch or weeds lightly covered by snow and would take a heavy tumble, to the amusement of the others. Hryhory was quite skilled on skis. The type they used were better than the sporting type and no poles were needed. Sporting skis would have been too narrow here and would sink. Theirs were about three times as wide, somewhat shorter and covered underneath with rawhide with the fur lying the right way. They moved forward without any resistance, but in reverse the fur acted as a brake.

At night they made camp right in the snow, without pitching a tent. To windward they banked up the snow, then they made a big fire, and in between the snow and the fire they laid branches of spruce and pine. These camps were dry and warm. Here they would dry their clothes and drink tea, or old Sirko improvised "husters"

tea, by using twigs of hazelwood together with the brown dry leaf. The tea turned out "not worse than China." In the morning they went on; the blinding sun and the wind burnt their skin, which turned bronze.

On the Bikin river they saw a wonder of wonders; a frozen waterfall glistening in the sunlight from a high steep cliff about 200 feet straight up. It stood there like an icy wall shining with all the colours of the rainbow which gave it the appearance of flowing — in fact it was dead still. One of nature's wonders! In the summer there rose in this area countless springs, and the water fell off the cliffs in hundreds of tiny streams each carrying with it particles of the ground from which it came, green, reddish, brown and yellow. When the frost came it performed a trick; the water continued flowing but part of it was constantly being frozen and so this wonder, from the bottom, from the river, right up to the little stream was created. Painted in this way and further adorned by the azure sky and the turquoise ice, this wonderful waterfall stood and glistened. This was the first time Hryhory had seen anything like it and he couldn't take his eyes off it.

In one place they went through the cedar forest and they wanted to get some nuts, but those that had fallen were deeply covered with snow, those that hadn't fallen were near the tops of the trees and out of reach. They shot some cones down and they found the cedar nuts inside numerous and very tasty. The shell is about as large as a good cucumber, in appearance similar to pine cones, and under each scale as if under a lid, were nuts about the size of a bean.

And so they arrived at the river Iman. This stream, so fast and turbulent in summer, now lay still under a heavy coat of ice and snowdrifts. The snow was clean and undisturbed except in the centre where under a layer of fresh snow, like veins under the skin, there were the marks of a little travelled road and on top two recent

narrow lines. Between these were the marks of horses' hooves. Someone had been through yesterday in two sleighs. From the width of the runners Sirko concluded that the travellers had been Old Believers going upstream. That meant they had gone down before the last snowfall. Now they were returning, so they must have been to Iman. This he read, and none could have convinced him otherwise. They turned and followed the sleigh marks.

Here Hryhory had a chance to read the taiga newspaper — journalism of the virgin forests. But what he read made a greater impression on him than all the works of Balzac or Stendhal, which he had once read and had now forgotten. Only four words were written on the snow in large letters:

"Fiona sends regards to Medvin."

It was as though someone had struck him on the head with a wooden mallet. What's this? Which Medvin? Could it be . . . ? No, that's not possible!

"Fiona — That's that beauty, the wife of the Tungus, Dyadorov. She's a Russian from among the Old Believers. What a misfortune to have bound his life with that woman. He loved her, worshipped her, did everything for her; and she — well, as they said, they were not matched. Her eyes were turned in other directions, and my God, there were many volunteers. She was pretty, big and strong like a horse and all the Party chiefs who visited this area, various officials from the militia or NKVD, all have grazed in that pasture. And Dyadorov is away for months on end hunting, and trying to provide. When he found out, he was going to cut her and all of them to pieces. They took him away, kept him for a while and finally let him out after nearly scaring him to death.

"Medvin — that's the name of his one-time persecutor who was first an interrogator and then section chief of one of the NKVD branches. That name shook him to the core; just that one name. But it couldn't be; that

was ten thousand kilometres away, it must be a coincidence — some Old Believer.” And although he was almost convinced that this was a coincidence his inner upheaval continued for a long time because that name brought to mind a storm of frightful memories of suppressed anger and of infernal eternal hate.

The others did not notice what was happening to him; they read the message, laughed, talked about it for a while and went on. Nor could they have seen what was happening to him, because the pain and bitterness over his broken life, over his ruined youth was not apparent in the bronzed face, except that the jaw was set harder than usual.

About a kilometre farther on the same message was repeated: “Fiona passes regards to Medvin,” and again his heart pounded in his chest in spite of the coincidence in names.

This was repeated four times, as though some evil spirit was stalking his peace of mind.

Hryhory had worked his way to the front and now led the way accompanied by his misleading, disturbing thoughts. It was widely known that recently either a military investigation committee or some officials of the NKVD had been going around in the taiga. It was rumoured that they were about to build something somewhere, or perhaps to “clear the frontier of enemies of the people.” Perhaps it was both. While still in prison he had learned from those who had been in these parts before that many military projects were under way in this area. He had learned then that along the frontier they were building a complete line of fortifications and that many of the hillocks which looked innocent had been made into veritable fortresses. As to the second objective, that is clearing the frontier of enemies of the people, he had seen such operations carried out before.

These and many similar thoughts evoked by that name were now churning around in his head.

At the point where the Iman turned sharply to the right, southward, and continued to wind its way between the crests of Sikhote-Alin they turned to the left and went eastward.

Eventually they reached the Zmiyna where an old Udeg lived all alone in a cave. He had been there for many years awaiting his end. He was almost completely blind and for some unknown reason he was called "Inokenty Petrovich, the master of Yaurin." Yaurin was a place somewhere in the small Khinkhan, and he had lived there most of his life, completely alone in the vast area. He hunted and was his own master. When they opened gold mines there he left and wandered off into the wilderness, eventually coming here. He looked more like a dried mushroom than a human being. He caught fish, birds and occasionally a squirrel, and his catch netted him enough for some vile tobacco, some pressed tea, and matches. This seemed to be enough for him and in a silence accompanied only by his memories he awaited death. The good folks did not forget him and occasionally hunters came by and left things for him, even alcohol now and then. Like a little chipmunk he lived there and smoked his pipe with his eyes closed. Long ago he had been a Shaman among his tribe. Even now he knew how to get on with his gods and they guarded and protected him. No one knew what his real name was, he was just "Inokenty Petrovich". With this name he was an eloquent symbol of his tribe, the now half mythical tribe of Udegs which has reached the edge and is standing on the doorstep of extinction. It was that strange naive tribe of the children of nature who have now died out like small children as the result of the gifts of foreign colonization: from alcohol, syphilis, etc. These were the final days of the last of the Udegs, "the last of the Mohicans," without even a name. This patriarch, this high priest and bearer of the traditions and the national pride of his tribe was capable

of only one thing — going off to this unapproachable bush and dying branded with a foreign name.

Here Old Sirko left the horses, because it was in this area, near the upper reaches of the Yrin that the “cats” had been reported. They gave Inokenty Petrovich a block of pressed tea and some tobacco, and the shrivelled beardless old man was as happy as a child. Not being able to speak either Russian or Ukrainian he thanked them in sign language, and gave them to understand that he knew that they wanted him to look after the horses.

Now the tiger hunters prepared themselves for the job in hand: they put on their leather clothes made mostly of heavy rawhide, they packed their rucksacks with food and indispensable items. Hrytsko carried the small folded tent and around his waist some heavy rope. Natalka also carried rope and an axe. Hryhory carried an axe, rope, ammunition pouches and a campers’ cooking pot. Old Sirko was away for a long time in the bush selecting a stout straight staff about three yards long and about four inches thick, which he smoothed with an axe. They fixed their skis, slung the rifles over their shoulders, put the dogs on leashes and set off at a walking pace.

The terrible frosts and wind had “eaten up” the snow and what remained was hard packed and easily carried men and dogs except in the thickets where the snow was intact and sifted like sand. In spots it was knee deep, in the ravines and in sheltered places you could drown in it, and in the wide-open high spots there was hardly any snow at all.

On the way Old Sirko coached Hryhory about his forthcoming role. He had had many opportunities to test Hryhory who had passed each test to the old man’s satisfaction. Had it not been for that he would not have set out on this “cat hunt” this winter. But he took great care to instruct him on the techniques involved in this work.

"Now listen carefully and don't forget. You are taking the place of Mykola. You see, this thing depends on complete co-operation; if we stay by each other something will come of it. That is why we worked only as a family because an outsider is not likely to risk his head for one of us. Without that this business is impossible. . . .

"I don't know how they catch these cats in books; we have our own method — only four of us bare-handed, and the dogs, of course; you couldn't do it without them.

"Although a cat is big and clever, a human being is more clever. We do not catch mature ones because it cannot be done; we simply shoot them, and catch the young ones. They are just as big as the old ones but they weigh less — about three hundred pounds — and they are not as smart as the old cats. Even so it can grab a good-sized colt with its teeth, toss it over its back and carry it off, the devil knows how far. But when we get after it, it can never get away.

"The main thing is nerve, speed and yelling. Once we are upon it, then there must be yelling and shouting.

"At first the dogs chase it without giving it a chance to catch a breath. Probably it is not really afraid of the dogs, but we are always right behind them. The dogs chase it, sometimes a whole day, until it cannot run away any more. Then it makes for a rock or some other cover from one side, turns with its back to the cover and occupies a defensive position. The dogs attack and the cat fights back. Here is where we come in! This staff — that's the first thing. As soon as the cat sees a human being it forgets the dogs and turns against the person. I push the staff at the cat and it grabs at it with its jaws. The important thing is not to get frightened and to feint expertly. That is the way we did it: I went first with the staff; as soon as the cat seized it Mykola jumped on its back and put a noose around its neck. As he pulled it tight I tossed the staff away and grabbed its fore-paws

so that it could not claw Mykola. Brother, that has to be done quickly, before you can bat an eye, and above all you must yell with all your breath, with all your might, as though you were being cut to death. You see that petrifies the beast, its nerves can't take it, and it loses its strength. So don't be afraid when we begin shouting, don't think it has ripped open somebody's stomach (even if it has) but just yell too, as though your stomach has been ripped open. . . . Do you understand? Well, there you are.

"Another thing, don't be afraid of it, it's only a cat. And God forbid that you should hit it with anything. You might wound it and then all this effort will be for nothing; a wounded one will not fetch a quarter of the price. . . ."

As they walked they carefully examined all the thickets. Hrytsko and Natalka walked on the flanks, the old man kept a sharp lookout and continued talking:

"There are times when the cat will knock the staff out of your hands and throw itself at you. Then you have to seize it by the jaws and choke it so that it can't get you in its teeth. It happened to me once. . . . If you had to hold it that way for a minute then it would tear you and your clothes to shreds, but it lasted perhaps a second before the boys had the noose around its neck and legs and brought it down to the ground. My boys worked well! They wouldn't allow their father to be eaten up, so don't you allow it either because after it's through with me it will have you for dessert. That's how it is.

"When we begin chasing do not get ahead of the others and do not stay back. Watch me. One covers the rear because if you happen to meet a crafty one it will come around from the rear and dispose of us one by one before we know it. Now then, as soon as you see me give it the staff, mount it immediately, hold the rope this way, then slip it this way, and yell! Yell, but don't sleep

on the job, work fast or you won't even know when it snaps your head off. . . . Wait! . . ."

Natalka was standing holding back Zalivay and signaling to the others. They came immediately and Natalka pointed to two tracks in the snow. Two cats had gone through the deep snow. Old Sirko examined the tracks carefully.

"An old female and a two-year old, this morning, walked quietly, not hungry . . . on their way to a lair. . . ." He whispered this information.

Hryhory was amazed by the change in the dogs. They sniffed the tracks, the hair stood up straight on their backs, and they kept pulling on the leashes but not violently. Every now and then they looked up at the people as though seeking an answer to a question. They were well trained.

From the behaviour of the dogs Hryhory could see that they had come across tigers. Zalivay was so angry that he shook all over. Natalka had to hold him by the collar, not trusting the leash. He only growled deep in his throat knowing well he was not allowed to bark or howl.

"The important thing now is to break up that pair skillfully"—old Sirko doffed his cap and crossed himself—"Grant us O God!" Then he pulled the cap down firmly: "Well children, watch yourselves!"

They untied their ropes, prepared them carefully and slung them over their necks. Each loaded his rifle and slung it over his back in order to have the hands free. Sirko turned to Hryhory:

"Watch carefully. When I shout and start shooting, then you shoot straight in the air, load and shoot again and shout, then sling your rifle behind your back and follow me with all your might. And don't look back!"

Sirko took Rooshay, Hrytsko took Neptra and Natalka took Zalivay and they began following the tracks. Sirko

went first, then Hryhory, then Hrytsko and finally Natalka. She carried the Winchester in her hands and kept looking to the sides and to the rear. Her job had already begun because cats are treacherous specially when there is an old female with a young one. The cat could easily be near by, even now planning a campaign of action against her enemies.

The tracks were mostly parallel, only now and then crossing each other. They went into the worst thickets where a hunter will not ordinarily go. In specially dangerous spots old Sirko would go around never dropping his eyes from the tracks and at the same time examining every rock and windfall for any sign of the beasts.

Hryhory tried to mobilize all his hunter's faculties, specially sight. A pain developed in his temples from concentrating on Sirko and the area in front. Hours passed as they covered mile after mile over high clearings, through valleys and impassable thickets. The tracks went on and on in a southerly direction from one patch of thick underbrush to another, over rocks and sometimes over clearings . . . every moment they could expect to spot them, right here and now. . . .

They followed the tracks well into the afternoon without stopping to eat. In one place the tigers had danced around under a tree and Sirko inspected everything carefully. Then Natalka spoke: "Look up there in the tree."

There, about ten feet off the ground, between two stout branches of an oak tree they saw a beautiful black tail. "A sable! Who could have set the trap?" Although it was forbidden to trap sables, they took it since it had already been trapped. Here Hryhory understood the meaning of the various traps that he and Hrytsko had set. He also learned how careful the "cats" are; they milled around here for some time but they did not take

the sable, having sensed that a human being had been here.

Hrytsko put the sable in his bag: "One can't just leave two thousand five hundred to rot. The depot will accept it as Kamchatka sable."

Farther on they found the spot where the tigers had rested, under a tree. Old Sirko stopped and felt the snow, looked around, thought for a while and shrugged his shoulders. He concluded that the tigers had been there recently but that they might have been scared away. A little later they came upon some tracks of wild boar, and quickened their pace because the tiger tracks showed that the cats were now hunting.

Under the constant physical and nervous strain they forgot about food and continued following the cats until dusk, when the tracks led them to a river. "Dawbikhe" said the old man, speaking like a conductor announcing the next station.

The tigers had stood on the shore, looked at the snow-covered river with the sleigh tracks. These tracks and probably the scent of horses and humans made them turn sharply up and away from the river. The wild boar tracks continued straight across the river.

"Stop," said old Sirko. "Nobody hunts tigers at night." The river meandered here between the high clearings and at this point formed a sharp bend. Sirko decided to camp right there. They put up the tent, pushed away the snow, collected a pile of dry wood and twigs and cut down some pine and spruce branches. They made a fire and boiled two rounds of tea, and ate their meat raw in thin shavings dipped in salt.

After supper Hrytsko skinned the sable which had thawed out by then. "Well, what do you think of it, father?" asked Hrytsko admiring the pelt. Old Sirko was an expert in furs. He picked up the pelt, examined it, described its good points and added in the tone of the

inspector at the depot: "There will be a fine of two thousand or six months in jail! But since it is his own fault for sticking his nose where he wasn't invited, we will report him as originating in Kamchatka or Sakhalin where hunting sables is permitted."

The sable was really beautiful. The top glistened with a bluish-black cast and beneath that was a sky-blue down. Hrytsko held the sable next to his sister's face: "This will be yours, my child, if you catch the cat."

They set out with the first light of dawn, leaving the tent and everything else that wasn't absolutely indispensable. Apart from their hunting equipment they took only matches, some food and a flask of spirits. The old man figured that during the day they would catch up with and corner those cats "and if not today then at the latest tomorrow."

The tracks wound back and forth as they did the day before; they could even see claw marks where there was little snow. In spots where the snow was deeper and covered by a hardened crust one of the tracks broke through constantly. "That's the mother. A heavy devil! Might be over 700 pounds." This gave them further assurance that the other one was young: between 200 and 300 pounds. Even so he would be as tall as the old one, only much thinner. He hadn't yet picked up his full weight and strength, and of course, experience. That was why he was still with his mother.

Suddenly everything moved with lightning speed. In front of a thick undergrowth old Sirko dropped the staff and picked up his Winchester. Hryhory saw the quick movement of a striped body and then there was a shot! A huge cat leaped upward as though propelled by a spring. Hryhory fired at the animal, and other shots echoed from the rear. The old man was now shouting and screaming like a Tatar or a Chechen. At the same time he was firing into the air and moving quickly after the second

animal which flashed by and disappeared. Released from his leash, Rooshay dashed off like the wind, followed almost immediately by Zalivay and Nepra, their howling adding to the infernal noise, which reverberated through the taiga.

Hryhory skied with all his might and, following the old man's example, slung the rifle over his back, ready for anything.

Natalka had turned and fired once more into the huge beast which was lying in the snow, pawing the air. Then she caught up with her brother and pleaded:

"Hrytsko, dear brother, I will follow him! I will be the third . . . look after the tail. . . ."

This wild, mad chase went on for one, two hours; but it seemed endless. Hryhory was afraid of only one thing: could he stand up to it, would he have enough strength, would he pass the crucial test? For the lives of beloved people, the life of the old man was now clearly in his hands.

The dogs were always within earshot, and their barking was punctuated now and then by howling and yelping. Then the old man pressed on harder and his frightful shouts echoed through the bush. It was his way of encouraging man and dog and of reminding the cat that, like relentless death, he was right here on its tracks.

Tiger and dog tracks zig-zagged right and left; often the top crust of snow could not hold the cat and it broke through deep into the snow. In places there were brown blood spots in the snow — the cat couldn't keep up this pace for long. . . .

"Hurry up, hurry up," yelled the old man, "we will lose the dogs, it will tear them to shreds. . . ."—and in the meantime the branches sticking out over the winding, tortuous course they followed were tearing gashes in their faces.

Now the yelping of the dogs was quite near, and old

Sirko put on the heavy rawhide gloves which he had shed before. They could see the dogs in front of them dashing around beneath an overhanging rock. Immediately the old man slipped off his skis and holding the staff like a spear, went forward. . . . Hryhory bent down for a split second to his skis when Natalka went past and he only saw in an instant how she slipped her skis and they went sizzling past his own skis.

Later he often recalled this moment but could not reconstruct exactly how all this happened. He was the first to reach father Sirko. . . . He only remembered how Natalka yelled . . . how he leaped with every ounce of strength . . . a struggle . . . a deafening mixture of human, dog and tiger sounds . . . how he slipped on the noose and immediately found himself at the bottom clinging to the tiger's neck . . . how everything rolled over him . . . and how he tried to shout with his eyes and mouth filled with snow. . . .

The whole thing lasted perhaps ten seconds, but it seemed to him that it lasted through eternity . . . and then a sudden silence and Natalka's frightened face peering into his . . . and then friendly laughter. . . .

"Let him go!"—that was old Sirko, laughing, dishevelled and perspiring—"let him go or you will choke him. . . ."

"Is it all over?"—the din above fell apart and he was dragged out of the heavily trampled snow. Only now Hryhory could see how he had dug his bare hands into the brown mane and froze in that position . . . and he remembered that he had taken off the rawhide gloves so that they would not get in the way. . . .

The beast lay almost motionless, now and then twitching convulsively. Hryhory finally opened his fingers that had gone rigid. The seconds of general fear and apprehension had now turned into the prolonged laughter of relief. He was intact, nothing had been bitten off or

broken. The tension was released; Hryhory, covered with snow, and exhausted, joined in the general mirth. Hrytsko was beside himself: "And I was sure that it had eaten you. I could only see your deer shoes sticking out of the snow."

They rested and picked up their belongings. Some things like rounds of ammunition, had to be dug out of the snow. The old man's cap was the last thing they found.

A large striped cat lay on the trampled snow. Its legs were tied together both ways, and a noose was pulled tight over its neck. It seemed to be dead; only the tail shook a little and curled slowly like a green twig in the fire. Occasionally a frightened convulsive tremor ran down its whole body.

"It's dying," spoke up Hrytsko in fright, "the noose is too tight!"

"Don't worry," the old man quieted him down, "this is a cat; you can't choke it as easily as that."

They looked over the damage to themselves and to the dogs. Old Sirko's jaw was bleeding from a deep scratch which he dismissed lightly. He couldn't even remember whether it happened during the chase or here. Nataalka had a good-sized bump on her head either from a rifle butt or from somebody's forehead. Hrytsko was all right except for his rear which he rubbed on the sly. Apparently after it had been tied, the beast had kicked out with its hind legs and sat him heavily on a rock. Outwardly Hryhory looked perfectly intact; the fact that his ribs ached and that his lip was cut inside was a personal secret.

The dogs lay in a row on the snow with their tongues hanging out as though it were midsummer. But they were much worse off. Rooshay had a torn ear, and Zalivay had a large chunk of skin torn loose on his side. He was licking it, carefully picking up the loose skin and

spreading it back over the wound with his tongue. Old Sirko pulled out a knife and cut off the loose skin; the intelligent dog only yelped a little and then licked the old man's hand.

"Never mind, this isn't too bad; it will grow over. . . ."

Things were much worse with Nepra. Somewhere along the chase she had pierced her eye and now it was flowing with blood and tears. She looked sadly at the humans. Sirko examined the eye and shook his head: "Well, perhaps it will be all right . . . it's a pity . . . yet there never was a war without victims . . . perhaps it will pull through." He then walked over to the motionless cat and loosened the noose. He muttered happily: "This is truly good fortune. One of us is lucky!" He found his staff and pushed it through between the cat's legs. Then he went to work making a cage.

While he worked on the cage, tying it together out of stout poles, Natalka and the boys collected the skis, made a fire and began preparing a meal. They were just beginning to realize how hungry they were.

"Look, boys," shouted Sirko after a while, "this is the Sobor!" These rocks where the dogs finally cornered the tiger were well known to the old man. Hunters referred to them as the Sobor because they resembled a ruined church. They stood there separately like a building, worn down by wind, rain, frost and time. There were caves among the rocks; it was an ancient haunt of tigers.

"Go over in that direction," he pointed with the axe. Hryhory and Hrytsko put on their skis and went off.

Before long they reached the spot where the two cats had been scared off; coming from a different direction they were amazed to find themselves on the spot where the chase had begun at morning. After a while they found the other cat. It was a huge female, a terrifying example of an old Ussurian tiger. She lay there stiff on the trampled snow. Blood was spattered all around on the snow and

the open jaws were filled with frozen bloody foam. She had received a mortal wound from the first shot and there were four more bullet holes in the body, the last one apparently right through the head.

Hryhory was amazed at the sight. They tied the fore legs together and then put a rope around the legs and the head and hitched themselves to the rope.

"We will ruin the skin," complained Hryhory.

"That's nothing," said Hrytsko. "This skin is worth only one fiftieth of that little sable. Let's go."

"Why so cheap? I should have thought. . . ."

"I don't know why. We never skin a dead tiger; we deliver it to the depot just as it is. The biggest one will fetch about one thousand at the depot. They sell them, entrails and all, somewhere in China."

The tiger moved easily over the crusted snow, and they soon had the dead one near the living. When they got their bearings they discovered that they had gone around in circles all day and had caught the live one almost on the same spot where they had begun chasing it.

The cage was ready. It was about nine feet long, low and narrow. The top was open. In the meantime the young tiger was coming back to life, and the old man hurried: "Come along, youngsters. Let's take it."

They lifted the cat, using the staff stuck between its legs, and placed it in the cage. Old Sirko covered the top with stout pieces that he had prepared, drove the pegs home firmly and tried each of them for strength. When he was satisfied he pulled out the staff from between the legs.

"Well, praised be the Lord! Now we shall have breakfast, lunch, supper and a snack. . . ."

It was getting too dark to travel so they spent the night there. They cleared away the snow and the rocks provided shelter. They made a large fire and slept better than they would have on a stove. But before falling

asleep they talked for a long time. As usual after a successful venture the old man was in good humour and had a talking streak. He recounted many events and speculated. He spoke as he dug around in the fire:

"You see, how intelligently everything is arranged in this world. This cat, for instance, bears only one and then not every year, because if they bred like mice or pigs the tigers would have devoured everything in the world long ago. It seems that the bigger and the fiercer the animal the less it breeds, and the smaller he is the more he breeds. Why are so many mice born? Because everything eats them: polecat, marten, skunk, and ermine, and the owl and the fox, all feed upon them. So they have to breed fast and in large numbers so that their race should not die out. But no animal eats a bear or this cat. On the contrary, they need a great deal of food and that is why they breed so slowly."

Yes, the old man had seen much of life, had thought a good deal about it, and in such matters could easily have advised many learned professors.

"And you know, one thing sticks to another like a flea to a sheepskin coat. If you want to find a skunk look for mice, if you want to find a wolf look for a deer, if you want to find this tiger look for wild boars; you see they are all shepherds and they are all specialists—engineers. . . ."

Now and then there was a burst of laughter, specially when the old man spoke about people, about his meetings with town people, about his observations and his unexpected conclusions.

In the morning they set out for the camp where they had left their tent. Four pairs of skis were fastened together and the cage was placed on the top to form a kind of sleigh. The dead one was tied on to the sleigh.

They reached the tent about noon. Now there occurred a minor incident which soon grew in significance and put

an end to the epic hunt. All this happened quickly and beyond recall, like a sudden fire, an avalanche or an earthquake which hit where they are least expected.

The tent stood intact and awaited its owners. They were surprised upon coming near: the tent was untouched and empty but someone had been there and had spent the night. Lower down on the ice there were the remains of hay where the horses had stood. Whoever had stayed there had drunk up all the spirit in one container and had taken another away.

"Where is the sable?" inquired Nataalka.

"I hung it here. . . ."

"It's gone . . . and the axe we left here is gone."

Old Sirko frowned: "It was not a local person," he muttered through his teeth. "The devils, there were two of them. They were not of the taiga — taiga people would not break the law. . . ."

They went down to the river and examined the tracks which showed that the sleigh had left recently, down the Dawbikhe to the Iman. . . .

Hryhory looked round near the tent and found the butt of an expensive cigarette, the "Golden Brand." His heart beat violently. . . . Silently, before the others could come back from the river, he freed his skis from under the cage, fastened them and set out. On the way he loaded his rifle. He went straight through the bush, across the neck of land formed by the winding Dawbikhe.

Hryhory knew the course of the river in this area, and he knew that if he went cross-country he could out-strip even an express train if it followed the course of the river. The only question was time but from the tracks near the tent it was apparent that the "guests" had left not more than an hour before. He moved fast as though he were chasing the tiger again.

Eventually he reached the river and the momentum carried him out on the ice. He listened but there was no

sound; only a shot in the distance. He noticed horses' hoof marks which were quite fresh; they must have just gone by. Beyond this point the river made a large arc to the right around a high clearing and on the other side of the clearing it joined the Iman. Hryhory sighted a straight line along the centre of the clearing and started out again. . . . Again he reached the river bank with such speed that he was carried well out on the ice off the steep bank. He turned sharply; and immediately took down his rifle. . . .

A pair of horses came galloping around the turn. The wind blew in Hryhory's back. Not so long ago he was dragging a live and a dead tiger — their hair was still stuck to his clothes and his hands still bore marks of tiger blood. . . . Now he went forward rifle in hand, to meet the oncoming sleigh. Two figures who had been sitting in the sleigh covered up to their ears now threw aside the blankets and displayed a "Budenivka" and a Yezhov cap. They reached for their weapons.

Suddenly the horses caught the scent of the tiger, snorted, reared and turned sharply and sent the sleigh and its contents flying.

Hryhory glued his eyes to the two figures and didn't even notice how the maddened team of horses made a large arc around him and galloped off with the overturned sleigh bouncing after them.

One of the figures got up and made a move towards the wooded shore. The other was desperately trying to ready a rifle, and finally pulled out a pistol.

"Stand still!" shouted Hryhory. "Drop the pistol! Up with your hands! Three paces sideways! Stand there!"

Hryhory walked up to them, and suddenly his heart pounded madly in his chest. His eyes sank fang-like into the one in the Yezhov cap . . . and then he burst out in uproarious, frightening, joyful laughter.

“MEDVIN!”

My God! This moment, this moment of wonder, of irrepressible gladness. Yes, there is a God on earth and in heaven! Here he was, here was the one between whom and Hryhory even God could not find justice.

And Medvin, that brave hero, that terrible judge and master of the souls of “puny folks” and detestable thief and breaker of the law of the taiga, stood there and trembled . . . yes, trembled, even his lips trembled, and the eyes betrayed the soul of a loathsome coward. Three bars on his collar — like three splashes of blood.

“The great chief himself? Yes . . . Greetings. . . .”

The other one, with only one bar, a regional chief, was stepping backwards stealthily. “The devil paired them up,” thought Hryhory and then spoke up:

“Well, that must be all, ‘comrade investigator’! That’s everything . . . the investigation is finished,” and then his voice became slow and hard:

“Right now I shall be your tribunal!”

He raised the rifle and shot. The other man turned and made for the forest. Hryhory watched him and listened to his vengeful heart hammering in his breast. . . . The one who was running away turned and fired from his revolver. By that time he had almost reached the bank.

“Is that the way you were taught to shoot?” announced Hryhory. Almost absent-mindedly he raised his rifle and fired. The figure threw up its arms, waved them in the air and rolled down the steep bank.

For a moment Hryhory stood motionless. His thoughts flew by on the wings of a hurricane. . . . Yes, That was everything — now to Manchuria, to China, to Japan or straight to the devil. . . . There it was. Now everything was cut off with one stroke — enemies, friends, and peace of mind — everything. . . .

“Wait! Nobody is responsible for my actions.” He

looked over the clean expanse of snow and then wrote with his finger in large letters:

"Judged, and the judgement executed by me — Hryhory Mnohohrishny. As to the crime — this dog knows very well." And then he signed it.

So . . . I wonder where those poor horses went? They will die. . . . A pity. . . . Well. . . . He stood for a moment, sighed, waved his hand, hung his rifle over his neck and turned to go. And there stood Nataalka looking straight at him!

"What have you done?"

Hryhory took her by the hand and led her away. She did not struggle — she walked quietly after him but he felt her hand trembling. It did not tremble from fear.

"What have you done?"

"Listen, Nataalka! What I did I had to do. Do you understand? I have killed a dragon. You didn't see it; do you understand, you didn't see it! When I am far away from here — then tell your people about it. . . ."

She looked at him and her lips began to tremble. Her whispered question betrayed surprise and consternation:

"Where will you go?"

"Wait. Is your Winchester registered?"

"No."

"That's good. Give me your Winchester and you take this rifle. It isn't registered either but . . . perhaps father will look after it. . . ."

"But wait, please wait. . . . All right, you did what you thought had to be done . . . perhaps you know best, but where will you go?"

Dear God, how much human feeling can be expressed in so few words! All those things she kept quiet about for months. . . . Hryhory felt a sharp tightening around the throat. And the girl continued:

"It is absolutely safe . . . in our place. . . . And we could go farther into the wilderness. . . ."

Hryhory took her hand and held it tightly.

"Don't be silly, little girl. You don't know who it is. In a week they will turn this wilderness upside down. They will search — this is an important dog. But, now I know there is a God in heaven! Yes there is! He hammered my kidneys, broke my bones, crushed my youth and tried to scratch my heart. . . . He tortured me for two years, and then sent me to an insane asylum; and all that just because I loved my fatherland. And in the name of my mother I swore then that I would have his head for that. I escaped from the asylum . . . they caught me, and others of his type tortured me again. . . . Then they sentenced me to twenty-five years! I am only twenty-five now! And all that because I loved my unfortunate land and people. . . .

"I swore that I would kill any of them like mad dogs. I escaped from the prisoner convoy. They were taking me from Ukraine to penal servitude, to a slow death and they guarded me like blood hounds. But I escaped. I jumped from that death train — into the night, to death, to fortune.

"And I had good fortune. . . . I found my way to you. Yes, I had good fortune; the brave are always fortunate as your mother would say. . . . Embrace her for me and kiss her for me . . . sister."

And then Natalka clung close to him and wept bitterly, helplessly, like a child. They were parting. This was forever. And she kissed him, hungrily, desperately; she put her very soul into that kiss.

Then she broke away suddenly, clenched her teeth, quickly slipped off her ammunition pouch, gave it to him and took his arm in return.

She turned and went away quickly . . . stopped . . . wavered, then turned again and disappeared. After a while he heard her voice from the thickets. It was almost sombre and betrayed the tears that welled beneath:

"Follow this brook until you reach the shelter . . . take

a horse, food . . . and matches. . . . Father will not say anything. . . . I will explain to him when we get back. Then follow the valleys westward . . . to the Ussuri . . . and to Manchuria. . . .”

Tears did not let her finish what she might have wanted to say.

Poor . . . proud, primitive . . . naive and exceptional Nataoka. . . .

Hryhory felt as though his heart was being squeezed by powerful tongs. He stood and clenched his jaws until they ached to keep himself from shouting wildly, desperately. Down his cheek rolled one solitary tear; it escaped somehow, as he had once escaped from a dashing train.

A heavy, flaky snow began to fall. It covered footsteps; it covered everything. . . . And a row of snowflakes, like white doves, sat along the sights of the Winchester.

I I

Nothing Venture, Nothing Win

From the West the frontier approaches Khabarovsk along the Amur, and from Khabarovsk southward it follows the Ussuri. The best place to cross the frontier is in Birobidjan where the forest is more primitive, the Amur is narrowest and bordered on both sides by the Great Khinkhan. Hryhory knew this. He had learned this perfectly long ago, just in case. Now the moment had come. But could he . . . No! He couldn't go just like that. He must go back there, to see — just a glimpse — for the last time. He must see father, and mother . . . perhaps the only close and dear ones on this earth. He must say good-bye, he must kneel before them and ask their blessing for this long journey, into the dark, frightening unknown . . . perhaps even death.

For three days he walked through the snow suffering this internal strife. He could not, in the end, control this desire to go back. He must.

He had reached the shelter and stood beside the horses near the hay stack. They recognized him and whinnied. He patted his horse and looked to see that everything was well. The hunters were to be back shortly. He did not dare take a horse but he took food, matches, a bottle of spirit and a handful of rounds. Inokenty Petrovich was not at home and Hryhory was glad. He took what he

needed and went. That had happened the day before yesterday. Yesterday he broke through the ice and had to dry himself. This went on all night and all night he thought the same thing, over and over again. Yesterday he had also seen a little procession going along the river. "Ours" it occurred to him. He wanted to shout and run after them but instead he only sighed.

The procession moved slowly along the ice. The horses pulled a long sleigh loaded with the tiger and all their belongings. There was one skier in the front and two in the rear. A dog ran back and forth barking a complaint; nobody seemed to pay any attention to him. Hryhory felt an ache in his heart . . . there was Nataalka . . . there was Nataalka. She was leading the way, leaning forward against the wind. He visualized her determined look and his heart. . . . No, you can't say what is in the heart when it is bathing in blood.

The party soon disappeared around that icy waterfall that glittered in the sun. A mighty mountain god had waved his wand and frozen the giant, painted him in all the colours of the rainbow, fitted him out with transparent glassy armour — and now he stood there glistening with cold light.

Hryhory continued to stand there for a long time listening to Zalivay's barking in the distance and he stood until long after the sound was gone.

* * *

It was still dark, there was just a suggestion of dawn, but a fire was already burning in the home of Sirko.

Hearing a slight noise in the distance the dogs started barking. Hryhory whistled softly and the dogs were soon at his side dashing back and forth, greeting him happily. They smelled the Winchester and were mad with joy.

A beam of light lay on the snow. As usual, the Sirko family was up early. But perhaps they hadn't been to bed,

maybe something had happened. No, things were as usual; they must be getting ready to go to town. . . .

With his head bent low, old Sirko sat on a bunk fully dressed. He sat there frowning as though trying to figure out what else he should wear — a fur coat, or a deer skin jacket; should he saddle the bay or the chestnut?

Natalka sat sewing deer shoes made out of the hide of an *isubra*. She was embroidering them with white fluff. She was pale, and sullen like her father. Her head followed her work from left to right but her mind seemed far away.

Hrytsko sat near the fire trying to pour buckshot, going deer-hunting; but the work wasn't going well.

Mother Sirko was cleaning frozen cranberries which looked like drops of blood, or perhaps a broken string of beads.

There was a depressing silence in the house, the same kind of depressing silence that had overwhelmed them on the way home when, in a few words, Natalka told them what she had seen and what Hryhory had told her. When they reached home, she broke into tears, and kissed her mother.

Hrytsko was angry with his adopted brother for disregarding their friendship and going away without even a farewell. His heart boiled when he heard his sister's account. My God! He didn't have the slightest notion! His immediate reaction was to go back to search but he soon realized that it was too late; and he was silent. Silence was the only thing left in the name of that friendship. It was the same with Natalka and with Sirko — like a conspiracy.

It was high time they were getting ready to go to the depot in the city to deliver their catch, but the old man didn't seem to be in a hurry. Somewhere out there in the cage the cat had put out his paws and raised his proud head; in a detached, motionless way he was looking straight ahead with his big damp eyes. For three days he had not

taken any food, but he could do that for five days without dying. It was a proud and sturdy animal . . . and the old man's thoughts continued to wander between the proud creature and. . . .

There was a sudden sound in the hall. The latch clicked . . . a cloud of frosty vapour rolled into the room, and changed into a man. Hryhory closed the door and stood there.

The Winchester was slung over his shoulder, snow and ice clung to his clothes up to his arm-pits, his lower garments were frozen stiff, the ammunition pouches were crossed over his chest, the upper garments were open and his chest was covered with perspiration. He stood there dead-still. He looked exhausted and wind-burned; and he smiled in a childish way.

"You didn't expect me," he said hoarsely.

The cranberries were flying all over the floor. "Oh, my God!" whispered the mother, and with outstretched arms moved to the door. "Oh, my son, my poor child!" and maternal tears flowed down her cheeks like those spilled cranberries over the floor. "What have you done, you poor unfortunate boy?"

Hryhory gave in to some invisible force, and without realizing what he was doing he took off his cap and fell to his knees. He could find only one word: —"Mother. . . ." The severe strain brought out heavy veins on his face.

"My son, my son. God . . . God will forgive you, child. . . . God, and the Mother of God will judge you." She tried to help him up but she could not see him through her tears.

"Don't worry, don't worry . . ." spoke up old Sirko with satisfaction, "a Cossack's deed is for a Cossack!"

He had stood there since Hryhory walked in. Hryhory rose and looked questioningly into the old man's eyes. But the old man hid them under his bushy eyebrows where they seemed to be smiling to each other under the frown. They

stood there facing each other like Taras Bulba and Andriy, except that this was not Andriy, this was Hryhory and his head was not hanging down in shame; it was held high, proud and determined.

The old man nodded his head, satisfied:

"I knew you would come, son, yes I did. . . . Well, then. . . ."

There was utter silence. Nataalka had dropped her work and now stood deathly pale without uttering a word. How could anyone know or describe what was happening to her! Her eyes were devouring the newcomer. Her brother looked at her, then at Hryhory, and turned away. He knew his sister and he understood what this meant.

"Yes, I came. . . . But I must hurry. . . . I came to say good-bye to all of you. . . . Please forgive me if I have done anything wrong, perhaps we shall not see each other again (and he smiled here), except in the next world. . . ."

His eyes moved from one to the other and finally met Nataalka's. The girl blushed; she read in his eyes what was in his heart. Tears welled in her eyes and the crimson blush slowly turned to a deathly pallor. Through an inner storm she heard:

"I must hurry . . . forgive me and wish me well as I wish well for you! . . ."

She stamped her foot, then turned suddenly and went out, apparently to the pantry.

"God will forgive you, my son," said the mother as she wiped her tears, "forgive us too, if sometimes. . . ."

"May God bless your way, son!" said father Sirko solemnly. "It's a pity but . . . put a few things together for him for the road. . . . Don't delay, son, because it will be daylight soon. Do you know the way?"

"Yes, I know" said Hryhory. "I have been studying it for some time . . . I thought perhaps in the spring, but. . . ."

"Be careful. In Manchuria — in Kharbin and in

Sokhalin there are relatives of ours. But you know that already. . . .”

Hryhory nodded his head. “Thank you.”

“Well let us sit down so that we may meet again. . . .”

In keeping with an old custom, they sat down, Hryhory at the end of the bench. They sat in silence for a minute, and then, as though in response to a signal, they rose and began their farewells.

The mother, again in tears, brought Hryhory a fully packed rucksack. Sirko, with difficulty, tried to close a button on his breast.

“May health be with you, son! Have you enough ammunition? Good. . . .”

At this moment Natalka returned. As she walked in she was still in the process of fastening an ammunition pouch; otherwise she was fully dressed as though she were going hunting. There was a determined look in the set of her lips and eyebrows. She was still very pale, but she was calm. She came in and stood beside Hryhory.

“And where are you going, daughter?” said the mother clasping her hands. The old man half closed his eyes, evidently disturbed. Natalka stood bareheaded in front of Hryhory and looked at him, questioningly, painfully . . . it was a short, no, endless moment. And she found her answer in those eyes, in that mixture of love and regret occasioned by the consciousness of an unfulfilled happiness. Then she took him by a hand in which the blood thumped violently, and knelt before her disconcerted parents.

“Oh, my God!” was all the mother could say. Natalka looked at them through glistening eyes with faint crystal tears and unalterable determination:

“They may kill me . . . but if I am destined to be happy, then, mother, let that happiness come my way. And you, father . . . ! Bless me. . . .!”

There was a period of depressing silence. Tears filled Natalka's eyes:

"I will be responsible for my deeds . . . before God and man; no, before God and you. . . ."

Father Sirko looked grimly and questioningly at Hryhory who moved as though to speak. But Natalka forestalled him.

"Hryhory has no right to speak! I know what he will say, but he will be lying. . . .! He will deceive himself for my sake. . . .

"I have maintained a stony silence for months. I struggled with myself. . . . I did not know, but today — I know — now I know, that otherwise I shall die. I am blood of your blood, I am your daughter . . . don't destroy me!" Again there was silence, and then Natalka pleaded once more:

"Father! Let me be happy, please. Perhaps I will be happy!" and she added reproachfully, "I have never defied your wishes, but I have your heart; you gave it to me, such as it is . . . let God be the judge."

Old Sirko saw that there was nothing he could do. Yes, that was the voice of Sirko blood! Listen to it! And he listened to his daughter and looked at Hryhory from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Birds of a feather," and there was a suggestion of a smile in one of the brow-hidden eyes.

"Let God be the judge. . . ."

She was about to rise but Hryhory, seeing what this might lead to, that Natalka might defy her father for his sake, went down on his knees beside her and bowed his head low.

"That's the way it is, mother," said Sirko.

Natalka caught the tone in her father's voice and hastened:

"If I should perish — what of it? Mykola perished . . . but if he dies — then at least I will know where his body

lies and I will come back to you. But do not stand in the way of our happiness, father! Mother! After all you can't escape death even on horseback. Mykola. . . ."

Her mother could no longer stand it and turned to her husband in tears:

"Why are you silent, father? That is your seed!" There was no reproach in her voice — only confusion and sympathy. She had solved with her heart what the old man was about to solve with his mind.

"Such are the times . . . such is life . . . well what can you do. . . ."

That was all that the old woman needed. She wiped her tears, took down the ikon — her own blessing — and making every effort to appear cheerful (so that her daughter might be happy) she blessed it, passed it to the old man and then stood by him and cried.

"Never mind, old woman! God is not without mercy. . . . May the ways before you be smooth, and the people hospitable, and may you be happy all your lives, so that neither forces of darkness nor the evil eye, nor an enemy bullet . . . there you are . . . and don't delay, children!"

"Don't worry . . . I know every road and trail . . . and there I will have my aunt and so many relatives. We will take Zalivay and he will bring you a message when we reach safety. . . ."

She kissed her parents and her brother, and she radiated happiness.

"You will see, everything will be fine. We will invite you to the wedding."

The old man nodded his head and smiled as he looked at his daughter:

"Sirko blood."

"May God grant it," said mother, "and take this, you scatterbrain . . ." and she poured out a handful of old gold coins, rings and brooches. Then she took a gold cross

from her neck and put it on her daughter's, "It may come in handy." She embraced them both and wept.

It was getting light outside. Hrytsko made a move to accompany them but Natalka stopped him, put her arms around him and looked tenderly at him:

"He is your adopted brother — leave him to me, I will be responsible for him. Yes? Mother and father are left to you and you are responsible for them. Give me your word that you will not do foolish things, and that you will look after them. And when you marry you will stay near them." When he gave his word she kissed him.

Before the day fully dawned two armed figures on skis, with rucksacks on their backs emerged from Sirko's homestead into the frosty air. With them was a large Yakut dog. They crossed the valley and disappeared into the bush.

* * *

One night, at one of the outposts on the Manchurian border near the Pashkov village where the Amur, squeezed between two mountain ranges, flows in a clear narrow ribbon, there was a general alarm. Shouting went on along a wide front. It began as the result of a distant fire and several explosions. Then it moved to Pashkov and finally spread for about 10 kilometres on either side . . . it seemed to be a general skirmish between Japan and the USSR. But all this was only a pursuit of "frontier violators" who made an armed foray across the frontier of the "socialist fatherland". Except that it wasn't known which way they crossed. The night was very dark, the forest thick and the guard had too good a reputation to discover under the circumstances who was going where and where the border is being pierced. The confusion was terrific.

The "diversionists", not so much brave and experienced as reckless, dared to cross the frontier in the least expected place — in Pashkov itself, the little town stuck to the

shores of the Amur, where the roads are well travelled and tracks are easily covered, and where the Amur is covered by high and twisting hummocks. To do that they had to cross a village, a one-time Cossack station, now de-Kulakized and converted into a border collective farm, with a broken-down roof and bare rafters. This was the extreme edge of Birobidjan. The former Cossack inhabitants, or "Hurans" as they were called, escaped into Manchuria and the place was now inhabited by patriots of the fatherland from Berdichiw, Tula and Orlov. In any case the "diversionists" knew this and decided to cross right next to the border control point. But before that they created a well-thought-out diversion.

This is how it happened:

Just before twilight two persons on skis, accompanied by a large dog, approached stealthily and crossing the crest of a distant hill, stood and studied the terrain. Far in the distance on the shores of the Amur they could see snow-covered Pashkov. The whole of the left bank of the Amur was fairly low, with here and there a hillock covered with copses, dry grass and weeds. To the south this low land was cut by a high range of hills covered with bush. This range continued right up to Pashkov, and along it ran a road.

The right bank of the Amur, on the Manchurian side was mountainous. The blue crests of the great Khinkhan reached to the sky. The great Khinkhan on the right, and this range of hills on the left squeezed the Amur, forming a narrow gorge.

"There!" Hryhory waved his arm.

Then they found a large snow-covered haystack — God knows when and by whom it was cut — and brought to it some dry branches and a few armfuls of dry weeds. Then Hryhory found two stout pieces of wood, dug several holes in them in which he placed several rounds of ammunition, and placed these in the hay. He pulled out a handful

of cotton from the padded jacket, and into this cotton he put some gunpowder wrapped in a piece of newspaper which they had found in an abandoned forestry barrack in Birobidjan where they had spent their last night in this country. He placed this preparation into a pile of dry grass.

Now they placed their hopes in this invention, their skis and their weapons. . . . When it got darker, Hryhory placed a smouldering fuse in the cotton, they put on their skis and quickly departed, making a wide arc aimed at Pashkov. They had reached the cemetery outside Pashkov when far behind them in the hills a fire broke out. It was later followed by a series of explosions. . . .

From the border point on the Amur several shots replied. There was an alarm in Pashkov, and someone was heard to shout, "Sergeiev! Come here!"

A cavalry detachment galloped out of Pashkov toward the hills. Two figures and a dog walked on to Pashkov. They cut across the square and were just turning round the corner of a large building near the river when they ran into a figure hurrying in their direction.

"Stop!" the figure yelled in a drunken voice. This was the chief of the border guard himself hurrying to his duties, and doing up his belt on the way.

"Stranger!" came an urgent call from the girl, and at that moment the dog struck at the chest of the stranger and grabbed him with his huge jaws. At the same time the butt of a Winchester was applied across his head, and the stranger fell.

"Come here, Zalivay", and the two figures and the dog disappeared in the darkness.

Firing went on along the border, tearing bright chunks out of the darkness. The Japanese border guards had also sent an alarm up and down the lines. Only in front of Pashkov, where the mountain fastness was impassable, was it quiet. From the distance came several loud reports and

a machine gun chattered in response. There was quite a commotion . . . a flare was fired from Pashkov and it lit up the crest of the great Khinkhan and the Amur covered with hummocks with its blinding deathly light. . . . Frightened dogs howled in the distance.

The flare floated in the sky; and myriads of shadows floated among the hummocks. You couldn't make out whether those were living creatures dashing about, looking for a place to hide or just a mirage. Great chunks of ice, set edgewise at various angles, came to life with fantastic movements. A machine gun chattered near by along the Amur. Bullets whined and ricocheted off the ice blocks. Another flare went up farther away, and was followed by similar gun play. The "centre of battle" had shifted. Cavalry units rode by along the road which paralleled the Amur. They were off to fill the breach. The battle raged on. . . .

* * *

Across the Amur, high on the hills of the Great Khinkhan, on the other side of the "frontier fortress" stood those guilty of starting this battle. They stood there bare-headed, dishevelled, breathless and happy.

Overcome with joy, Natalka now clung to Hryhory and kissed him with all her heart and soul, giving full vent to the pent-up longing:

"You are mine! Mine! We will go now towards your Ukraine!"

She pressed close to his breast and listened to its agitated beat. For the first time in her life she was kissing her man freely and she gave her heart free rein. Hryhory also gave freedom to his heart. He took her in his arms and over and over again kissed those wild, unapproachable, untouched lips, those large mocking deer-like eyes, those frost-burnt hands which could be so fierce in combat but so tender to him . . . imagine where he was destined to find his happiness!

The large Yakut dog, Zalivay, stood on his hind legs, whimpered softly and tried hard to lick their noses.

Slowly the frontier fracas abated.

The fire had gone out and Pashkov was again quiet, only an occasional shot was still heard in the distance.

Natalka listened for a while, then opened Hryhory's rucksack, took out a large piece of meat and gave it to Zalivay:

"Eat . . . my very dear, my very faithful friend . . .!" She petted him under the neck. The dog licked her hand and whimpered very softly. He sensed in his dog's heart some impending change in his fortunes, but he attacked the meat ravenously.

"Give me that message . . ."

Hryhory took out the tiny piece of paper which he had carefully prepared that morning. Natalka took a piece of ribbon, placed the message at the bottom of Zalivay's collar and tied it up with the ribbon. When everything was ready, she still knelt there for a long time patting the dog, talking to him, pulling his ears; she was loath to part with him. But finally she got up and spoke in a determined tone:

"Zalivay!" The dog jumped to his feet and listened attentively. Natalka wavered for a moment and then spoke firmly, waving her hand:

"Go home!"

Zalivay turned sharply and ran off . . . then came back, and stood waiting. He whined sadly, beat the snow with his tail and his eyes questioned both Natalka and Hryhory. "Why aren't you coming?" But he already knew what they wanted. He understood his mistress from the tone of her voice, but he did not want to part.

She felt sorry for the dog, but there had never been a time when she had reversed her orders. It had to be so, especially this time.

She bent down to the dog, who took advantage of

this to lick her mouth, and repeated her order in a kindly tone as though she were trying to convince a human being:

"Go home! Yes, home . . . do you understand?" and shaking him gently by the neck, she straightened up, and pointing in the direction from which they had come ordered: "Zalivay, go home!"

The dog milled around on the spot, looked from one to the other, barked softly, whimpered in anguish, then ran off as fast as he could go. He disappeared out of sight and they could only hear the rustle of the snow below. . . .

"Will he find his way?" Hryhory spoke his thought.

Natalka listened quietly for a few moments and then replied:

"If he finds his way out of Pashkov, he will. If he doesn't, he will turn and catch up with us. But . . . Zalivay will not return."

Their road led into the unknown. They had burned all their bridges behind them and had to be ready for all the problems, the difficulties, the struggles and the losses that might lie ahead of them.

Their road led forward and their thoughts flew back, through the snowbound wilderness and forest along which a lonely dog, faithful to the end, was now running in the direction of a snow-covered tiger-hunters' cottage lost in the forest.

* * *

The press of the Far Eastern country was filled with sensational headlines. The first page of the "Pacific Ocean Star" was in mourning. Under the grim headlines—"DEATH TO THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE!" and "YOU DIED BUT YOUR CAUSE LIVES ON! WE SWEAR, DEAR COMRADES, THAT WE SHALL AVENGE YOUR DEATH AND NULLIFY ALL THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD!"

there were two pictures surrounded by a black border. Under the pictures there was a notice in heavy letters that in the taiga "A LARGE BAND OF ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE ARMED TO THE TEETH, and headed by a great enemy of the state, a prison escapee, spy and agent of fascism, Hryhory Mnohohrishny, AFTER A STUBBORN BATTLE AND IN A BRUTAL MANNER MURDERED COMRADE MEDVIN — Chief of the State Special Division of UHB, NKVD, for the Far Eastern Country, and the Chief of the N. Region of the NKVD."

They enumerated all the services of the much-decorated comrade Medvin, "veteran of the Cheka — OGPU — NKVD, and a famous and upstanding *chekist*," who never faltered in his pursuit of the enemy and whose hand never shook . . . etc. Then followed frightful threats and curses against "enemies of the people of every shade," their supporters and sympathizers. Special thundering blasts were directed at the "kulaks and sub-kulaks" who were to be uprooted fiercely, mercilessly, now and for ever and ever.

There was much exhortation about the "sanctified" duty of all — young and old — to help the organs of Cheka. Below there was an announcement offering a large reward for the terrible "leader of the band" — Hryhory Mnohohrishny. There was also the testimony of an eye-witness who had seen the band go eastward, obviously trying to break through to Japan. The band was said to have been last sighted on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk.

Old Sirko and Hrytsko had come to Khabarovsk to deliver the live tiger. He listened to all these unusual dispatches and frightful threats and curses and was strongly inclined to give forth with a grand homeric laugh. The whole thing struck him as being terribly funny.

He knew the story of the NKVDist "who fell in combat with a large band of enemies of the people." But

this did not interest him much even though there was mention of a large reward. It was the other account that appealed to his sense of humour. After all, old Sirko was a crafty old wolf and immediately sensed the meaning of the episode. It was clear to him that the same cause lay behind this event. And from these accounts he had reason to be happy because they showed that "our youngsters are frolicking"; they must be the "two brigands with a gigantic dog." The three of them must have cooked up that commotion, and there wasn't anyone else there. Of that he was certain.

The old man looked at the tiger — the cage, listened while some girl read these accounts to the workers at the depot, and he suddenly had a great urge to let the tiger go. "Let him run. Ha! Wouldn't that cause a to-do!" He might even have done it, but the tiger was already in a padlocked iron cage. But much more important was the fact that the tiger would have torn him first as the main cause of his predicament. Still, it was a noble, youthful thought.

So he listened and waited while the bookkeeper made his calculations, and the usual deductions for a state loan, etc.

"They don't seem to say what happened to those brigands," and he told Hrytsko to buy up all the newspapers ("we will read them at home") hoping to find a few words giving a clue as to what happened to the brigands.

He listened to conversations, but they did not reveal anything in particular because life and this kind of propaganda had drilled people into inconsequential remarks or to silence. After all they were accustomed to similar and even more sensational accounts; without them life would be quite abnormal. All these "diversion," "frontier disturbers," "enemies of the people," "trials," "purges," "firing squads," "chekists," "NKVDists," "bemedalled heroes,"

'prisons,' diversionists,' 'spies,' etc., were part and parcel of this mad country. This craze was part of the style of life. It was also the style to hunch their shoulders and to await a thunderbolt from a clear sky, like an ox in a slaughter house. But if you could shell them out as you do a nut, you would find interesting and unexpected things. You would see how they scorned all these sensations; and you would see many more interesting things. . . .

Going home old Sirko did nothing but smoke his pipe, one pipeful after another. He had bought half a sackful of tobacco in the capital and now didn't say a word for miles on end. He seemed to be thinking hard, and his thoughts always returned to that one pertinent point:

"Why didn't the papers say anything about what happened to those brigands?"

When he arrived home, old Sirko spread the newspapers out on the table and his index finger wandered through them for a long time. But he found nothing that he did not already know, and he ended his research by tossing all the newspapers in the stove.

* * *

On the evening of the second day after Sirko's return from Khabarovsk Zalivay came home.

One-eyed Nepa and Rooshay began barking joyfully and old Sirko opened the door to see what was going on.

Zalivay lay on the doorstep. He was thin; worn out and wild-looking, the hair on his back stood up as it does on a wild boar. You could count his ribs at a distance.

"Zalivay! Oh, my God!" Alarmed and overjoyed, old mother Sirko turned her attention to him as if he were a human being.

The dog gave a hoarse bark and crawled into the house. His feet were covered with ice — snow had packed itself between his claws and turned into icy boots. He lay

down and looked at them with wise, sickly eyes. He licked the old man's hand as the other fondled his jaws:

"Aren't you a fool. You know I read about you, yes, brother, I did."

The dog whined softly as though he was telling them of his experience.

The old lady gave the dog some food while Hrytsko searched him, and found the message.

That was a happy day for the Sirko family. The old man spread out the tiny piece of paper and held it like a sacrament.

"A despatch has arrived!"

They lit the lamp and set about reading the message. Old Sirko guided his finger from one letter to the other and read:

"Alive. Well. (Oh! — that was Sirko.)

We embrace and kiss you.

We have crossed over to aunt."

Old mother Sirko wept from the excitement.

"Go ahead, read it. . . ."

"What else shall I read? Isn't that enough? That's all there is."

"Well, then read it again!"

But Sirko did not have to be urged. After a moment of reverent silence he turned back to the message and read it over and over again. He put it on the table, lit his pipe, puffed for a while, smoothed his whiskers, and then picked up the message and examined it carefully just in case he had missed something written in a corner. . . . Then he read it again, perhaps for the tenth time.

Alive . . . Well . . . Embrace . . . Kiss.

"Some brigands. I knew that. God did make them for each other."

Sirko had never read anything more interesting in his life.

Finally his wife took the message from him and put it away. She kissed the piece of paper as if she were kissing both of them, and then tied it inside a piece of silk and placed it at the bottom of the chest, together with other things that had belonged to Nataalka.

Then she knelt, and with tear-filled eyes prayed to an old ikon of the Mother of God. She asked very little — just to see them again, at least in the twilight of life, at least in her last years.

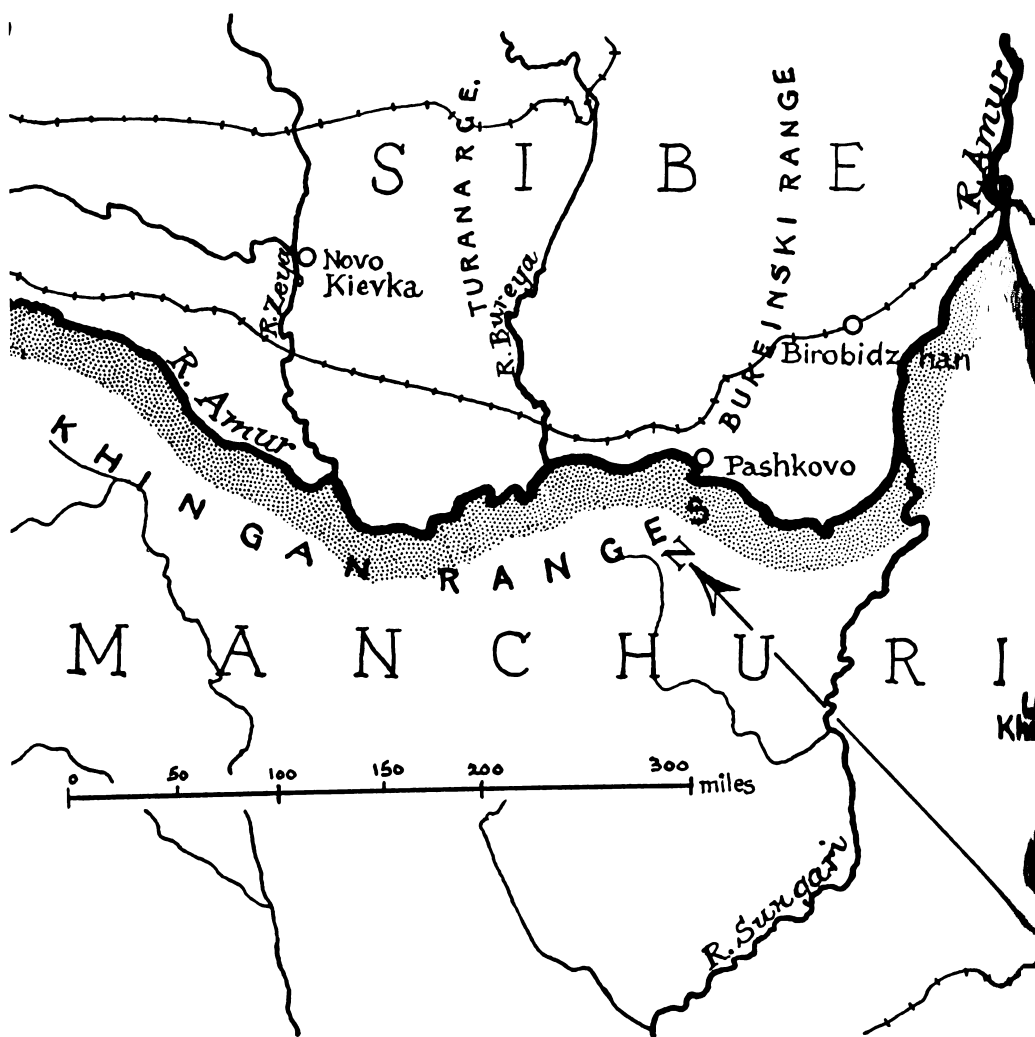
Hrytsko tied Zalivay down because his mother asked him. She tended him like a baby; she fed him, cared for him and talked to him.

But Zalivay was desperately lonely. He missed his happy mistress, his great friend to whom he was tied with bonds much more powerful than that rope.

On the fifth day Zalivay was nowhere to be found. The rope was there but no Zalivay. This reckless and infinitely faithful dog had his own concept of friendship and he followed the dictates of his canine heart.

He undertook the hopeless task of finding her. But — the brave always have good fortune.

1943.



The map shows the area in which the action of the novel is set. Numerous Ukrainian settlements extend along the rivers Ussri and Amur. In one of them, at the foot of the Sikhote Alin the hero, Hryhory Mnohohrishny, finds refuge after his escape from the

You should read . . .

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— *American Historical Review*



THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED



The author of this novel, Ivan Bahriany, was born in 1907 in the Ukraine. His father was a bricklayer and his mother came of peasant stock. Bahriany had a full education but failed to graduate from University because he was suspected of "political unreliability".

He started writing in 1925 and as a member of a literary group which stood aloof from the Party, he became a victim of the Communist purge in the early 1930's.

In 1932 after some of his writings had been severely attacked by the Communist critics, he was arrested and eventually sentenced to five years penal servitude. In 1936, feeling that his sentence might be renewed, he escaped from the Concentration Camp and for two years was a free man.

Bahriany was again arrested in 1938 and spent over two years in prison in Kharkiv awaiting trial.

Finally, because of ill health, he was released from prison.

During the second World War he made his way to the West and since 1945 has lived in Germany suffering from chronic tuberculosis.

As well as this novel, Bahriany has written: "WHY I DON'T WANT TO GO HOME", "THE ORCHARD OF GETHSEMANE", "THE RING OF FIRE", "A COLLECTION OF POEMS", "THE GOLDEN BOOERANG" and a Play, "THE GENERAL".

Bahriany is the leader of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Democratic Party which is dedicated to the formation of an independent and democratic Ukraine.