



THE  
EVER-PRESENT  
PAST

The Memoirs  
of Tatiana Kardinalowska

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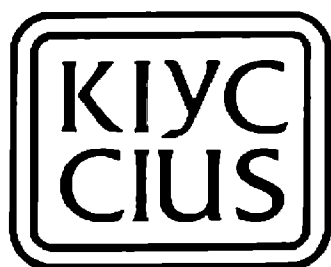
## The Memoirs of Tatiana Kardinalowska

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*transcribed by Assya Humesky*

*translated by Vera Kaczmarska*

*edited by Uliana Pasicznyk*



Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press

Edmonton

2004

Toronto

# Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press

University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta  
Canada T6G 2E8

University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M5S 2J5

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ISBN 1-895571-48-0

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## Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Kardialowska, T.

The ever-present past: the memoirs of Tatiana Kardinalowska / recorded and transcribed by Assya Humesky; translated by Vera Kaczmarska.

First published Kyiv: Dnipro, 1992 in Ukrainian under title:

Nevidstupne mynule.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-895571-48-0

1. Kardinalowska, T.
2. Authors' spouses—Ukraine—Biography.
3. Ukraine—Intellectual life—20th century.
4. Communism and intellectuals—Ukraine—History—20th century.
5. Authors, Ukrainian—20th century—Biography.
6. Political purges—Ukraine—History—20th century.

I. Humesky, Assya, 1925– II. Kaczmarska, Vera III. Title

DK508.83.K365A3 2004

947.7'0841'092

C2003-904970-1

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This book was published with generous support from the Michael Kowalsky and Daria Mucak-Kowalsky Endowment Fund at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies.

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Printed in Canada

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## PREFACE

My mother died in 1993 at the age of ninety-four. Her memoirs end in the year 1934, leaving the last sixty years of her remarkable life unrecorded. It is my intention—indeed, my duty—to pick up the thread of her narration and bring it to its true conclusion. Of course, that story will be as much mine as hers, for it will be told from my own perspective and in my own way—Mother's style is inimitable, in any case.

The present memoirs were a collaborative effort. Mother would relate an episode or two as I typed. Later, when I read the typed text to her, she would make changes or additions. The work proceeded at a snail's pace, taking ten years to complete. At last, in 1992, the memoirs were published in Ukrainian in Kyiv, under the title *Nevidstupne mynule*.

For this English edition, I have supplied some notes to her story, primarily to bring it up to date. Some material in the original Ukrainian version (mainly quotes from other memoirists) has been omitted.

The fact that the family photographs included in this book survived is a small miracle. In 1943 I was being deported from Ukraine by the Nazis for forced labor in Germany. Not wanting us to be separated, my mother decided to join me and brought along my little sister, Mirtala, as well. All Mother took with her were a few items of clothing and our family photos, which she packed in Mirtala's schoolbag. During the many Allied air raids we lived through while in a German forced-labor camp, Mother always made sure she grabbed that schoolbag when we and the other prisoners ran for shelter. We also took the photos with us when we escaped from the camp and walked over three hundred kilometers across the Tirolean Alps. After many more adventures, they were still with us when we finally made our way safely to the United States a few years later.

I sincerely thank Vera Kaczmarska for translating my mother's memoirs and Uliana Pasicznyk for her skillful editing of the translation. I am grateful to the late Professor George S. N. Luckyj and to Dr. Frank E. Sysyn for the insightful foreword and personal remembrance. I also express my gratitude to the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and to Roman Senkus and Dr. Marko R. Stech of CIUS Press for supporting and preparing this book's publication.

ASSYA HUMESKY

ANN ARBOR, DECEMBER 2002

## FOREWORD

During the 1930s, Ukrainian literature was subjected to a devastation of staggering dimensions and consequences. In the course of that decade, hundreds of Ukrainian writers, critics, and scholars were arrested, incarcerated, and shot or otherwise killed. This incredible bloodbath, carried out on Stalin's orders, went unnoticed in other parts of Europe and in the Western world as a whole. In the decades that followed, émigré Ukrainian scholars tried to draw attention to that devastation and to the man-made famine in Ukraine that claimed millions of peasant lives. But not until 1988, during Gorbachev's era of glasnost, did the world community hear and begin to comprehend accounts of the Soviet regime's genocidal practices. The Russian researcher Eduard Beltov was one of the first to present clear evidence that the "literary purges" were much more devastating in Ukraine than they were in Russia: more than five hundred lives were lost. Today, researchers in Ukraine have finally gained access to the archives of that era, so long buried in secrecy, and accounts revealing and detailing the dimensions of the tragedy will undoubtedly be written. But today relatively few witnesses remain to tell us the human story behind these horrible crimes.

The memoirs presented here are truly exceptional testimony about those times. They are the personal, very readable, and yet highly informative recollections of Tatiana Kardinalowska (Tetiana Kardynalovska), widow of the Ukrainian writer Serhii Pylypenko. During the period of Ukrainization, her husband was the leader of the large association of peasant writers called Pluh (The Plow). Like many other writers' groups, this organization played an important part in Ukrainian literary life. In the 1920s, when Pluh was organized and flourished, the Communist Party tolerated the free development of Ukrainian language and literature. But with Stalin's rise to power in 1930, official Soviet policy changed. In 1932 all literary organizations were dissolved by Party decree, and a Soviet writers' union controlled by Moscow was created. Ukrainian writers soon lost their autonomy and, all too often, also their lives as Stalin's great purge of intellectuals began.

Tatiana Kardinalowska was a remarkable woman in her own right, and her description of events is both authentic and moving. She was born to a Russified Ukrainian family, the daughter of a tsarist general. During the Revolution of 1917, she married Vsevolod

Holubovych, one of the leaders of the Ukrainian Central Rada, the first Ukrainian government, which lasted only a year. It was during that time that Tatiana recovered her Ukrainian identity and refined her knowledge of the language. Her colorful account of those stormy days vividly conveys the fragility of the leadership of the Ukrainian People's Republic as well as the romantic aura of life under it. The story is presented through the eyes of a young woman in love not only with her husband, but with her newly discovered country. When independent Ukraine collapsed in 1919, she chose not to emigrate. It was through her second marriage, to Serhii Pylypenko, that she came to know the members of the Ukrainian intellectual elite of the 1920s who are described here in some detail.

Tatiana's chief personal qualities were honesty and humaneness, and these permeate the memoirs. Through her we become acquainted with prominent writers as individuals, rather than as cultural activists or literary figures. In these pages, Mykola Khvylovy, Volodymyr Sosiura, Valeriiian Polishchuk, Ostap Vyshnia, Yurii Smolych, and others come alive, with faults and virtues in full view. Equally true to life are the officials of the Soviet secret service and the prison authorities to whom Tatiana went to try to save those she loved. Her personal charm and beauty were important in these and all her adventures. Reading her words affords us the pleasure of sharing her company and observing her solicitude for her children and friends. The grim reality of the 1930s that she depicts is relieved somehow by the evidence of her courage and good will that we find here. The public and personal horrors and ordeals of that decade broke or destroyed many people. Tatiana was among the few who not only survived but remained unbroken and true to herself.

The Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz once wrote: "In the great pressure of the life of the collective on the individual, resistance is possible only by delving into one's innermost self and reposing there." That is what Tatiana Kardinalowska succeeded in doing. She refused to be either a victim or a mere survivor. She fought back and lived to tell her story. Now it is here before us—to read, to ponder, and to share.

GEORGE S. N. LUCKYJ  
TORONTO, MAY 2001



## TATIANA KARDINALOWSKA: A PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE

I first met Tatiana Kardinalowska in the 1970s in Cambridge, Massachusetts, when I was a graduate student at Harvard University. At that time the Ukrainian community had just endowed Harvard's first chair in Ukrainian studies, also the first at any North American university, and was responding to the inspired challenge of Professor Omeljan Pritsak to endow two more chairs and a research institute there. In those heady days, academics, students, and Ukrainian intellectuals, eager to formulate great plans and initiate or revive important projects, gravitated toward the Ukrainian program's first small office on Cambridge Street and then, after 1973, to the institute's commodious if somewhat rickety house on Massachusetts Avenue. The presence and participation of Tatiana Kardinalowska, who was then living in Cambridge and teaching at Boston University, helped us all to connect the study of Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian past with the period of Ukraine's independence in 1917–19 and the Ukrainian cultural revival of the 1920s.

During the summer, when her daughter, Professor Assya Humesky, came to Cambridge to teach Ukrainian courses at the Harvard Summer School, Tatiana Kardinalowska would meet with students and staff to share her reminiscences. These were always memorable occasions. In her unpretentious and direct way, she would speak of the extraordinary events and people she had known and make them come alive, repeatedly conveying important insights in seemingly random comments. My understanding of the 1920s was shaped by one such comment. Many of us who hoped for a Ukrainian cultural revival or political presence within the Soviet Union looked to the period of Ukrainization and Ukrainian National Communism as a model. After returning from a trip to Ukraine in 1973, Tatiana Kardinalowska described to us her very personal journey there. She mentioned that in meeting with Ukrainian cultural leaders, she was struck by how little fear they seemed to have, in contrast to what she knew had been felt by the Ukrainian intelligentsia of the 1920s. History's record of literary achievements, publication statistics, and political debates had given me one vision of Ukraine in that decade. That evening, through one insightful comment, followed by others, Mrs. Kardinalowska helped me to comprehend reality as it was actually lived at that time. That was

an insight hardly to be found anywhere else, following the obliteration of a cultural generation and its personal effects.

In a number of cases, a speaker's talks before Harvard summer-school students led to the taping of the material presented. These projects preserved, for instance, the recollections of Lusya Demydenko, granddaughter of Mykhailo Drahomanov. The stimulus for Mrs. Kardinalowska's writing of her memoirs came in part from the taping of summer-school presentations. Also, during a meeting in Ukraine in 1973, the writer Yurii Smolych insistently told Mrs. Kardinalowska that it was her duty to record and publish her story. At that time, despite the thaw and rehabilitations of the 1960s, uncensored memoirs could not be published in Ukraine. Then, just two years later, there began a new repression and silencing of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, which extended to the end of the 1980s. In 1992, shortly after the Soviet regime collapsed and Ukraine regained its independence, the Ukrainian-language original of Mrs. Kardinalowska's memoirs was published in Kyiv. With the publication of the present volume, the English-language reader, too, gains access to the story of her remarkable past.

Tatiana Kardinalowska tells us at the outset that she is not a historian and that she will relate only what she herself saw or heard from those close to her. In reading the work of a memoirist, particularly one who continued to read about and discuss the period he had lived through, it must be kept in mind that the writer has been informed by subsequent opinions and analyses. At the very least, this might be expected to influence the selection of content. Mrs. Kardinalowska's account, however, is pervaded by a sense of fresh reaction, as if the perceptions and views of so many years ago were being relived and captured. For instance, in her presentation she has eschewed a recitation of the "who," "what," and "when" of everything she relates. Such information would have made her account easier to follow for those not well versed in the events and personages of independent Ukraine and Ukrainian literature during the 1920s. But it would also have dulled the immediacy of her account, and altered perspectives and evaluations. For example, her reader is left without a definitive statement about Holubovych's fate and without a genealogy of the Kysilevsky family. Nor did she herself add an explanation of the use of the term *zhyd* that so offended her when she was a primarily Russian-speaking young woman, still unaware that in the language of Western Ukraine, unlike in Russian, the term is not derogatory, but a neutral word for Jew (as it is in Polish). By limiting introduction of subsequent

knowledge and understanding, Mrs. Kardinalowska preserved the authenticity and immediacy of her account.

In tracing a life that began as the privileged child of a tsarist army officer and became that of an impoverished woman in exile with two young daughters, Mrs. Kardinalowska was spurred by a desire to share her recollections of major historical and cultural figures. She moved in those circles primarily because of her marriages, first to Vsevolod Holubovych, prime minister under the Ukrainian Central Rada, and then to Serhii Pylypenko, head of Pluh Association of Peasant Writers. Because of her tendency to understate her own accomplishments and influence, Edward Kasinec, librarian at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard, was first to note at one of her presentations that Mrs. Kardinalowska was the translator of over thirty books and that her debates on collectivization and literary politics with Pylypenko were incisive and well informed. Nor did she dwell on her personal appearance, which clearly had a considerable influence on her circumstances and position. Very telling in this connection, however, is her account of how the religious activist Volodymyr Chekhivsky tried convincing her to accompany him on a proselytizing mission as a symbol of the Madonna.

The *Ever-Present Past* documents one of the most important shifts in the political and cultural map of Eastern Europe. What appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century to be a small band of Ukrainian cultural and political activists in the Russian Empire had, by 1917, succeeded in enlisting tens of thousands of intelligentsia to the nation-building cause. With the rapid spread of modern Ukrainian identity among the masses, the Ukrainian movement even survived the failure of statehood, emerging as a force strong enough to oblige the Bolsheviks to seek accommodation with it. That process of Ukrainization formed a new Soviet Ukrainian intelligentsia, one which had a strong pre-1920 component. The remarkable cultural flourishing of the 1920s was achieved by dynamic forces that matured and bloomed between 1905 and 1930.

In outlining her own development, Mrs. Kardinalowska speaks to the issue of Ukrainophile sentiments by depicting the devotion of her father, Mykhailo Hryhorovych Kardynalovsky, to Ukraine's greatest poet, Taras Shevchenko. In conjuring up the archaic and colorful world of her youth in tsarist times, she illustrates how the seeds of Ukrainian identity were present in the educated upper classes in Ukraine, seeds that could, in changed circumstances, take root and grow. Tatiana

Kardinalowska's father, despite his relatively progressive views, could not imagine the existence of an independent Ukraine, but her first husband was part of the small cadre of prerevolutionary Ukrainian political activists. Although she does not dwell on Vsevolod Holubovych's influence on her own personal development, it is clear that his views and career ushered the young girl toward a full, modern Ukrainian identity.

As for so many members of the young Ukrainian intelligentsia of central and eastern Ukraine of that time, Russian literature was Tatiana's spiritual and cultural reference point, in a way that now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is difficult to imagine. Eventually she would find herself among writers who sought to create a Ukrainian literature that could compete with Russian literature, and she would even move toward Khvylovy's slogan, "Away from Moscow." But, of course, all these writers were themselves formed by Russian literature. And before a viable Ukrainian culture could be fully established, the experiment itself would be stamped out by Stalin and a new era of Russification would reestablish the primacy of Russian literature. For Tatiana Kardinalowska, the link between the Russian and Ukrainian cultures lasted a lifetime, as is reflected by her choice of a poem by Ilia Ehrenburg to begin her story.

Although the wish to depict the prominent individuals she had known prompted Mrs. Kardinalowska to record her memoirs, it is her characterizations of less notable people that are some of the book's most revealing. The significance of Ukrainian independence becomes clear to us through such figures as the Kuban Cossack who decided his national identity on the basis of Semen Petliura's speeches, the clerk who was honored to provide a picture frame gratis for Holubovych's portrait, and the youth in Poltava who was committed to continuing the struggle for Ukrainian identity and independence. The nature of Stalinism can be perceived, if not comprehended, in Mrs. Kardinalowska's account of the woman who desperately sought, as she herself did, to see Andrei Vyshinsky, the chief Soviet prosecutor, in an effort to save her husband's life.

Students of Ukraine's revolutionary times will turn to these memoirs to gain insight into the characters of the major cultural leaders of the age. They will find valuable material on, among others, the writers Ostap Vyshnia, Vasyl Ellan-Blakytny, and Mykola Khvylovy. Above all, the figure of Serhii Pylypenko emerges clearly from these pages. Tatiana Kardinalowska's love for her second husband hardly

qualified her as an objective observer, but it meant she knew him as no one else did. Here she shares much of that knowledge with us.

When Mrs. Kardinalowska shared her experiences with students and others at the Harvard Summer School, the famine in Ukraine of 1932–33 was continually a focal point. At that time, Soviet authorities were asserting that no famine had occurred, many Western specialists did not perceive the Soviet regime as culpable, and the general public had virtually no knowledge of what had taken place. Today, when that man-made famine has been acknowledged and has become the subject of historical study in Ukraine and the West, her recollections still give us some of the most poignant information we have about its horrible toll.

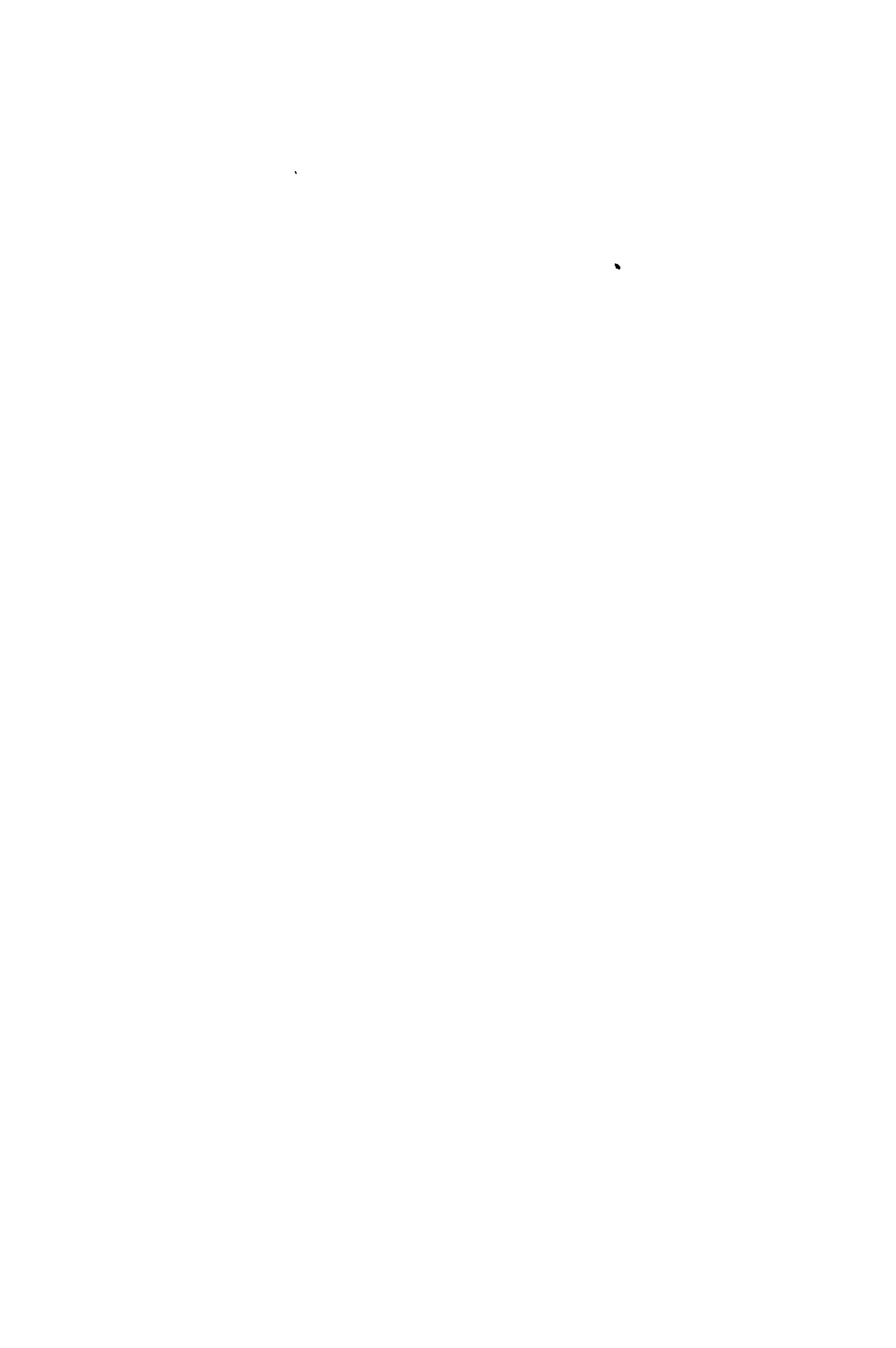
Tatiana Kardinalowska lived with her remarkable past ever present. She lived to see her daughters—Assya Humesky, professor of Slavic languages and literatures at the University of Michigan, and Mirtala Bentov, noted sculptor and poet—become established in the new world the three of them had entered together. She also lived to see many of the writers she had known, once branded non-persons by the Soviet regime, returned to the canon of Ukrainian literature and culture. She even lived to witness the rebirth of an independent Ukraine. Today, her memoirs will find resonance in the ever-growing community in the West that endeavors to understand reemergent Ukraine.

FRANK E. SYSYN

TORONTO, MAY 2001



*The Ever-Present Past*



## INTRODUCTION

*When the sun inclines toward the earth—  
shadows grow longer;  
When life's lines approach their end—  
thoughts get clearer<sup>1</sup>*

As I embarked on my memoirs I kept thinking: “What was interesting in my life?” I lived through four wars during those long years—Russia’s war with Japan, the war with Germany, the civil war in Ukraine, and World War II. I was imprisoned and witnessed famine and the whole range of human suffering. Fate blessed me with the opportunity to associate closely with many of the distinguished figures of the age—talented artists and writers, individuals who were creating Ukrainian literature and history. I was more than a passive observer. Life threw me into the vortex of unfolding events, demanding immediate and often risky decisions. It taught me to evaluate people, to trust my own judgment and intuition, to fear nothing and no one. I approached life thoughtfully; my memoirs reflect my thinking and observations. Actual dates and historical events appear in my story only when “history” intruded on my personal life. I am not a historian; therefore, I speak only about those things that I saw with my own eyes or heard from people who were close to me.

Once, during the civil war in Ukraine, I heard the poet Ilia Ehrenburg recite his then unpublished poem, “Our Grandchildren.” It became etched in my memory as the truest expression of the spirit of those days.

Our grandchildren will puzzle and wonder  
As they leaf through the history books—  
1914 ... 1917 ... 1919....  
How did they live, all those poor wretched souls?  
Children of the new age will read of the battles,  
Will learn the names of the leaders and orators,  
The number of the dead  
And the dates,

---

<sup>1</sup> From my daughter Mirtala Bentov’s collection *Thought Forms: Sculptures, Poems* (Boston, 1975). A sculpture by Mirtala, also called *The Ever-Present Past*, is reproduced as the frontispiece to these memoirs.



They will not learn how sweet on the field of battle  
 Was the scent of roses,  
 How clearly amidst the din of cannon the chirping  
 Of swifts was heard,  
 How beautiful it was then to be  
 Alive.

Never, oh never, was the sun's laughter so joyously spent  
 As over a city's destruction,  
 When the people crawling out of their dark basements  
 Marveled: the sun is still there!...

Mutinous speeches rang out,  
 Enraged armies perished,  
 But the soldiers discovered what fragrance snowdrops can impart  
 Before an attack starts.

Escorting at dawn, executing in firing squads,  
 They alone discovered the meaning of an April morn.  
 In the slanting rays the cupolas blazed,  
 Yet the wind implored: Oh please wait! One minute, just one  
 more minute!...

Embracing, they could not tear themselves from those sad lips,  
 Nor release the grip of firmly clasped hands,  
 They loved—I will die, will die:  
 They loved—burn on, little flame, in the wind:  
 They loved—oh where are you, where?  
 They loved, as they can love only here, on this mutinous and  
 tender star.

In those years there were no gardens with golden fruit,  
 Only a brief flowering, one doomed month of May.

In those years there was no "goodbye,"  
 Only a short, resounding "farewell."

Read about us and marvel.

You didn't live with us—mourn your loss:

Guests on the earth, we came for only one evening.

We loved and destroyed, we lived at the hour of our death,  
 But above us stood stars eternal,

And under them you were conceived.

In your eyes our anguish still burns.

In your words our mutiny still echoes.

We spilled far into the night and unto ages and ages to come  
 Our extinguished lives.

## CHAPTER 1

I was born in Kyiv in 1899 into the family of a career officer of the Russian imperial army. My childhood was spent in an environment typical of military circles in those days, although our family itself was far from typical. Readers today can gain a general idea of that milieu from the works of Anton Chekhov, Aleksandr Kuprin, and Mikhail Bulgakov. My “eyewitness” accounts may provide a somewhat different perspective.

My father, Mykhailo Hryhorovych (Russian: Mikhail Grigorovich), was of noble ancestry, though his family was impoverished. Our surname, Kardynalovsky (Russian: Kardinalovsky),<sup>2</sup> often elicited interest and wonder, for it derives from *kardynal* ‘cardinal’ and there were no cardinals in the Russian Empire. One distant relative became sufficiently intrigued by the name to investigate its origin. He discovered a Kardynalovsky who had come to Ukraine from Hungary some two hundred years before: our ancestor was apparently of Polish origin, for his family coat of arms depicted a white ram with a bloodied side (red and white are the Polish national colors) against a green meadow. But with that the relative’s search came to an end: he discovered nothing more about our ancestor or surname.

My paternal grandfather was also an officer. Although then no longer a young man, he took part in the Turkish campaign. Returning home with his unit, he was riding through a small village near Kyiv, not far from Fastiv, when he saw an extraordinarily beautiful young peasant woman standing by a well. The events that followed could have been taken straight out of a romance by Yevhen Hrebinka, who wrote “Dark Eyes” (“Ochi chernye”):

I remember, I was a mere sixteen, no more.  
Our army was dispatched to fight a war.  
Dusk was falling as I stood beneath a tree  
Watching soldiers ride their horses down the street.

---

<sup>2</sup> The spelling of my surname, Kardinalowska, reflects both German orthography and my gender. This was how my name was written by the authorities during the German occupation of Ukraine in the Second World War, and I retained the spelling after emigrating to the West.

A young nobleman rode up to me and prayed,  
 "May I ask you for some water, pretty maid?"  
 As he drank, he leaned down and looked into my face,  
 Firmly pressed my hand, and gave me an embrace.

As in the song, the girl gave my grandfather water to drink and captured his heart. He ordered his soldiers to set up camp in the village and spent three days there. He met the young woman's parents, proposed, and married her.

I remember my paternal grandmother as being tall and svelte and as having very black hair that did not go gray even in old age. We children dubbed her "Black Grandmother" because of her hair, thus drawing a distinction between her and our other, "White," grandmother, whose hair did turn gray. Because she was not of noble birth, our "Black Grandmother" felt slighted by the label, and Mother strictly forbade us from calling her by that name.

"Black Grandmother," whose name was Oleksandra Dominikiivna, was of Polish peasant ancestry, but she spoke only Ukrainian—I don't recall if she knew any Polish at all. Her manner was rather severe, and she always had her own opinions. For example, she never wanted to master any grammar, because she felt that, as a peasant, she was unworthy of the undertaking, and neither Father nor the rest of us could convince her otherwise. Such views also manifested themselves later, when she would not permit her adopted daughter, Raia, to attend secondary school. She felt that as a poor orphan Raia should "know her place." Nevertheless, Grandmother had a very deeply ingrained sense of her own dignity. She loved her only son devotedly, but his high position interested her very little and she was certainly unimpressed by it. When he was promoted to the rank of general and several military orderlies were assigned to our family, Grandmother never regarded these men as somehow inferior or subordinate. On the contrary, she treated them with kindness and concern and without any trace of superiority. As children we observed this, and her behavior undoubtedly made a strong impression on us.

"Black Grandmother" was not known for her religiosity. I don't recall ever seeing her pray, and she never went to church—a fact that set her completely apart from "White Grandmother," who was forever visiting monasteries, attending church devotedly, and observing every church ritual and tradition. "White Grandmother" did all this despite the fact that she could not tolerate the local village priest, who fleeced

the peasants mercilessly for every baptismal, nuptial, or funeral rite he performed. Sometimes this priest would refuse to bury some poor soul for days on end until he received prepayment for his services. Grandmother never kissed his hand in church, nor did she ever invite him to her home. In an effort to instill some piety in me, she took me along on her visits to the monasteries, but the sight of the well-fed monks elicited neither my regard nor respect, while the Church Slavonic language they used simply did not enter my consciousness.

My maternal “White Grandmother” was of noble birth, but her family, too, was impoverished. Her maiden name was Makhno—something I learned only during the revolution, when Nestor Makhno, the famous partisan anarchist, made his appearance in Ukraine. Grandmother feared that he might be a relative, especially because they both came from the same town, Huliai-Pole, and was relieved to be assured that Nestor Makhno was not from a noble family. (In fact, the surname was very common in that part of the country; there was even a village called Makhnivka whose residents were almost all named Makhno.)

There were ten children in the family of “White Grandmother”: nine sisters and a brother. Their parents died when the children were young, and they were parceled out among relatives. My grandmother was taken by a family of wealthy landowners and received an education commensurate with people of that class. In my childhood I read a lot of Nikolai Gogol’s work, and for me “White Grandmother” was the very incarnation of an Old World landowner. She was always enthusiastically cooking some kind of “confitures,” as she called them, and readying endless jars of the sweet concoctions to dispatch to us in town. These were prepared in huge copper kettles following all the principles of Old World culinary art. There were jams made of boysenberries, raspberries, wild strawberries, rose petals, apples, pears, and sour cherries. In the sour cherry confitures, the pits were replaced with walnuts—imagine how time-consuming that whole process was! Though Grandmother always got the credit for making the confitures, she in fact had a whole staff of helpers. Grandmother herself admitted that the whole jam-making procedure was a throwback to the time of serfdom. In addition to the confitures, Grandmother also knew how to make all sorts of fruit liqueurs. Once she was preparing *vyslniak*, a liqueur made of sour cherries. After letting the sour cherries ferment, she had them pitted and ordered that the pits be thrown away. Without giving the matter any thought, one of the servants dumped them in a

corner of the yard, where our geese sampled some and found them quite tasty. Eating the pits to the very last one, they dropped down in a stupor. Soon a frightened servant ran in shouting "Mistress! All our geese have died! They're lying motionless in the yard!" Grandmother, distraught at the news, ordered the servants to pluck the feathers off the geese, so at least these would be of some use. When the servants started the plucking, the geese suddenly regained consciousness and created a tremendous racket! This incident was long a topic of conversation in our family, and it always elicited gales of laughter.

I don't remember "White Grandmother" as an avid reader, but I do recall one book she regarded very highly as a guide on how to live well. It was a kind of housekeeping manual, written by Elena Molokhovets, that was popular among ladies of the time. It contained exhaustive advice on how to cook, how to conduct oneself with servants, how to dress, how to rear children, and so on. I saw this same thick, heavy hardcover volume in many households even after the revolution.

My "White" grandmother liked tending to her health, so she was always interested in anything new in the medical field. Somewhere she heard about homeopathy as a new branch of medicine. She was told that homeopaths used herbs in their work, sometimes even poisonous ones in microscopic amounts, and that intrigued her. When she learned that a homeopathic doctor had set up a practice in their area, she went to visit him. He prescribed some medicine, and she brought home several bottles of multicolored pills. Leaving these bottles on the table, she went out of the room for several minutes. In the meantime, my mother, who was then three years old, came into the room, saw the beautiful "candies," and began sampling them. When my grandmother returned, her small daughter was just finishing the last pill. The whole family fell into a panic and braced for something terrible to happen—but nothing did: Mother had not so much as a bout of diarrhea. The experience made Grandmother lose all faith in this branch of medicine, however, and she swore never to visit a homeopath again.

"White Grandmother" had an enormous repertoire of romantic stories she liked to tell. Our favorite was about the beautiful Halshka, princess of Ostroh. Memory of her was still very much alive in the area where Grandmother had spent her childhood and youth. Grandmother even visited the church where Halshka's body was kept in a glass coffin. But by that time not a trace of the princess's legendary beauty remained, and the whole episode gave Grandmother quite a fright. Halshka's story was immortalized by the Russian writer Vsevolod Solovev in his

historical novella “Kniazhna Ostrogskaia” (The Princess of Ostroh, 1876). He was obviously intrigued by her incredible adventures, and indeed her life story was excellent material for an adventure novel. Few would have believed it, had it not been for some contemporaries of hers who corroborated the details. I told Halshka’s story to my own daughters, and they were just as fascinated by her as I myself had been as a child. It’s strange how memory is passed down from generation to generation.

Grandmother also liked to tell a true story about the eighteenth-century Cossack rebel and brigand Semen Harkusha—a tale with an extraordinary semblance to Pushkin’s novella about Dubrovsky. Harkusha was a handsome young man with impeccable manners. He would appear unexpectedly at some grand estate as a ball or family celebration was in progress, pretending that his carriage had just broken down. Harkusha would enter the salon and manage to spirit away the possessions of the host and his distinguished guests. He would then immediately give all this wealth away to impoverished villagers. Our grandmother never had the opportunity to meet this Ukrainian Robin Hood, but she was acquainted with several landowners who had had the dubious pleasure of experiencing his visits firsthand. Apart from these romantic personas, Grandmother’s imagination was also fired by the famous Polish hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, whose escapades she described with great gusto.

Now, looking back over time, I see how such stories influenced my character and even my worldview. I was fascinated, too, by stories of Joan of Arc and Kaspar Hauser, as extraordinary people who were forced by circumstances to act against society and history itself and yet never faltered in pursuing what they set out to do.

I know little about my maternal grandfather—only what my mother and grandmother told me. He traced his lineage back to a Zaporozhian Cossack named Kysil, who began calling himself Kysilevsky after being elevated to the nobility. Grandfather lived on his estate and took an interest in public affairs. Local landowners named him to the post of community arbitrator, a position created after the abolition of serfdom to facilitate implementation of reforms. It was a government position, and each person’s candidacy had to be approved by the governors and ratified by the Russian State Duma. Naturally, the community arbitrators usually favored the noblemen. But there were exceptions. Sometimes a humane arbitrator would attempt to redress a peasant’s grievances. Perhaps my grandfather was one of these exceptional arbitrators, for he was known as a very

amiable and well-intentioned person. Years later, his son Aliosha found this part of his father's biography potentially incriminating and sought to hide it from the Soviet authorities, for whom humanitarianism, in any case, had little meaning.

Grandfather played the cello well, and my mother accompanied him on the piano. He also loved to listen to songbirds. Peasants who knew this often brought him birds that had fallen out of their nests or injured their wings. Once they brought him a songster with a broken leg. He bandaged the leg and fashioned tiny crutches for the bird. To everybody's surprise, the bird quickly learned how to hop along on these and would wander throughout the house, whistling the Ukrainian folk song "Oi, ne khody Hrytsiu ..." (Don't Go to Evening Parties, Hryts), which my grandfather taught it. Grandfather turned the veranda into a bird sanctuary, and the birds in it became totally domesticated. Grandfather would go about whistling arias from operas, romantic ballads, or Ukrainian folk songs with a bird perched on his shoulder. The birds quickly learned an entire repertoire of songs and performed for Grandfather's guests.

Like most landowners of his time, Grandfather was an avid hunter. He had a pack of hunting dogs, one of whom he called Herr Miller in honor of the German who had given him the dog as a gift. The peasants, not understanding these words, simply called the dog Harmacyder (which means "disorder" in Ukrainian), a name that suited the boisterous dog perfectly. Harmacyder had a voracious appetite and made a habit of entering the kitchen just when meat patties were being fried. Despite the cook's best efforts, he always managed to snatch one right out of the frying pan and dash out a door or window, savoring his catch.

Mother also told stories about another dog, a huge Newfoundland named Fingal. This dog was the embodiment of benevolent patience. As children, my mother Olha and her brother Oleksii, who had the nickname Aliosha, would tug at his tail and ears or mount him like a horse. Fingal bore it all with total composure. When Mother was a toddler, she was let out on the veranda that stretched around the house. Since there was no railing, Fingal was delegated to protect her. He was a wonderful nanny: whenever Mother approached the edge of the porch, he blocked her way, and no amount of pushing and shoving would make him budge.

True to his breed, Fingal felt a responsibility to save people by dragging them out of the water. When guests came to the estate to swim in the river, he had to be locked up in the house. Otherwise he

would throw himself into the water and start “saving” everyone. One day, Mother, then a small child, was let out into the garden for a walk, and, as usual, Fingal accompanied her. Suddenly screams, barking, and the stomping of feet resounded on the street adjoining the garden. Mother, curious, stepped out into it. A dog came running sideways towards her, foam dripping from its mouth. A crowd of peasants was giving chase and screaming, “Rabid! A rabid dog! Save yourself!” Oblivious to the danger, and accustomed to considering animals her friends, Mother approached the “little doggie.” And then something incredible happened. Instead of running from the mad dog as instinct would dictate, Fingal attacked him and managed to kill him—but not before the mad animal had bitten his flesh. When the peasants ran up to him, Fingal was still breathing but lay motionless. They carried him to an old beekeeper in the neighborhood who was renowned for his use of herbs to cure rabies. The old man made every effort to save the faithful animal. After lying sick for three weeks, Fingal recovered somewhat. But he never regained his health fully. Becoming sickly again, he soon died, surrounded by our family’s affection and gratitude.



## CHAPTER 2

That was how my grandparents lived. I'd like to say more now about my father, Mykhailo Hryhorovych Kardynalovsky. When he was just seven years old, Father was sent to the Kyiv Cadet Corps. He never spoke to us about his childhood or about the years he spent in the corps, but once, in 1915, when he returned from the front, he wanted to visit the corps and invited me to come along. As we walked through the park encircling the school, Father found the bench on which he had carved his initials. When we entered the building, Father immediately became excited: "The smell! That familiar smell!" he exclaimed. There was indeed a distinctive odor, which obviously had lingered all those years. The vestibule walls were covered with marble plaques with the names of graduates who had achieved the rank of general engraved in gold. Father found his own name among them. This was the only time I remember seeing my father deeply moved by memories of the past.

Father was a very good student, and he excelled in mathematics in particular. As he himself used to say, he had inherited this aptitude from his famous ancestor, the mathematician Mykhailo Ostrohradsky (Russian: Mikhail Ostrogradsky), whose life story he had heard from his own father. He often recounted this story with pleasure, though in general he did not like to speak about his family. As is often the case with narratives transmitted orally from generation to generation, the "family" version differs somewhat from the official biography, and I would like to share it.

In his youth, Ostrohradsky was such a poor student that he was nearly expelled from school. His family lost hope that anything would come of him, and his father was ready to apprentice him to someone who could teach him a trade. He wrote to his brother, a mathematics professor at St. Petersburg University, complaining that his son was not interested in anything and that he only wandered about taking measurements and jotting them down. His brother was intrigued by this description of his nephew's actions and requested to see the boy's notes. To his astonishment, it turned out that his nephew's jottings were complicated mathematical calculations. The uncle suggested that Mykhailo be sent to him so he could prepare him for university. And that was how Ostrohradsky got on the path that led to his becoming a scientist.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In reality, Ostrohradsky's uncle was not a professor at St. Petersburg University; but he did persuade Mykhailo's father to send the boy to Kharkiv University. This is mentioned in Andrii Konforovych and Mykola Soroka's biographical novel *Ostrohradsky* (Kyiv, 1980).

My brother and I shared our own father's interest in math, and I, too, liked to take all kinds of measurements. Much later, when I finished my secondary education and enrolled in the Department of Road Construction at the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute, I had the opportunity to take that interest in a professional direction.

After his graduation from the Kyiv Cadet Corps, Father's love of math led him to enroll as a student in the Mikhailov Artillery Academy, where Ostrohradsky had taught until 1841. Half a century later my father taught higher mathematics there too. (How fitting that the academy was named Mikhailov!<sup>4</sup>) Father's education and natural aptitude enabled him to make extraordinarily rapid strides in his military career: he never remained at any rank for more than two or three years. By the time he was thirty-two, he was already a major general. Soon he became a lieutenant general and, subsequently, a "general of the artillery," that is, a full general: military newspapers of the time reported that my father was the youngest general of this rank in the empire. As was customary for all officers at the time, Father received a medal of distinction or an order with each promotion. He also won innumerable medals for bravery. The last military distinction he received was the Order of the White Eagle—the highest honor in the tsarist army. On learning of the award, Father joked, "This is my last award, for there are no more to be had." The joke became a sad reality, for he died at the front soon after and this last honor was awarded posthumously. His military decorations were put to good use later, when my family was in very difficult financial straits after the revolution: Mother sold them to help us survive.

Besides the orders, Father received the Golden Sword of St. George, awarded for his service in the war with Japan. The words "For Bravery" were engraved on it. This weapon would later have a tragicomic role. When my husband Serhii Pylypenko was arrested in 1933, the sword was "discovered" during a search of our apartment—it hung in the pantry—and documented as proof of a military plot. Such incidents would be quite common then. For instance, in searching one writer's apartment, the secret police found a cannonball on his writing desk. The writer had kept it as a reminder of the day during World War I when it had fallen at his feet but failed to explode. The police documented this too as evidence of an insurrection in the making.

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<sup>4</sup> That is, a name based on the the possessive form of "Mikhail."—*Eds.*

As mentioned, Father fought in the war with Japan. I remember some of the episodes he related about this war. One time, at a bazaar in Manchuria, he witnessed the following scene. Crowds of people were pushing and shoving. In the center of all the commotion was a man who had fallen to his knees. His hands were tied behind his back and his neck was enclosed in a wooden brace. Suddenly there was the swing of a sword and the man's head rolled to the ground. Father, an amateur photographer who always carried a camera with him, captured this moment on film. As children we gazed at this picture with terrible awe as we listened to Father's account of what had happened.

Father spoke about how people became fatalists in wartime. For example, the orderly assigned to him was told by a gypsy fortune-teller that he would not be killed or wounded in the war. This man believed in his "lucky star" to such an extent that he fearlessly brought Father his meals at the front even during the fiercest battles. And he did indeed survive the war unscathed. The same gypsy told one of the officers that he should have no fear of bullets, for he would die of a lightning bolt. After hearing this, the officer stopped paying bullets any mind, but he became terrified of storms. Whenever there was any lightning, the officer would try to find a crowd and make his way into the center of it. Amazingly enough, during one storm a lightning bolt found the unfortunate man and struck him dead. Whenever Father told us this story, we could tell that he himself saw a connection between the fortune-teller's predictions and the men's fates.

In Father's own life there were many incidents that seemed to point to the existence of some higher power that held sway over people's lives. The following was among them. Father was an excellent horseman. Despite his rather stout figure, he could jump up on a horse like a young man, as a soldier simply stood by to steady the stirrups. Father had a half-thoroughbred pony named Femida that saved him from harm many a time. During one battle, Father was galloping out in front of the soldiers, as was his custom, and accidentally tugged at the bridle in such a way that the horse reared up, throwing back his head. At that very moment, a bullet aimed at Father whistled through the air, passing right through the horse's gaping mouth and just grazing his lip. Father's sudden tug saved both their lives.

In January 1917, however, my father's luck finally ran out. During the war Father was an artillery inspector in the army. Given his high position, he should have been at military headquarters rather than out

at the front. But Father always preferred to be out with the troops. He wanted to set an example of courage, like the commander about whom the Kuban Cossacks sang:

Our commander is no coward,  
Riding always up ahead.  
He was very badly wounded  
In the chest by Polish lead.

Father was like that—he repeatedly risked his own life to be with his men. As he was riding at the front on that January day in 1917, he was shot by a German sniper, his stately figure on easy target. Father was evacuated to a medical unit, but his wound proved fatal. Mother was sent a telegram summoning us to his deathbed. Before we could gather our things for the journey, there came a second telegram, informing us of his death. Mother was asked where she would like him to be buried, and she chose the old cemetery at Lukianivka, not far from our home. The funeral was extraordinarily solemn. Many staff officers accompanied the coffin to its final resting place. Father's orders were carried on a pillow, and his Golden Sword was carried separately. Many years later I returned to Kyiv and found my father's grave, which had had a stone cross at its head.<sup>5</sup>

Father was a reticent person by nature. He did not have many friends. Nor did he associate much with the other officers, for he had nothing in common with them, neither shared interests nor common political views. He acquired his only true friend toward the end of his life. General Klembovsky was a renowned military man whom father met during the war. Klembovsky did not emigrate after the revolution, nor did he join the Red Army. He taught at the Military Academy. The men were drawn to each other not only by a personal affinity, but also by shared political views. Father was not a supporter of absolutism; he favored the constitutional monarchy espoused by the Kadets,<sup>6</sup> and his ideal of a statesman was Pavel Miliukov. No portrait of the tsar hung in our house, something that always surprised military officers who came

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<sup>5</sup> Over time, the cross disappeared and the grave could no longer be found. Now, thanks to L. A. Protsenko, a historian and archivist who spent nearly twenty-five years establishing the identities of those buried at the Lukianivka cemetery, my father's grave has been found once again. My niece, Roksolana Kardynalovska, had another iron cross placed over it, with an inscription written in Ukrainian.

<sup>6</sup> That is, members of the Constitutional Democratic Party.— *Eds.*

to visit. Father loved Ukraine and considered himself a Ukrainian. He often hummed and sang Ukrainian songs at home, and a copy of Taras Shevchenko's *Kobzar* lay open on his writing table. We children did not understand Shevchenko's poetry very well at the time, for we spoke Russian at home, but Father would translate and explain it to us. Yet Father's Ukrainophilism did not extend so far as to dream of Ukraine's independence. He was convinced that Russia would never allow that to happen. Today, in retrospect, I see how extraordinary it was that my father, though raised from early childhood in an atmosphere that propagated ultra-monarchism, maintained his independent views and love for his own people throughout his life.

Father was tall and weighed well over two hundred pounds. In the military, a man of his rank was entitled to two or three orderlies. One of them served as a messenger and personal servant, helping him dress and put on his boots (Father's size and gout prevented him from managing that on his own). An amusing story is connected to Father's gout. Someone told Father about an alcohol-and-ant mixture that was heralded as a tried-and-true folk medicine for treating the condition. It called for burying a half-empty bottle of vodka in an anthill, with the neck of the bottle barely sticking out. Ants were supposed to flock to the bottle and fall in; their bodies would then ooze out acidity into the vodka, creating the healing concoction that was then to be rubbed into the legs and feet. Father found the remedy intriguing and decided to try it. He told his orderly to take a bottle of vodka and bury it in an anthill. A few days later, he sent him to retrieve the bottle. The orderly came back empty-handed, saying the bottle had disappeared. In consternation, Father gave him another bottle and the same instructions. The results were the same. Deciding that the orderly had shared the potential remedy with his friends, Father finally abandoned the experiment. In the end, the orderly's temptation certainly proved greater than Father's dedication to treating his gout.

Father's spirit of democracy was remarkable. It was evident in his relationships with orderlies, soldiers, and common people. I do not remember a single incident when Father was rude to a soldier or shouted at one, though that was customary among the officers. I do, however, recall incidents of brutal behavior toward orderlies by other officers and their wives.

One incident made a particularly strong impression on all of us. It happened in Kyiv in the family of the officer who lived above us. He was away fighting at the front, and his wife, who had four small

children, was assigned an orderly. She overworked him, shrieked at him, and often slapped him across the face. The soldier tolerated her cruel treatment for almost a year. Finally, he could stand it no longer and decided to kill his tormentor. He took a revolver and went to her room, but seeing that she was sitting on a sofa and reading to her children, he took pity on her. Instead he ran out of the room and fired a bullet into his own chest. My brother, who happened to be in the garden, heard the shot. He ran to the soldier, finding him blood-soaked but still breathing. My brother summoned the police, and the soldier was taken to a military hospital. As he lay dying, the soldier revealed the particulars



*Tatiana's father, Mykhailo Kardynalovsky  
(1916 or 1917)*

of how he had been treated. But the officer's wife was not brought to trial, and she was soon assigned another orderly.

Of course, that was an exceptional case, but such behavior was not uncommon in the military. In contrast, the orderlies assigned to our family were treated so well that when their three-year tour of duty was over, they often begged Father to extend it. When they first arrived, they did not know how to cook, so Mother patiently taught them. Some of them became quite expert at it and even later found jobs as chefs. The culinary arts did not interest me, however, and I grew up not knowing how to cook at all. Later, during the revolution, when I had to live alone, I taught myself to cook hot cereal and boil an egg, but that was about the extent of my repertoire. Once a commissar who had moved into our apartment wanted some *halushky* (dumplings). He ordered me to prepare them and left, leaving me completely at a loss. I had never made *halushky*. When the commissar returned and discovered that I hadn't made any because I didn't know how, at first he was stunned. Then he became furious, calling me a good-for-nothing princess with two left hands who didn't know how to make *halushky* and yet had the nerve to call

herself a Ukrainian. That was during the first days of the revolution. Later life obliged me to learn to do everything—cook, sew, wash laundry, and chop wood.

Instead of addressing our mother by the usual "*barynia*" (noble lady), our servants called Mother by her name and patronymic in Russian, Olga Nikolaevna. The servants were good friends to us children, and they called us simply Tania, Liza, and Seriozha. When we came to the kitchen, they would tell us about their war experiences, play cards with us, and sing us soldiers' songs. Our favorite was the song about the sinking of the Russian warship called the *Varangian*. We also liked a song about the Boer War that went "Transvaal, Transvaal, My Country—You're All Aflame," as well as one about Suvorov<sup>7</sup>:

First one, then another, felled by a stray bullet,  
Will tumble into a bottomless chasm.  
Falling from the heights, against rocks and brush  
Their state-owned bodies will be torn asunder.

We also heard the story of Arkhyp Osypiv, both from our orderlies and from Father. In the orderlies' version, Osypiv gained legendary stature and the tale was embellished with many details, so that even the location of events was changed. That popular version went as follows.

During the time of the Crimean War, a Russian fortress was surrounded by the Turks. The situation of the Russian garrison was hopeless, for their ammunition and food had run out. They decided to abandon the fortress and dig a passageway under the fortress wall. When everything was ready, Arkhyp Osypiv, an artillery man, volunteered to stay behind to blow up the fortress. The Russian soldiers fled during the night, and early in the morning the Turks broke in. Suddenly there was a great explosion, and the fortress blew up with the Turks in it—Osypiv had denoted the explosives and died there together with the enemy. Afterwards his regiment started a new custom: each morning at roll-call, an officer would call out "Arkhyp Osypiv!" and one of the soldiers would reply, "Died a hero's death!" That tradition continued up until the First World War.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A song about the difficult crossing of the Alps from northern Italy by Generalissimo Aleksandr Suvorov's Russian army to fight the French in Switzerland in 1799.—Eds.

<sup>8</sup> Osypiv was born in the village of Kaminka in Lypovets county, Kyiv gubernia. He served in the Tenginsk Infantry Division and distinguished himself during the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars, for which he was decorated for bravery. In 1837 his battalion was

We were friends with not only the orderlies, but also the cooks. Sometimes this “fraternizing with the common people” had unexpected consequences. One evening some ladies came to visit Mother. Usually she did not allow us in the living room during such visits, but this time one guest persistently asked to be “shown the children,” so Mother summoned me to the room. I was very shy and embarrassed in the presence of the elegant ladies, but when one of them asked me to recite a poem, I mustered my courage and recited a gem I had recently learned:

My beautiful spouse  
In the street lies soused,  
The coachmen cuss  
‘Cause the horses fuss.



*Tatiana's mother, Olha Kardynalovska  
(née Kysilevska, 1907)*

One can imagine the consternation my performance caused in this genteel company—and my mother’s embarrassment! To make matters worse, when asked where I had learned the poem I innocently responded, “In the kitchen,” eliciting a roar of laughter from the guests and more embarrassment for Mother.

My childhood memories are tied much more closely to my mother than with my father. Though Father was kind to us girls, he concentrated most of his attention and energy on our brother Serhii, whom everyone called Seriozha, and pinned great hopes on his future.

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stationed at Fort Mikhailovsky on the shores of the Black Sea. In 1840, when the Adygei people of the Caucasus rebelled, the insurgents managed to take command of two other forts and were advancing on Fort Mikhailovsky. The Russians, fearing that they could not hold out, prepared to blow up the fort. On 22 April 1840, as the Adygei were forcing their way in, Osypiv blew up the ammunition dump, and with it all of the defenders and attackers. His name was then permanently kept on the roster of the regiment’s first company. See “Osipov, Arkhip,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1953), 568.



He dreamed that his son would grow up to be a great man, a person like Miliukov, whom Father respected greatly. He left the upbringing of Liza and me largely to Mother.

My mother was a woman of medium height with dark blue eyes and fine features. She had extraordinarily beautiful hair—black, lustrous, and so long that her braid fell well below her knees. Mother was well proportioned, an avid sportswoman, and loved riding horses and swimming. I remember one family trip to Simeiz in the Crimea, just after the war with Japan, where Mother's swimming created quite a sensation. She would swim far out to sea, to a rock where none of the other vacationers, least of all the other women, dared swim. Sometimes dolphins accompanied her on these swims and frolicked alongside her.

Mother had many other talents as well. At the age of thirteen, she accompanied her father at musical performances before the Society Club. She wrote poems and had a thorough knowledge and refined appreciation of art. In general her interests lay in the spiritual and artistic realms rather than in practical matters.

Though we had a good number of nannies and governesses, it was Mother who supervised our education. She awakened our love for literature very early and directed our reading. But it was her piano playing that influenced us the most. We would listen to her play for hours. There were times when she would play through the night while we sat in some corner of the living room, enthralled by her music until, finally, we simply fell asleep.

Mother had a difficult youth. At the age of seventeen she married my father's cousin, Mykola Kardynalovsky. Soon she discovered what this young military officer had hidden from her—he had tuberculosis, which was then incurable. Overcome by a fear of death, he tried desperately to convince Mother and himself that his illness was not as dire as everyone thought. He forced Mother to drink from his glass and tried in every way to infect her with the disease. He did not succeed, however: he died within a year of their marriage, without passing the illness on to her.

At his funeral Mother met his cousin Mykhailo Kardynalovsky, and they soon fell in love. But they could not marry, because the church forbade marriages between a close relative of a deceased man and his widow. Their love was so strong that, disregarding law and public opinion, they began living together, which in those times required extraordinary courage. When their son, my brother Serhii, was born a

year later, my father adopted him immediately. Shortly afterwards my parents were permitted to marry legally.

Mother's life was filled by music and her children. Like my father, she had little affinity for the military milieu. Officers' wives visited us very infrequently and only when such visits were absolutely obligatory. Mother's true friends were artistic people and her brother's university friends, with whom she kept up a lively correspondence. All of these people lived in Kyiv, whereas our family was obliged to move from place to place every two or three years, for with each of Father's promotions to a higher rank came transfer to a new location.

## CHAPTER 3

My father's first transfer was to Omsk. It came on the eve of the war with Japan, and I remember it well. The journey by train took nearly three weeks. But the trip itself was of little interest to us children. The only exciting parts were the stops at small Siberian stations along the way. The approaching train would attract the local inhabitants, who would rush to the station to sell the passengers all kinds of produce—bread, eggs, milk, and the like. During one stop, Mother asked our German nanny to purchase some eggs. She came back empty-handed, telling Mother in a frightened voice that “those women sell only crow's eggs.” At first Mother didn't understand what she was talking about, but then she realized what the nanny meant. The Russian word for “boiled” (*varënyi*) sounds very similar to the Ukrainian word for “crow's” (*voronyi*), and the nanny thought that crow's eggs were being sold. At another station, a group of Ukrainian peasants, dressed in embroidered shirts and speaking Ukrainian, met the train—on camels! They brought watermelons, muskmelons, and vegetables. What a strange sight that was—Ukrainian peasants on camels!

It was late autumn when we finally arrived in Omsk, and the weather was murky and uninviting. That evening we were all sitting on unpacked suitcases in our new home, located at the intersection of “Impassable” and “Old Grave” streets. The cold room was semidark. As Mother read some heartrending story, tears rolled down my cheeks and my heart was heavy, as if filled with foreboding about the joyless life that awaited us in Siberia.

In those days Omsk was a small city with unpaved streets. Instead of sidewalks, people had to walk on narrow wooden planks supported on high wooden poles. This was essential because a great deal of snow fell during the winter, and when it melted in the spring, the streets became absolutely impassable to pedestrians or any other kind of traffic. Scenes like the following one were common. A small pony pulling a very heavily loaded cart would be beaten mercilessly by the driver until the poor beast collapsed into the mixture of snow and mud and was half-immersed in the slush. The driver continued to beat the horse as he tried to pull him out, but to no avail. The horse floundered and sank deeper and deeper into the mud. A crowd gathered; someone brought the long planks designed specifically for such occasions. The planks were shoved under the horse, and a man grasped each end.

They rocked the planks up and down until the horse slid to a dry place and could stand.

We lived in Omsk twice—once before the war with Japan and then again after it ended and Father came home from the front. Both times left me with unpleasant memories of cold so brutal that birds, frozen in flight, fell out of the sky and people walked about with their breath frozen on their collars. We children had our faces smeared with lard to protect us against frostbite. Our warm parkas were made of deerskin and lined with fur. They had to be pulled down over our heads and tied at the neck. They kept us warm, but they were so heavy that when we fell, we couldn't get up without help. As a child I tended to fall a lot, which caused our Siberian nanny to exclaim, "What a child—now up, now down!" My clumsiness may have been the result of the rickets I had suffered as a child, which left me with bowed legs. I had been treated with "sand baths"—that is, my legs were buried in hot sand on the banks of the Dnipro River. Afterwards the rickets disappeared, but I was unsteady on my feet for some time.

The local people would prepare *pelmeni* (meat dumplings) for the winter, piling them into huge outdoor barrels. The *pelmeni* would freeze immediately, and then they would be cut out of the pile with an axe as needed. Milk was also sold at the bazaar, in frozen chunks. In the summer, however, everything bloomed, and in August, when the harvest was ripe, one could walk along a path in the fields and watch a rider on horseback disappear into the tall fields of wheat—Siberian horses are so short that the feet of their riders seem to touch the ground.

There were many Kirghiz people among the local inhabitants. Once we were walking with our nanny along the wooden sidewalk when we suddenly heard screams and spotted two Kirghiz men. One had a bloody knife in his hand and was chasing the other. Nanny scooped us under the arms and flew like a bullet onto our porch. We all rushed inside and our nanny bolted the door. Almost immediately there was a tremendous banging on the door, and we heard one of the men pleading to be let in. We were frozen with fear. Nanny made no move toward the door, and soon the porch was quiet. After some time, we peeked out the window. There was the body of the murdered Kirghiz, lying on the porch in a big pool of blood.

I also remember the big Siberian watchdogs. Many of them were a crossbreed with wolves, which often wandered in from the taiga to the city, especially during the spring, and frolicked with the dogs. In



*Tania (right) and her sister Liza  
(Omsk, Siberia, 1905 or 1906)*

fact, dog owners there never knew for certain whether the animal in their kennel was a dog or a wolf. Our landlord had a huge watchdog named Osman. When he broke off his leash and dashed down the street, all the neighbors would scatter, screaming "Osman's loose!" I don't know how Osman got his reputation, but we children didn't let it deter us at all. We crawled into his doghouse and played with him, and the dog never hurt us. Mother knew about our friendship with Osman but did not forbid it, to the astonishment of our neighbors.

As for the wolves, I remember hearing about something that happened one winter. The frost that year was particularly brutal, and the forest animals suffered greatly. An officer had to go to a neighboring village with his family. They set out on the journey in two sleds—the officer and his wife in the first, followed by the second with a driver, a nanny, and their infant. The road wound through a thick forest. When they had traveled about half the distance, they heard the howling of wolves. The horses sped up, but the wolves' cries got closer and closer. The first sled was quicker, leaving the second somewhat behind. The driver beat the horses to make them speed up, but the hungry wolves, jumping out onto the road, started to gain on it. The driver, turning his head, saw that the infant had fallen out of the sled. He pulled on the reins, but it was impossible to stop the terrified horses. As the sled sped away, the wolves attacked the child and tore it to pieces. Later, under questioning, the nanny swore that a wolf had leaped into the sled and had torn the baby from her arms. The driver, however, declared that she had thrown the child from the sled to the wolves. The judges apparently found the nanny's testimony more believable, for they exonerated her.

## CHAPTER 4

At the end of the Russo-Japanese War, Father was transferred to Pavlovskaiia Sloboda, a former Arakcheev settlement near Moscow.<sup>9</sup> The settlement buildings were arranged in a square: the center was an area for drills, and around it stood the soldiers' barracks, officers' quarters, stables, and other buildings. Located at one end was the sports equipment: vaulting horses, ropes, rope ladders, and the like. My sister Liza, who was then five, climbed the ropes like a monkey. Her skill was greatly admired by the soldiers and the training officer, who often asked her to demonstrate it.

The soldiers were taught to ride, and Father enrolled us too in a series of riding lessons. Because we were small and could not sit in saddles, we were seated directly on the horses' backs, with saddle blankets as our only cushions. The horses knew instinctively what kind of riders we were, and they soon resorted to antics—they would stop suddenly and lower their heads, causing us to slide down their necks to the ground together with the saddle blankets.

Another episode involving horses and Pavlovskaiia Sloboda took place one winter's day. My parents had been in Moscow and they had returned by train. The station they arrived at was thirty kilometers from Pavlovskaiia Sloboda. A driver had been dispatched with a carriage and a pair of horses to meet them. The train was late, so the horses had been confined in a stable for a long while and were restive. Anyone who has worked with horses knows that when they are uneasy, horses can suddenly bolt and tear off, oblivious to any efforts to restrain them. And that is precisely what happened. My parents had hardly settled themselves in the sled when the horses took off. The driver pulled on the reins with all his might, but in vain. The reins tore into the horses' mouths, but they kept on galloping wildly. Luckily, the carriage robes were fastened tightly around my parents; otherwise they would have fallen out when the carriage careened around the curves. The driver finally stopped trying to guide the horses; instead he prayed they would get to their destination safely and that the Sloboda's gate would

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<sup>9</sup> The first Arakcheev settlement was created in 1810 by Aleksei Arakcheev, the head of military affairs in the Russian Empire. The peasant inhabitants of the settlements were forced to perform lifelong military duties besides *corvée*, and to live under strict army conditions, including limitations on marriage. The settlements were abolished in 1857.—*Eds.*

be open. And that happened. The horses galloped the entire thirty kilometers, dashed through the Sloboda's narrow opened gate, made a sharp turn at the square to the stables, and came to a dead halt.

One day a young officer named Boris Nikanorovich Sitniakovsky was transferred to Pavlovskaja Sloboda. When he caught sight of Liza, he was struck by her resemblance to his young sister, whom he had loved dearly and who had died a short time before. Liza promptly became a favorite of his. He would seat her on a pillow before him on horseback, and they would ride about the Sloboda grounds together. One day Boris Nikanorovich received a letter that his mother was coming to visit. He became anxious, for he didn't know how he would introduce Liza to his mother. But his worry proved needless. When his mother first heard of his attachment to a girl who resembled her deceased daughter, she was distraught, but when she met Liza her agitation eased and she soon became fond of her. Several years later, during the war with Germany, Boris Nikanorovich visited us in Kyiv. He was married by then, but the marriage was not a happy one. By this time Liza had become a tall and beautiful young woman. Boris Nikanorovich's warm feelings towards her were rekindled and now developed into romantic ones. But Liza continued to relate to him as she had in childhood, with warm girlish friendship and trust, and there was no chance of a romance developing between them.

From early childhood we had live-in tutors whose task it was to prepare us for secondary school, that is, entrance into a gymnasium. They lived with us for years, and several—for instance, our teacher of German, Fräulein Liebe—became like members of the family. I also well remember our teacher of botany. My sister and I were not in the least bit interested in botany, but we adored butterflies. Our brother Seriozha had a butterfly collection, and Liza and I loved to capture new butterflies to add to it, always asking the botany teacher, "And what is this butterfly's name, according to your botany?" Above all, we loved animals, as did our whole family, especially Mother. She taught us to treat them well. We never hurt any animals who happened to come into our lives; on the contrary, we always took care of them as best we could. Knowing this, the soldiers would sometimes bring us squirrels, hedgehogs, or other animals. Once they brought us a small polecat. When I trustingly put out my hand to him, the frightened animal seized my finger with its teeth and bit it right down to the bone. A polecat usually sinks its teeth into its victim in a death grip. Once this one got hold of my finger, it held fast for about ten minutes, until someone managed to pull it off. I

endured the incredible pain stoically and did not cry—it was typical for me not to cry from pain. For instance, when I was twelve I ran down the stairs holding on to the rail, not noticing the nail that was sticking up from it. The nail slashed my arm open almost to the elbow, so severely that the sinews were exposed. When I was taken to the doctor, he took one look and ordered everybody out of the room—he was certain I would scream horribly when he cleaned and stitched the wound. To his surprise, I uttered not a sound.

We children dreamed of having a dog. One day we found out that a dog had wandered into the house of our neighbor and that she wanted to get rid of it. We immediately ran to her house and met the small dog—a black, short-haired Manchester terrier, whom the neighbor had already named Ralf. We all liked Ralf very much and he seemed to be taken with us, for he immediately began playing and chasing after us. When we found out that the dog was a female, she became Ralfochka. She lived with us for ten years and became part of the family. Ralfochka knew each of us by name, and when we sat down to dinner, she would come up to the table expecting to play her favorite game. We would send her from one of us to the other, calling “Ralfochka, go to Tania!” “Go to Seriozha!” and so on, as the dog happily ran from one of us to the other.

All of us liked to read, but Seriozha read with special interest and fascination. He was never without a book, and every family photograph showed Seriozha with a book in his hand, a finger holding his place. The themes of our games always seemed to derive from whatever book Seriozha was reading, in particular the novels of Alexandre Dumas, James Fenimore Cooper, and Thomas Mayne Reid. He would assign us names to match. I was “White-Haired Eagle,” Liza was “Quick-Footed Doe,” and Seriozha himself was “Creeping Snake.” The village boys took part in our games with immense enthusiasm. Officers’ wives usually forbade their children to play with peasant children, but our mother readily let us play in the village. We swam in the river with our friends and went mushroom and berry picking with them, often disappearing for the entire day. For our outings Mother sewed special bags on which she embroidered our names. We would fill them with food and set out on our journeys feeling like real adventurers.

Once we went to the river by ourselves and found a small raft tied up at the shore. At Seriozha’s proposal, we got on and set sail. First we sailed along the shore, but soon the current carried us out to the middle of the river. Seriozha, keeping his wits about him, ordered us to lie down on our stomachs and use our arms as oars. The raft was



very narrow—it could barely hold the three of us. We all began flailing away but produced little momentum—after all, we were only small children. Finally, our raft started to drift back to shore. When I recall those times now, I wonder that Mother did not worry about our being out alone like that. Yet I also marvel at her wisdom in allowing us to try out our own strength and become independent and courageous, qualities that would help us greatly later in life.

When it came time for us to enroll in secondary school, there of course arose the question of what gymnasium to choose. Father decided that my brother should attend the Rostovtsev Gymnasium in Moscow, then considered one of the best. He thought that the best choice for my sister and me was the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg, but Mother was resolutely opposed. So Father selected instead the Alekova Gymnasium for Girls in Moscow, which he had heard was an exceptionally good school. Consequently we children and Mother moved to Moscow itself, while Father remained at the Sloboda settlement.

In Moscow we settled in the part of town called the Arbat. At that time the Arbat was a peaceful neighborhood, with brick pavements and small buildings set in the midst of greenery. We loved to walk along its quiet streets with our mother. Leo Tolstoy came to Moscow at that time and settled in the same area. It was said that on his walks along the streets he enjoyed meeting and chatting with children. One morning we spotted Tolstoy walking along, dressed in a Russian peasant shirt: he looked just like the photographs of him we had seen in books, so we recognized him immediately. Speaking quietly, Mother urged us to go and greet him. But we were overcome by frightened shyness and hesitated: “What if he asks us which of his books we’ve read—or talks about one that we don’t know?” Mother tried convincing us that Tolstoy would not ask such questions, but we refused to budge. While we sparred back and forth, Tolstoy passed by and the opportunity vanished. We never came across him again. Later, as an adult, I greatly regretted that I had let the chance to meet him slip by.

In the fall of 1910, Sergei Utochkin, one of the first Russian aviators, came to Moscow. Leaflets announcing he would fly an airplane were posted all over Moscow, and the public was invited to gather at a military firing range just outside the city to witness the event. While out on a walk with a friend, my mother spotted a leaflet and decided to go, for she was very curious to see how a human being could fly. She and her friend set off together for the field. When they got close, it turned out that the field

was encircled by a tall barricade, and one had to have a ticket to get in. When Mother asked where she could get one, she was told that they were all sold. Mother, genuinely disappointed, decided to do something she had never done before, that is, make use of her "high position." She declared that she was a general's wife and showed her passport as proof. When it became clear that she was telling the truth, she and her friend were seated in the very first row, with a good view of Utochkin's takeoff. Those sitting in the back could hardly see it at all, for his plane flew very low to the ground. But the best view was from the other side of the fence, from the tops of a row of tall trees that some enterprising young boys had climbed.

Fall came and school began. I clearly remember our first day. The other girls surrounded us and showered us with questions: "Who is your father?" "What estates does your family own?" Our reply that Father was a general seemed to satisfy them, but the fact that we did not own any estates aroused the girls' consternation. And when they heard that we had arrived at the gymnasium by streetcar instead of private carriage, they lost all interest in us. Many of these young girls came from titled families, and the parents of many were millionaires. All the girls were fluent in French, whereas the only foreign language we knew was German. Then, too, we weren't accomplished at "dancing the mazurka." All in all, we felt totally alien in this milieu. To our great joy, in the spring of 1910 Father was transferred to the Caucasus, and we left both that school and Moscow. Our destination was Temir Khan Shura, then the capital of Dagestan.

## CHAPTER 5

The town of Temir Khan Shura was very small—its population was about three thousand, as I recall. It was located some forty-five kilometers from the seaport of Petrovsk, the train's final stop. From Petrovsk one had to travel to Temir Khan Shura by carriage across the mountain range described in the stories of Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. The governor's residence was in the town, and it was here that the Fifty-second Artillery Brigade was stationed. My father was assigned to be its commander. Although the brigade was considered to be a part of the Russian army, local mountaineers comprised over a third of it. They wore wine-colored, gold-trimmed Circassian coats with red-lined brown hoods. In these uniforms they cut very handsome figures, for they were slender and had amazingly small waists. They were also excellent horsemen. On tsarist and religious holidays there would be military parades in the city square, after which there were performances of trick riding. This truly beautiful spectacle attracted all the city's inhabitants, as well as people from outlying villages. The riders performed unbelievable tricks. For example, galloping at full speed on horseback, they would bury a dagger into the ground up to its very handle. Riding off a ways, they would then wheel their horses around and, galloping at the same dizzying speed, bend low from their saddles and pluck the dagger up from the ground with their teeth. In the evening there were performances of dances called the *lezginka*. Girls in beautiful national costumes danced as if they were floating over the ground. Chadors of light fabric pinned to their hair covered their faces. As they turned away from their partners, they would unveil their faces, and each girl's partner danced around her as if in pursuit. The passionate and surging vitality of the men, contrasted with the shyness and grace of the girls, made the dance very expressive and beautiful. Afterwards the men would dance separately. Their dances were also extraordinary and lovely to watch, but I always trembled with fear when the dancers held the tips of the daggers close to their eyes and started to spin and leap at incredible speed.

There were two schools in Temir Khan Shura—a boys' secondary school that focused on scientific subjects, and a gymnasium for girls. There were seven grades in the boys' school. The mountain boys who attended had a very poor knowledge of Russian; they were indifferent students and were expected to complete only four of the school's

seven grades. They would then go on to the Elizavetgrad Cavalry School, entrance to which required only four years of schooling. As a rule, it took the mountain boys twelve years to complete these four years of school! Each grade could be repeated three times, and most of the boys took full advantage of that. By the time they graduated at the age of twenty, all of them were married and had children.

At the girls' gymnasium that my sister and I attended, the local girl students also commonly repeated a grade several times. Most of them married very young, and few completed the full eight grades. Their parents demanded that they bring their chadors to school in case the teacher happened to be a man. The route to school took me and my sister through the square where the boys' school stood. Invariably, the windows would be flung open and the boys would throw us kisses, calling out, "Hello there, sweetie!" Father, who was familiar with local customs, made sure that his orderly always walked us to and from school. Though we were only ten and eleven, there was reason for concern, especially after the following incident. A fruit dealer from the mountains visited our home. Seeing me, he told my father he would like to buy me to be his wife. When Father refused, the man, thinking that the offer must be too low, raised it several times. This continued until my father lost patience and ordered him to leave. The man left in anger, and when Father's friends heard of this, they warned him that the man might try to kidnap me. After that Father ordered us never to leave the premises unaccompanied by one of our orderlies.

My sister and I were always close, and probably that was why we felt little need to make friends among our peers. I became friends with only one of my classmates—a Tatar girl named Khabira Tabasaranskaia (Russians living in the Caucasus called all the mountain people Tatars). Khabira came from a wealthy and distinguished family that regularly hosted formal galas in their home, which we girls from the gymnasium were invited to attend. The galas were held in a huge hall with large windows and narrow floor-to-ceiling mirrors. The spacious toilet in the house also attested to the wealth of Khabira's parents. Instead of toilet paper, guests were provided with silver jugs filled with water (my first encounter with the custom).

Apart from Khabira, I remember a Georgian girl who attended one of the upper classes. She was strikingly beautiful—tall and slender, with long black hair. She was very popular at school dances, where the boys swarmed around her. I did not know her well, but enjoyed watching her from a distance. Once she invited me and several other

classmates to her home. In her room we saw a large photo of her eleven brothers. All of them were cavalry officers, and we were told that they all were very fond of their sister. Sometime later, terrible news swept the gymnasium: the Georgian girl had committed suicide. It was said that she had become pregnant and could not bear the shame she had brought on herself and her family. I was totally stunned by this news. I could not understand how eleven brothers could fail to protect their beloved sister, or why pregnancy should bring shame upon a woman in the first place. Also, at the age of eleven, I couldn't understand how she could be pregnant without being married.

Our brother Seriozha also had few friends. Indeed, he had only one friend, a Georgian named Vania Alkhazov. Vania was the son of a piano tuner and had a passionate love of music. Everyone in his family was musically gifted—Vania and his brother inherited perfect pitch from their father. During his frequent visits Vania used to sit in the corner of the living room, near the piano, and listen to our mother play. Sometimes he would sit down at the piano and play from memory his favorite works by Mozart and Beethoven he had heard Mother play. He would recreate them with unbelievable subtlety and accuracy, conveying all the nuances beautifully. Once Mother took him with us to Tiflis (now Tbilisi) to attend a performance of *Carmen*. The opera had a great impact on him—he sat motionless and totally absorbed throughout the performance. The following day he came to our house and, as usual, sat down at the piano. Once again we heard the overture to *Carmen*, followed by all the rest of its music: the extraordinary boy had memorized the whole opera!

I suspect Vania was somewhat taken with me, though he never spoke of it. He only told my brother that he dreamed about having his picture taken with me. I knew this, and one day as we were passing a photographer's studio I suggested that we go in and have our picture taken together. Vania beamed with happiness, and as a result I have a picture of myself with Vania.<sup>10</sup> We stayed in touch with him long after our family left Temir Khan Shura—he even visited us in Kyiv several times during the First World War. To our sorrow, he was later killed at the front.

The families of Russian officers living in Temir Khan Shura did not dare go to the mountains and rarely ventured outside the town—and then only for organized group picnics. As usual, our family was different.

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, this photo could not be found.—Eds.

Mother often took us to the mountains. The orderlies accompanied us, and for long trips there were also hired guides. Sometimes we spent the night in a *saklia* (a Caucasian type of stone house) belonging to friends of the guides. The mountain people were famed for their hospitality, and to us, as friends of friends, they were particularly kind. We were always asked to share a meal with them. At first we did not have the courage to eat their food, because they added *cheremsha* (a garlicky and sharp-smelling spice) to practically every dish. Its odor permeated their clothes and living quarters. Finally, though, after much coaxing by our hosts, we tried some—and promptly forgot all about its odor. After that we gamely ate anything that was offered to us. These mountain hikes remain among my most pleasant memories from those years. We would wander in the mountains for hours on end, beautiful new vistas opening before us at every turn.

One time I climbed up a cliff and sat on its very edge, drinking in the lovely view. I had been sitting there for quite some time when I suddenly realized that an eagle was soaring above me. It was circling slowly and dropping altitude with every turn—my presence on the cliff had obviously captured its interest. I became uneasy. The bird was enormous, and I recalled how the guides had told us that eagles sometimes descended to snatch up goats and sheep. In no time at all I was scrambling back down the cliff.

Another day we were out in the mountains with our orderlies, this time without any guides. First we rode on horseback, and then we traveled on by foot. It was a beautiful day, and we wandered about the mountains, discovering fresh beauty everywhere. When evening came, we started looking for a place to spend the night. Mother noticed a quiet little hollow under a cliff and we decided to camp there. We had started to take out our tent and sleeping bags when suddenly we heard someone say, “What are you doing here?!” The speaker, a highland hunter, was approaching us. He had spotted us quite by accident at a distance and had come to warn us that, the day before, he had seen a bear and her cubs sleeping in this very spot—no doubt they would return. We quickly packed up our things and left for a safer location.



*Tatiana (in Temir-Khan-Shura, former capital of Dagestan, Caucasia, 1912)*

## CHAPTER 6

Relations between the Russians and the local inhabitants were more or less civil, but hostility could surface at the slightest provocation. For instance, Russian soldiers would often entertain themselves by calling over a mountain boy, giving him a piece of meat to eat, and then telling him, "That was pork!" When the boy fell to the ground in anguish, screaming that he had committed a sin, the soldiers roared with laughter. Naturally enough, the family of the boy would gather, pull out their daggers, and a fight would ensue.

Deaths were known to occur. If a local student received a poor grade in school, his teacher's life might be at stake. At that time Dagestan was only partly "subdued." The mountaineers were a freedom-loving, bellicose people, and periodically a confrontation of some sort would develop between them and a Russian detachment in one of their villages, each of which was called an *aul*. In 1910 real warfare broke out over Zelim Khan, whom the Russians saw as a bandit but the mountaineers viewed as a patriot and hero.

Zelim Khan, the leader of a small but daring band on horseback, sought revenge against the Russians, who had conquered his fatherland. Attacking swiftly, he would rob and kill any Russians he could and then distribute all his gains among the inhabitants of the nearest *aul*. A special cavalry division was organized to deal with this Caucasian Robin Hood. It included not only Russians, but also a good number of mountaineers who had personal vendettas against Zelim and his associates. They soon realized it was impossible to catch him. One time our father, with evident delight, told us the tale of how Zelim Khan, threatened with imminent capture, had ridden into an *aul*. Telling his people to scatter, Zelim continued riding his horse in full view of the Russians. Then, suddenly, he vanished, as if the earth had swallowed him up. It was certainly true that Zelim had sympathizers in every *aul* who were ready to spirit him away and shelter him.

Another episode demonstrated the extent of Zelim Khan's prodigious courage, adroitness, and wit. He was riding a horse alongside a ravine, on a path so narrow that it was impossible for two travelers to pass each other: it was said that whenever a mountaineer rode onto this path, he would fire a shot to warn anyone who might be at the other end to wait until he had passed through. In any case, two Russian detachments had cornered Zelim there and now



stood guard at either end, waiting for him to appear. The officer in command, certain that he was about to capture his quarry at last, sent a messenger to Zelim with a note that read, "Give yourself up, Zelim Khan! I have you in my pocket!" But Zelim did not surrender. As night approached, the Russian detachments pitched camp for the night, knowing that Zelim had no way to escape. Toward dawn, they heard a loud noise—could it be that Zelim Khan was so foolhardy as to bolt on horseback down into the ravine? The Russians were stunned—they didn't expect such a tactic even from someone as brave and reckless as Zelim. Both detachments hurriedly left their camps and cautiously made their way down into the ravine to capture the rebel. Meanwhile Zelim calmly proceeded along the now unguarded path, went up into the mountains, and disappeared. The sound the Russians had heard was Zelim pushing his beloved horse over the edge of the cliff and into the ravine: by sacrificing the animal, he saved his own life. The following day the Russian officer received a note from Zelim: "Prince, there's a hole in your pocket!"

By a strange coincidence, many years later, when my daughters and I were already in America, my elder daughter Assya found out from her publisher, Israel Rausen, that he had taken part in the pursuit of Zelim Khan. Rausen was astonished that Assya knew the story. In all his years of living abroad, he had never before met anyone who knew anything about Zelim. Rausen spoke excitedly about the mountain rebel and his adventures, mentioning the incident when the commanding officer found he had "a hole in his pocket." He said Zelim's death was finally brought about by a jealous woman who betrayed his hiding place to the Russians (no wonder the French always warn, "*Cherchez la femme*"!). Acting on her information, the Russians encircled the house where Zelim was hiding. He returned fire for a long time, and then there was silence. The soldiers waited until finally the door slowly opened and Zelim appeared on the doorstep. Not knowing whether he had run out of ammunition or had decided to give himself up, and fearing a trick of some sort, the soldiers dared not move. Zelim Khan fired a few more shots at his enemies and then fell dead to the ground. Only then did they approach him, and froze in amazement: his whole body was riddled with bullets.

The fighting spirit of the mountain people played a tragic role in our family. One spring, after school was out, an overnight trip to the mountains was arranged for the honor students at the boys' school. My brother Seriozha, who was then twelve, was among those invited

to go. The teachers were to accompany the students, but Mother still worried that something might go wrong. She feared that the students, disregarding the rules, would bring along alcoholic beverages and get drunk. Our dog, Ralfochka, also sensed danger. The moment Seriozha left, she came to his room and started whining. She was sent outdoors, where she settled herself down under his window and howled continuously until dawn. The next morning, two teachers arrived at our door. One of them addressed Father: "Your son has sustained a slight wound." Father went pale and asked, "Where?" The teacher silently pointed to his temple. It turned out that what Mother feared had indeed happened. A drunk student had played a stupid joke and had taken aim at my brother with a rusty old pistol. My brother had tried to persuade him to desist from the drunken and dangerous folly, but the other boy continued aiming the pistol at Seriozha and said boastingly, "If you were a robber, I would shoot you like this—" and then pulled the trigger. A shot rang out and a bullet hit my brother in the left temple. Seriozha fell, unconscious. He was taken to the military hospital in Vladikavkaz, where he remained in a coma and hovered between life and death for several months. The student who had shot Seriozha was so guilt-ridden that he tried committing suicide. He was to be brought to trial, but Father refused to press charges, saying that that would not put anything to rights and that the boy was already being punished by his own remorse. The school administration wanted to expel the boy, but Father rejected that too, saying sadly, "That won't make me feel any better."

The doctors in Vladikavkaz felt it was beyond their competence to operate on my brother and advised my father to contact a specialist—a surgeon in St. Petersburg. The specialist named an exorbitant sum of several thousand rubles for his services, to which Father agreed. When the specialist arrived, he examined my brother and angrily exclaimed, "Why did you bring me out here to tend to someone who is dying?" Taking his payment, he left without even trying to help Seriozha. The local doctors then undertook the operation themselves. The trepanation of the skull they performed did not locate the bullet: it was deeply imbedded in a bone at the back of the head. The doctors did not dare to do anything more. My parents took my brother to St. Petersburg, to the famed Bekhterev Hospital, while my sister and I stayed behind in the Caucasus with our grandmother. After a time, Father was obliged to return to his brigade in Temir Khan Shura, but Mother remained in St. Petersburg to be near Seriozha.

Father suffered immensely throughout this ordeal. He became self-absorbed and nearly forgot about my sister and me. Later, however, he sought my company. He taught me to play chess and we played for hours—apparently that soothed him. He obtained postcards on which the words and music of some old Cossack *dumy* were printed, including his favorite, “The *Duma* about the Cossack Morozenko.”<sup>11</sup> He asked me to learn to play this song on the piano, and I had to play it for him every evening. I can hear its sad melody in my mind even now:

O Moroz, Morozenko,  
 You Cossack of great deeds!  
 It is for you, Morozenko,  
 That all Ukraine weeps.

Ukraine weeps, but your dear  
 Mother she cries even more.  
 Morozykha<sup>12</sup> burst into tears  
 Standing by the door.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry, Morozykha,  
 To grieve there’s no need.  
 Come join us Cossacks now,  
 Have a drink of mead!”

“Mead, my dear Cossacks,  
 Has lost its taste for me,  
 For my son, my Morozenko,  
 Is fighting the enemy....”

Seriozha was given a private room in the hospital, and another bed was placed there for Mother. Seriozha was two and half years older than I was, and though we were very close, I had not realized how

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<sup>11</sup> The *dumy* were Cossack epic songs and originated in the 16th century. They were performed throughout Right-Bank and Left-Bank Ukraine by itinerant minstrels to the accompaniment of a kobza or bandura as late as the 1920s. See *Ukrainian Dumy: Editio minor*, trans. George Tarnawsky and Patricia Kilina, intro. by Natalie K. Moyle (Toronto and Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and Petro Odarchenko, “Duma,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 1, ed. Volodymyr Kubijovyč (Toronto, 1984), 769–70.—Eds.

<sup>12</sup> Morozenko’s mother.—Eds.

much he cared for me. Mother later told that he called out my name the whole time he lay unconscious. All the hospital personnel who tended him knew he had a sister named Tania.

Dr. Botkin, the personal physician of the tsar and his family, made frequent visits to the hospital, and he would often stop by to see Mother. A friendship developed between them, and Botkin spoke to her at length about the tsar's family and about Rasputin. He said that Aleksei Nikolaievich, the heir to the throne, was very attached to Rasputin. At times Rasputin treated the boy rudely, but Aleksei never complained. Botkin confirmed the rumors that Rasputin had the power to stop a hemorrhage and that the man was a clairvoyant. He related one strange incident that he himself had taken part in. One evening Rasputin and the doctor were out walking together and they passed a drunken woman fast asleep on the steps of a building. They kept walking on, until suddenly Rasputin stopped, turned back, and went up to the woman. He shook her out of her sleep and told her, "Go home immediately! Something terrible has happened there." The woman roused herself and made her way unsteadily down the street. The doctor decided to follow her. It was a long way—the woman lived on the other side of town. When she finally turned into her own street, Dr. Botkin saw a crowd gathered outside one of the buildings. He soon learned the reason: a young girl had died suddenly—and she was the woman's daughter. The doctor knew scores of such incidents involving Rasputin.

Seriozha spent nearly a year in the hospital. His life was saved, but he was never the same, never a whole person again. Before his second operation, he began having epileptic seizures, which were to plague him to the end of his life. Also, the whole right side of his body was paralyzed, and his arm bent in at the elbow. At first, he could not move his right leg at all, but with therapy Seriozha learned to walk again, without even use of a cane. But the fact that he had suffered brain damage was the saddest part of all. For the rest of his life Seriozha remained a pleasant and kind person, but his mind was that of an adolescent. Although he did not become antisocial, he felt best when he was outdoors and alone—he would often wander off in the woods, gathering mushrooms. Animals had no fear of him at all—squirrels would come right up to him and sit on his shoulder while he fed them. Seriozha lived with us and at times with our uncle, and he always tried to be helpful and no burden to anyone. He was very gentle and considerate, and he was capable of very deep feelings. Once he fell in

love with an acquaintance of ours and, wanting to give her something nice, gathered flowers in the woods for her. It was painful for our family to observe all this and know that there was nothing we could do to help him.

One day, several years after he left the hospital, Seriozha was sitting in the kitchen with our orderly, watching him clean his rifle. The man accidentally pulled the trigger and a bullet flew just millimeters from Seriozha's head. Smiling sadly, Seriozha said, "It would be better if that bullet killed me." What irony! Seriozha's joyless life came to an end in Kyiv during the German occupation, when he found himself alone without any means to provide for himself. By the time I reached him, it was too late—Seriozha had died of starvation. Rest in peace, dear brother!

## CHAPTER 7

About a year after the accident, my sister and I moved to Kyiv with our “Black Grandmother.” Mother and Seriozha were already there. Father remained in the Caucasus until war broke out in 1914, and then he went directly to the front. We settled in Lukianivka, a suburb of Kyiv, on tree-lined and peaceful Velyka Dorohozhytska Street, where most of the residents were pensioners. A streetcar ran along the street to the center of town. Our house—number 44—stood on a hill. It was owned by the brother of the renowned art historian Ihor Hrabar. The house had a large garden in the back that extended down to a deep ravine, beyond which lay a workers’ settlement. It was in a house at the bottom of the ravine, right behind our garden, that the body of a boy surnamed Yushchinsky was found: some newspapers were carrying reports that he had been killed in a ritual murder by a Jewish man called Mendel Beilis. It was said that blood from a live Christian was needed to make matzos and that that explained the numerous knife wounds on the little boy’s body. In time the case against Beilis was brought to trial. Our family discussed the proceedings at length. None of us doubted that all of the “evidence” against Beilis was fabricated. The charge of inflicting wounds on a living person could have been verified by an autopsy, but the court would not allow one to be performed: it overruled the defense on the matter time and again. The whole city hummed with talk that if Beilis were found guilty, a pogrom would be inevitable. I was distraught over newspaper accounts detailing the horrible murder and maintaining that it had been committed for ritual purposes.

Any mention of a pogrom brought back one of my childhood memories. Mother and I were riding in a carriage when suddenly, somewhere in front of us, we heard muffled sounds—a combination of screams, singing, and the stomp of many feet. From around the corner a crowd appeared, led by a priest carrying an icon. As these people marched and sang liturgical songs, Jews were running out in panic from the side streets. Our driver turned to us and said anxiously, “It’s a pogrom! But don’t worry—I’ll turn into the first alley!” And so he did, driving the horses at breakneck speed.

The day Beilis was to be sentenced, a crowd of people gathered and filled the enormous square in front of the government offices where the trial was held. We went there too. The atmosphere was extremely tense

as everyone waited for the verdict. Finally an official appeared on the balcony and announced that the court had found Beilis not guilty.

What took place in the square then is impossible to describe. The crowd, which must have numbered over a thousand, let out a roar. People clasped and embraced one other, exuberantly shouting "Hurrah!" If there were dissenting voices, they were drowned out in the thunder of jubilation. Soon afterwards, Beilis appeared at a door, accompanied by several people. They all got into a car and drove off immediately through the crowd. Their destination was the railroad station, where a special train was waiting to take Beilis out of the country.

Our apartment on Velyka Dorohozhytska Street had eight spacious rooms. It accommodated my immediate family as well as Mother's brother Aliosha, his wife Zhenia, and their small daughter Oksana. Aliosha was then a student at the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute, while Zhenia was seeking admission to the Kyiv Medical Institute. At that time, it was very difficult for women to gain entry to medical school. Zhenia took the entrance exams several years in a row. She failed time after time, yet stubbornly kept preparing and reapplying. She finally managed to gain entrance to the School of Medicine in Zurich and then went on to complete her diploma there. Subsequently she was admitted to the Kyiv Medical Institute and became a physician. A woman with democratic convictions, Zhenia became a country doctor. She encountered many difficult and curious cases in her practice. Her first encounter with peasant women was a case in point. Several of them arrived at her clinic together and silently sat down. Zhenia waited a few minutes for one of them to speak, but they did not say a word. Finally she asked, "What health problems are you having? What ails you?" The women looked at one other and replied with evident scorn, "If you don't know, what kind of a doctor are you?"

One incident could have cost Zhenia her life. A woman who had contracted smallpox came to her for help and Zhenia prescribed treatment. The woman asked if she could keep breast-feeding her child despite the illness, and Zhenia assured her that she could continue without doing the infant any harm. The woman's husband, suspicious about the diagnosis, consulted another doctor, who said that continuing to breast-feed was out of the question, for the child might become infected and die. The husband tore into Zhenia's office in a rage and threatened her with a pistol, shouting, "If my child dies, I'll kill you!" Luckily, the child did not become ill and the case ended without incident.

Zhenia worked selflessly all her life. Many years later I learned that she was mobilized during the Second World War and worked as an army doctor, earning a medal for her services. After the war Zhenia continued practicing medicine. One day, while returning home from the clinic where she worked, she suffered a heart attack and died.

Aunt Zhenia was not a particularly important figure in my life, but her husband, my uncle Oleksii Kysilevsky, whom we all called Aliosha, was. A vibrant person with a great sense of humor, he loved poetry and was also a talented painter. After completing a degree in chemistry at the polytechnical institute, he got a job as an engineer at a sugar refinery. But soon the primitive and unhygienic production methods used there made him realize that the work was not for him, and he decided to change his profession. He returned to the polytechnical institute and enrolled in its Department of Road Construction. After several years of study, he became a highway engineer. He became well known and was well regarded throughout his long career. He also studied at the Kyiv Art School, where he worked in watercolors and became an accomplished landscape artist. His love of painting fitted in well with his new profession. Wherever his jobs took him—to the Altai, Mongolia, the Pechora River—he returned with beautiful watercolors he had painted. His friends tried convincing him to exhibit his work, but he refused, preferring to give his paintings away or stash them in a trunk. He was wary of attracting any attention from the authorities, fearing that they might discover his father's role as a community arbitrator and that might harm his career. For the same reason, Aliosha never published his travel notes, which were full of fascinating stories. One of them was about Mongolia and its fearsome blizzards. On one of Aliosha's expeditions through the steppe, dark thunder clouds suddenly appeared on the horizon. The members of the expedition, knowing from experience how rapidly such blizzards could descend in that region, began putting up shelters. The tent of a Mongolian nomad stood nearby: its owner was sitting at the entrance, calmly smoking a pipe and watching his cow graze nearby. Aliosha, puzzled by his calmness, asked the Mongol why he was not driving his cow to the corral. The Mongol screwed up his eyes, took the pipe out of his mouth, and said, "Why should I? Am I here to serve the cow, or is the cow here to serve me?" And troubling himself no further, the man continued sitting as impassively as before.

Another time Aliosha observed how the Mongols in one small settlement buried their dead. The deceased was wrapped in linen and placed on a low hearse that sloped to the ground. The driver whipped



the horse, and the wagon bumped along the road until the corpse fell off. According to local belief, wherever it fell was the place designated by the gods or fate for the repose of the deceased, and no one was permitted to move the body from that spot. The corpse was simply left for dogs to devour—great packs of them wandered the streets. Aliosha mentioned that the stench from such “funerals” was incredibly strong and could be smelled miles away.

Aliosha told another anecdote having to do with odors, this one not about the Mongols, but about the inhabitants of the Pechora region far to the north. As Aliosha’s party approached one settlement, they were struck by the stench of decaying fish. Coming closer, they saw huge pits half-filled with such fish. It turned out that this was the way the local inhabitants stored food for the winter. Throughout the brief summer and fall, until the first frosts, they caught fish and threw them into these pits. The fish started decaying, of course, but the fishermen continued eating them throughout the winter. Why these people were not poisoned as a result is baffling. Perhaps they developed some kind of special immunity to what they were eating.

Aliosha gathered hundreds of such observations, and he related them with colorful descriptions and dry humor. Once, while traveling on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, he struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger in his compartment. The passenger listened to Aliosha’s stories with great interest and declared that he must write them down, promising that they would be published. It turned out that the man was one of the editors of the Russian journal *Novyi mir* (New World). Disconcerted by his attention and praise, Aliosha assured the editor that he would write down and submit his stories. To my knowledge, however, he never did.

During the time we were living on Velyka Dorohozhytska Street and Aliosha was studying at the polytechnical institute, Liza and I were still gymnasium students. There was a twenty-year age difference between Aliosha and the two of us, his nieces, but that did not stop our threesome from enthusiastically undertaking joint literary projects. One of them was collaborating on parodies of the work of Aleksei Tolstoy, Aliosha’s favorite poet. We would write everything down in a special “journal,” which we titled the “Dorohozhytska News.” Aliosha was, of course, the main contributor, but Liza kept pace with him. I, however, lagged somewhat behind. Aliosha would also make comic drawings to complement our poetic output. Here is one of our poems, a parody of Tolstoy’s ballad “Sadko”:

Poor Liza is sad, at school she pines,  
While outside a glorious morning  
Announces spring—as it sparkles and shines,  
It fills her with wondrous yearning.

The streetcar below rolls aloud with a noise,  
The cars run along with a sputter,  
The freedom out there every creature enjoys  
As happy birds twitter and flutter.

And here the school mistress, still barely awake,  
Is gazing at her without emotion,  
And noisy schoolmates throughout recess  
Annoy her with all their commotion.

A German translation in front of her lies,  
But lost in her thoughts she is dreaming.  
To the Prince of Albania her fancy now flies,  
And beautiful visions are streaming.  
She sees the Albanian mountains so steep,  
Caressed by the azure-blue waters.  
The sea is so calm and mysteriously deep,  
And is dotted with sailing boaters.

And here comes the Prince, and he says with a smile,  
“Elizabeth, dear—my sweetheart!  
Oh, why is your countenance sad all the while?  
Your secret to me do impart.

Perhaps the sweet sherbet we ate, my dear Beth,  
Did not meet with your approbation?  
Or maybe our etiquette bores you to death,  
As well as our whole population?

Reveal all your thoughts and emotions, I pray,  
To share them with you is my pleasure.  
An Albanian sailboat on this sunny day  
We will take to the sea without measure.

The sea gulls so swift and the fish we will feed  
 With French bread so good and nutritious,  
 And thus chase away with lightning speed  
 Your thoughts and bad mood so pernicious."

And presently Beth and the Prince go aboard  
 Their yacht, with the retinue trailing.  
 They carry the train of her dress in accord  
 With rules they obey without failing.

All at once something struck like a thunderbolt  
 And everything instantly vanished.  
 Liza found herself under sudden assault  
 Back at school, where she had been banished.

The girls left and right, as if in a game,  
 All shove her and shake her, relating  
 That the German instructor has called out her name  
 Three times in a row and is waiting.

Poor Liza jumped up, grabbed the book in her hands,  
 But the lines of the German translation  
 All blurred, and she could not at all comprehend  
 Their sense, to her great consternation.

The furious German pulled out the grade sheet  
 And entered without hesitation  
 The fateful grade "F," which no one can delete,  
 Leaving Liza without consolation.

Another of our joint creative efforts was a takeoff on Pushkin's "The Upas Tree," which describes a scene at a pawnshop. Our version included the following lines:

No beast nor fowl would be inclined  
 To go near such forbidding places,  
 Yet folk with bundles wait in line,  
 With resignation on their faces.

A man was sent to this abode  
 By someone's look of plaintive pleading,  
 He took his threadbare overcoat  
 And pawned it there, his heart bleeding.

Aliosha was a frequenter of pawnshops, so the topic was a familiar one to him. His financial situation was precarious throughout the time he was a student at the institute. His wardrobe consisted of a single suit, which he periodically took to the tailor to be turned, just like the hero in Gogol's "Overcoat." The tailor was a very colorful person, a character straight out of the stories of Sholom Aleichem. His name was Meislik. As a child, I thought his name was a diminutive and meant that everyone liked him. Indeed, Meislik was a good-hearted man. He sewed for our whole family. I can see him now, sitting on a table drawn up to a window in his basement flat. Able to see only the legs of passersby, he sat Turkish-style, plying a needle back and forth while his children played around him. He had many children and was forgetful of their names. When his children became very boisterous, Meislik, wanting to scold them but not remembering who was who, would shout out, "Hey, Boria, Misha—you, whoever you are! Stop it!" Meislik was poor, but he strove to teach his children to amount to something. Apparently he succeeded: most of them became professional people, and some graduated from university.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being writers of poetry, Liza and I were avid readers. One bookstore in Kyiv, Idzikovsky's, also housed a very good library. We borrowed many books from it, primarily works of contemporary Russian literature. Our home constantly reverberated with conversations about literature, music, and art, and we children participated in these. We matured under the influence of the adults in our family, who were people of culture, well educated, and talented. We often went together to concerts, the opera, and art exhibits. We loved frequenting the Solovtsov Theater,<sup>14</sup> which staged superb productions of Chekhov's, Ibsen's, and Leonid Andreev's plays. The Moscow Art Theater troupe would often appear there while on tour.

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<sup>13</sup> Many years later, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I met Dr. Jerry Meislik, an ophthalmologist whose family came from Kyiv. He believed that the tailor Meislik must have been one of his relatives, since they shared a very uncommon surname.

<sup>14</sup> A Russian theater in Kyiv founded in 1891 by the actor and director Nikolai N. Solovtsov (1857–1902). It was nationalized in 1919 and renamed the Second State Theater of the Ukrainian SSR.—*Eds.*



*Tatiana as a gymnasium student (Kyiv, 1915)*

My sister and I went to see that troupe's performance of Gogol's "Inspector General." The famous actor Stepan L. Kuznetsov played the role of Khlestakov. He looked extraordinarily handsome and acted beautifully. Liza and I were captivated by him, and we went to every one of his performances. Finally we mustered up the courage to try to see our idol close up. We successfully made our way backstage and, with our hearts in our throats, knocked on the door of his dressing room. The actor opened the door in a gentlemanly way and ... horror of horrors! Before us stood an

aging man, his face covered by a thick layer of greasepaint. The look of disenchantment on our faces must have spoken volumes. The actor laughed and said, "Young ladies, never seek to examine close up what looks beautiful from a distance." I have always remembered this wise piece of advice.

Kyiv also had a Ukrainian theater in those days. The plays performed there were attended largely by people from the working class. Liza and I sometimes went there with our mother, but more often we went with our orderlies or cooks. Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko's *Svatannia na Honcharivtsi* (Matchmaking at Honcharivka) and *Oi, ne khody Hrytsiu ta i na vechornytsi* (Don't Go to Evening Parties, Hryts) were the kind of plays staged there, because the tsarist censors permitted nothing more serious. In contrast, all of Kyiv would come out to listen to performances of the famous Ukrainian choir led by Oleksander Koshyts, so that getting tickets to them required both effort and luck. Our family never missed an opportunity to attend. The choir was made up mostly of students, so its members were constantly changing. Yet Koshyts was able to meld them into an excellent group of singers, and listening to them was a real pleasure.

We also enjoyed visits to the circus, particularly the acrobats' floor performances. Their aerial tricks frightened us, though, because

accidents sometimes happened. Liza and I liked one of the acrobats so much that we decided to present him with an album of reproductions of ancient Roman and Greek sculptures. After long deliberation, we came up with an inscription for the luxurious and quite expensive edition: "Here, for you, the living embodiment of the creative genius of the great masters, are the lifeless monuments of their achievements." Naturally enough, the acrobat was extremely pleased and flattered by our gift.

Following Aliosha's advice, we enrolled in courses at the Kyiv Art School and attended it for the next two or three years. There we learned to draw from real life, to paint with watercolors, and to sculpt. Later my creativity expressed itself in the little animals I made from play dough for my children and in drawings and paper cutouts. My classmates at the gymnasium were enthusiastic about embroidering, but I had absolutely no interest in it. We were all instructed in sewing and embroidering, but after it took me an entire year to cross-stitch one handkerchief, my teacher lost all hope of teaching me anything more. However, a love for embroidering must have lain dormant in my Ukrainian blood, for many years later, in England, I took to embroidering pillows in traditional Ukrainian patterns. British ladies then bought them eagerly—and for a song.

## CHAPTER 8

What I have described were the circumstances in my life during my formative years, when my likes, dislikes, and understanding of the world were developing. What kind of a person was I at the age of sixteen? Liza and I were often compared to Pushkin's Olga and Tatiana. Liza was active and agile, loved gymnastics, and rode horseback beautifully, whereas I was clumsy and thought of myself as uninteresting, plain, and unlike any of my friends. I had no romances or even lighthearted flirtations. Men paid court to me, and my appearance sometimes caught the attention of passersby—"Look at those eyes!" they would say—but that made no impression on me. I remained convinced I was not at all attractive. In character I took after my father—from childhood I was not very sociable, and after Seriozha's accident I became even more introverted. Reading became my one true pleasure, and it substituted for real life. I read serious literature not meant for a girl my age and yet had a deep understanding of it. By the age of thirteen or fourteen I had already read Dostoyevsky's *Karamazov Brothers* and *Crime and Punishment*, which had a profound, if depressing, impact on me, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, which I found more enjoyable.

I was thrilled by Tolstoy's philosophical and religious works, especially his treatise *The Basis of My Faith*. At that time I was very concerned with issues related to the meaning of life. Among other Russian classics, I was deeply moved by Ivan Goncharov's novel *The Precipice*. For some time his heroine, Vera, was my ideal, and the figure of Mark Volokhov, the strong-willed nihilist with a Romantic type of courage, stirred my imagination. From childhood I myself was courageous and decisive. Of the three of us children, I was the only one not afraid to enter a dark room. This characteristic was later captured with humor in our "Dorohozhytska News" in a poem based on Vasilii Zhukovsky's ballad "The Glove":

"Liza and Tania, which one of you  
Will go down to the dairy?  
I would send Peter, but today  
I let him go out to town."  
And with these words our mother took  
Her purse and the search began.



*Liza and Tatiana with their mother, Olha (Kyiv, ca. 1916)*

Three nickels was all that she could find,  
 And she looked at us again.  
 "For being so brave I will let you use  
 A nickel to buy any sweets you choose."  
 At first she received no response, but then  
 Tania got up from her seat  
 And marched resolutely out the door  
 Into the darkness and sleet.  
 And everyone thought in fear and anguish,  
 "Oh, Tania! In getting some yogurt  
 You'll perish!"

I was compassionate toward people and animals who were hurt, helpless, or weak, and I was always ready to help them. Perhaps that is why I developed a wish to become a doctor. I remember that as I was returning home from school one day, a young man approached me and asked for help, saying he was hungry and had no money. "I was drawn by your face," he said. "You look like a kind person to me, and that is why I dared to approach you. Please don't be afraid of me—I'm not a beggar. I'm simply an unfortunate person." The man looked truly pitiable. But although he was dressed in ragged clothes, his face had a look of refinement. Without hesitation, I gave him the two rubles I had in my pocket and then suggested that he come with me to our apartment. When I brought him home, I told Mother that he was an unfortunate,



hungry person who needed help. Without asking any questions, she led him to the kitchen and gave him some food. He was deeply moved by our kindness to him and soon told us his sad story. He was a musician, a violinist who had completed the music conservatory. But he had started drinking, and when he could not stop, he lost his job. Now he found himself out on the street, without shelter, friends, or any hope. He told his story with sincerity, and it was evident how embarrassed he was by what he was sharing. He thanked us and left, but later he made several more visits to our home. He seemed changed, and he told us he had stopped drinking and had a job. I don't know if the change lasted, but he did tell us that our family's compassion had saved his life.

Episodes like this one recurred in my life, as if someone knew I had a compassionate nature and sent all sorts of hapless and helpless beings, both people and animals, my way. I have lost count of the number of dogs and cats I saved—those I found on the street and those that found their own way to me. Whenever I failed to be of help to any of them, I suffered terribly. One autumn in Kyiv, storm windows were being installed in our apartment. The workers did not notice that a big green fly had flown in between the two sets of panes. The insect buzzed about frantically, beating against the pane, finding escape from its prison impossible. The spectacle made me cry, and I begged that the poor thing be freed somehow. But my pity for an insect seemed silly to everyone else. I recall to this day how that fly suffered for several weeks before it finally died.

Like everyone in my family, I loved poetry. Though later I would be enthralled by Vladimir Mayakovsky, Sergei Yesenin, and Aleksandr Blok, when I was in high school I liked Nikolai Nekrasov, primarily because of his democratic spirit and compassion for the common man. I also liked Semen Nadson, the general favorite of young people at the turn of the twentieth century. But my favorite poet was, and still is, Mikhail Lermontov. In those years the intelligentsia took a lively interest in questions of civic morality, and our family was no exception in that regard. Nikolai Chernyshevsky's ideas were looked upon favorably in our milieu, and his book *What Is to Be Done?* was a real revelation to me. I was particularly taken by ideas on women's liberation. I read with avid interest a book called *The Biological Tragedy of Women*. I cannot remember the name of the doctor who was the author,<sup>15</sup> but I do recall that he

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<sup>15</sup> The author's name is Anton V. Nemilov. The English translation of his work was published in New York in 1932.—Eds.

wrote compassionately about the fate of women as essentially enslaved by their families and limited to bearing and raising children. Later I read with similar interest a book by Victor Marguerite entitled *La Garçonne* and attended a performance of Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House*. Most influential in developing my worldview, however, was the philosophy of Max Stirner as espoused in his treatise *The Ego and His Own*. In it he confirmed the intrinsic value of the human individual and his or her life experience ("The world exists to the extent that I exist in it"). Stirner also expressed the idea that even when love is selfless and self-sacrificing, a person always loves out of egotism, that is, because he or she needs to love and this brings personal satisfaction. I was absolutely stunned by this idea, because it went so against the grain of the principles of morality and behavior generally held at the time. I accepted it, however, and added my own interpretation: that love was a gift I gave people freely and that therefore it obligated no one to me. I passed this idea on to my daughters, teaching them that they did not have to love me simply because I was their mother and took care of them. I did not need their love "out of duty" or as a reward. The girls understood, and our relations were based on mutual love and respect, to the surprise and delight of everyone who knew us.

When I was fourteen, my uncle Aliosha got me a subscription to the journal *Byloe* (The Past), which was devoted to the history of the revolutionary movement in the Russian Empire. (Today it seems amazing that the authorities allowed such publications to appear in those times.) The journal provided detailed information about the fate of people who had fought against autocracy at various times in history. In it I read, for example, about Mikhail Gots, the famous socialist about whom even Leo Tolstoy, who disliked revolutionaries, spoke with respect. Gots was an idealist, the "soul" of the Russian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, and completely committed to the socialist idea. He spent many years in prison, where he contracted tuberculosis. *Byloe* also mentioned that, as a result of "intense interrogations," Gots was paralyzed—he had lost control of his legs. When he was finally released from prison, his party immediately sent him abroad, from where he supervised revolutionary activity.<sup>16</sup> It was also in *Byloe* that I read about imprisoned revolutionaries who had gone on hunger

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<sup>16</sup> In Ann Arbor I also met Gots's relative, Dr. Alexander Gots. He revered Mikhail and collected all the material about him that was available abroad. He was pleasantly surprised that I knew about Mikhail, for he had not long met anyone who had heard of him.

strikes to protest against tsarist prison authorities. Knowing about this method of protest became important later, when I myself was placed under arrest.

I read other books on political issues, borrowing them from Idzikovsky's library, and found nothing paradoxical about the fact that I, the daughter of a tsarist general, should be reading such "anti-government" literature. Yet it never occurred to me to become active in any political party. Even later, when I was pulled into the very nucleus of the political struggle during the civil war in Ukraine, I remained on the sidelines of any real political involvement.

My first contact with revolutionary circles was through my friend Galia Melnikova, my classmate at the gymnasium. Galia's father, Yuvenalii Melnikov, was one of the founders of the Russian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries in Ukraine; he had died by the time I met her. I often visited Galia's family and became well acquainted with her mother and her brother, who was also named Yuvenalii, or Yuva, after his father. Galia, her brother, and I were close friends and often went sailing together on the Dnipro. Once Yuva's friend, Petia, joined us and the four of us went for a sail. We were out all day and came back home exhilarated. Yuva and his friend went home, while Galia remained at our house with me. We had sat down to have some tea when suddenly someone banged on the window (the room we were in was in the basement and the window was at ground level). It was Yuva's friend Petia bearing tragic news: "Yuva has shot himself!" We were stunned. We had just parted company, and Yuva had been so happy! Nobody—neither his friends nor his mother—ever found out why he committed suicide. For me this was another distressing experience. Fate seemed to be preparing me from an early age for the traumas that would befall me in the future.

Galia often spoke about her father, though she had seen him only a few times in her life, between his arrests. In all the photos of him she showed me, he was dressed in prison garb. Though Galia's life was sad, it was better than that of those children left without any home at all after their parents were imprisoned for political reasons. Yet even in those "accursed tsarist times" there were government agencies that supervised the care of such children. Through such agencies, these children were sent to peasant families who provided them with foster care at government expense. The funds received must have been adequate, for the peasants gladly took such children into their homes. Galia's mother worked for many years in one such agency, checking to

see whether the peasants made proper use of the money they received; she found that the majority of them did. In some cases the peasants would compete for a child: one little boy was so sweet and lovable that peasants literally stole him from each other!

I don't recall whether Galia's mother was a party member. Shortly after the Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks started seeking out old revolutionaries. One newspaper published an article that referred to Yuvenalii Melnikov as a Bolshevik. As a result, Galia's mother received a letter inviting her to join the organization of old revolutionaries. She wrote back with indignation that neither she nor Melnikov had ever been Bolsheviks and categorically refused to join the organization. Her letter was published. I don't know what happened to the family subsequently.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1920s Velyka Dorohozhytska Street was renamed Melnikov Street, in honor of Yuvenalii Dmitrovich Melnikov.

## CHAPTER 9

My carefree years at the gymnasium were drawing to a close, and fateful historical events were brewing. The war with Germany, which had lasted several years, was still going on. Father was fighting at the front and rarely came home. During one of his furloughs he was visited by an officer, a distant relative whom he had never met before. The officer was also serving at the front. Upon arriving in Kyiv he had looked us up through the address bureau (people named Kardynalovsky were all interrelated). Father did not maintain ties with his family, and I knew little about them. There was a Kardynalovsky in Odesa who held some high post—possibly that of the town's chief administrator (*gradonachalnik*)—and had the reputation of being a rabid reactionary. Another Kardynalovsky had lived in St. Petersburg at the end of the last century. He must have been a good person, for he was spoken of with affection by people I met in the 1930s in Kalinin (before 1931 the city was called Tver<sup>18</sup>).

The officer Kardynalovsky who visited us in Kyiv was from the Far East. He turned out to be extremely rich and also extremely unlikable. He tired Father with talk about the benefits of military service in that area, praising the higher salary paid there and various other opportunities for accumulating wealth (that is, by collecting bribes). He advised Father, as a fellow Kardynalovsky, to follow his example and seek a transfer to Siberia. Father listened to this advice with undisguised displeasure and parted from him coldly. The officer left, obviously offended. But he came back and visited us several more times, for Kyiv was the nearest large city where he and other officers could come and spend their accumulated cash. Every time he came to Kyiv, he would order huge boxes of chocolates for Liza and me, and once he asked Mother's permission to take us to a jewelry store and buy us small presents there. Mother reluctantly let us go, advising us to choose something very inexpensive. He took us to Marshak's, a very chic jeweller, where Liza and I spent a long time looking at the rings and bracelets on display, not knowing what to choose. Finally, we saw some very simple gray rings with blue stones, which appeared to us to be very inexpensive. When Mother saw what we had chosen she was horrified—it turned out that our "gray rings" were sapphires set in platinum.

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<sup>18</sup> The original name of this Russian provincial capital, located between Moscow and St. Petersburg, was restored after the collapse of the USSR.—Eds.

After our brother was wounded, at first guests rarely came to our home. But with time that changed and many new friends came by to see us. Our most frequent visitors were Aliosha's friends from the institute, Ivan Pylypovych Nemolovsky, whom we all called Vania, and Vsevolod Oleksandrovych Holubovych. Both of them later became members of the first Ukrainian government—the Ukrainian Central Rada—and also members of our family.

Vania Nemolovsky's family was prominent in the upper circles of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, and everyone in it was active in Ukrainian civic life and culture. On his mother's side, Vania was related to the Kosach family (his mother was a cousin of Lesia Ukrainka), and he used "Kosach" with some pride as his pen name.<sup>19</sup> Vania's father, Pylyp Ireneievych Nemolovsky, was a doctor with lofty humanitarian ideals. He worked in a zemstvo hospital, where he tried to gain the trust of his peasant patients and to understand their psychology. For example, in giving a prescription to a peasant woman, he would tell her that the medicine had to be taken before sunrise and with the "first" water from the well. His sympathetic manner and understanding of people's psychology made him an extremely popular physician and gained him the reputation of being someone who "understood sickness" and knew how to "drive it out."

Vania had been Aliosha's friend during the years they were both gymnasium students. When Vania graduated from gymnasium (in Hrodna, I believe) he went to Gent in Belgium to study at the polytechnical institute there. He studied there for almost two years, gaining training in the technical sciences and simultaneously attending art school. When he returned to Ukraine, he enrolled at the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute and graduated from it with a degree in engineering. Vania was an excellent student, talented and educated in many fields. He also graduated from the Kyiv Art School and was an accomplished artist—indeed, art was his true vocation. He would probably have become a famous painter if war had not broken out. In 1914 Vania was mobilized, and almost immediately he sustained an

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<sup>19</sup> The Kosaches were a family of prominent Ukrainophile cultural figures in prerevolutionary Ukraine. The most famous member of that family is the poet and playwright Larysa Kosach-Kvitka (pen name Lesia Ukrainka; 1871–1913). Her mother, Olha Kosach (pen name Olena Pchilka; 1849–1930), the sister of the famous Ukrainian socialist and federalist Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841–95), was well known in her time as an ethnographer, feminist, writer, publisher, and translator. Lesia Ukrainka's nephew, Yurii Kosach (1909–90), debuted as a writer in interwar Galicia and continued his craft as a postwar émigré in Germany and the United States.—*Eds.*

injury to his right hand. He was brought back to Kyiv for treatment, but he never regained full control of that hand. As a result Vania was forced to give up the artistic pursuits he loved.

Vania was a socialist from the time he was an upperclassman in the gymnasium, when he joined the ranks of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. When the 1917 Revolution began, Vania took active part in organizing the Ukrainian Central Rada, which was dominated by the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries. For a very short time, he was the general secretary of military affairs. Vania met our family when he was still a gymnasium student and would come to visit Aliosha. Although my mother was thirteen years his senior, in the course of his visits Vania came to love her. This platonic love endured for years. On Mother's side there was initially only a feeling of friendship, but in time that too developed into strong affection. Neither Mother nor Vania concealed how they felt. My father knew about their platonic feelings for one another and did not interfere.

I should mention that in the last years of their married life, relations between my father and mother were somewhat cool, at least outwardly. To me, as a teenager, this seemed fitting, for I believed there was no such thing as marital love—a conviction that stemmed from my reading of romantic literature. I was a poor psychologist at that age and failed to recognize that Father's restraint was part of his personality. There was something else in their relationship, however, that puzzled me: what I had heard of Father's unwillingness to seek medical help when Mother was about to give birth. Each of her pregnancies was very difficult, with labor lasting for days. There was always fear that she would not survive. Yet Father refused to summon a physician, on the grounds that bearing children was a woman's natural function. As testimony to that he would cite examples of pregnant peasant women who worked in the field right up to the last minutes before childbirth: how the woman would then give birth to her baby, rest a short while, and walk home carrying the newborn in her arms. I assume he inherited such views from his peasant mother. To me, Father's attitude was proof of his callousness, or even cruelty, towards Mother. In any event, by this time their passion for each other had cooled and Mother had truly fallen in love with Vania.

In Vania's relationship to our family there developed a situation of which Mother was totally unaware: Vania also became smitten with Liza. Vania's feeling was strong and deep, and it caused him much



*Front row: Olha Nemolovska (Tatiana's mother), Serhii, and Liza; back row: Ivan Nemolovsky and Tatiana (Kyiv, 1917 or 1918)*

anguish. Yet he could do nothing about it. Liza tried to avoid him as much as she could, and the two of us did our best to prevent Mother from suspecting anything. One time Vania became very ill and was taken to the hospital. In his delirium he kept calling for Liza. We decided that I should go in her stead. I spent several nights at Vania's bedside. We told Mother that I did it at his request, and so the secret was kept.

When Father died at the front in January 1917, Mother married Vania. She lived with him through the brief years of Ukrainian independence and civil war. After Soviet rule was consolidated in Ukraine, Vania worked in the Ministry of Education for some time. At the end of the 1920s he was arrested as a "bourgeois nationalist" and exiled to Karaganda in Kazakhstan. Like other members of the Kosach and Nemolovsky family, Vania suffered from tuberculosis. Under the conditions of exile, the disease began progressing rapidly. He also contracted dysentery. Mother received a letter from him describing his wretched condition and the total absence of medical care: in the





*Vsevolod Holubovych (Kyiv, ca. 1916)*

letter Vania begged Mother to intercede on his behalf, for otherwise he would not survive. Mother went to see an NKVD<sup>20</sup> prosecutor. She showed him the letter and begged him to do something to save Vania's life. After glancing at the letter, the prosecutor snapped, "Well, if he's sick, he will either recuperate or die. There is nothing I can do." A short time later Mother received word that Vania had died.

Our second frequent visitor, Vsevolod Holubovych, was the son of Oleksander Holubovych, a priest who had a parish in Tulchyn in Podillia gubernia. When Vsevolod and his sister were teenagers, their father suddenly lost his sight. Instead of giving up his parish and requesting a pension, he continued serving as a priest. His wife would walk him to church and aid him during the liturgy, going as far as the iconostasis (women cannot go behind it), at which point a male would step in to help. One day members of the church hierarchy arrived in Tulchyn: they had heard rumors that a blind priest was pastor of the parish, which contravened church law. Father Oleksander was faced

<sup>20</sup> The acronym for Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del (the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), then the name of the Soviet secret police.—Eds.

with losing his beloved work, for which he had a true calling. At this critical moment, all the parishioners voiced support for their priest. They convinced the authorities that he was fully capable of fulfilling all his obligations and vowed that they didn't need or want another priest. The authorities acquiesced, and Father Oleksander continued ministering to his parish with the help of his devoted wife until he died. Vsevolod's parents had an idyllic relationship. When they married, they made a vow to each other that when one of them died, the other would not go on living (how they understood this in practice is a mystery—I don't think they had suicide in mind). In any case, Father Oleksander's wife outlived him by several years.

As a priest's son, Vsevolod could study at the seminary free of charge. That was important to the family, for they were in dire financial straits. Vsevolod enrolled in the seminary even though he did not intend to become a priest, and he completed his studies there with honors. His real interest was in becoming an engineer, but that meant completing two more years of study and obtaining a "certificate of maturation" (issued by all secondary schools in the Russian Empire except seminaries). When he was at last admitted to the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute, Vsevolod enrolled in its Department of Road Construction. Aliosha also transferred there at this time. Vsevolod was a very good student, and as soon as he completed his studies he was offered a post as engineer with the Odesa Railroad Administration. Unlike other engineers, Vsevolod became involved in all aspects of the job—he would travel all the routes by handcar and check all work in progress personally. It came as no surprise to anyone that his was a splendid career. In three years he became one of the best railroad engineers in the Southwestern Land, which was what Ukraine was then called.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Several years ago, I read an obviously monarchist and anti-Ukrainian article in the Russian émigré newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo*, in which the author scornfully referred to Vsevolod as a "half-educated seminarian" and an inept engineer, and then vilified him because he had been a member of the Central Rada delegation that had negotiated a separate peace between Ukraine and Germany in Brest-Litovsk in 1918. A few days later, as I was composing a response to this scurrilous article, I was surprised to learn that a Russian engineer who had worked with Vsevolod in Odesa had already written a rebuttal, in which he described Vsevolod with respect as exceptionally talented and well-educated.

## CHAPTER 10

In 1916, around Christmas time, my father arrived home from the front for his last leave. Vsevolod happened to be in Kyiv at the time. He dropped by, and he and Father spent the whole night talking about impending events. They both agreed that a revolution had begun, but Vsevolod believed that it was connected to events in Russia proper, whereas Father thought that it had started right at the front. Vsevolod said that anti-war propaganda was being spread throughout the entire army by young ensigns sent to the front by their political parties. "The soldiers are becoming disobedient," he said. "The antagonism between them and the officer ranks is growing." Father was a witness to the brutal treatment of soldiers at the hands of officers, many of whom would later be found with bullets in their backs or to their heads. Both Father and Vsevolod were convinced that a revolution in Ukraine was inevitable, and that the struggle would be protracted and bloody. But while Vsevolod had a burning desire to become involved in the struggle for Ukraine's independence, Father, though he sympathized with the idea, believed independence was unattainable because it conflicted with Russia's imperial interests.

In March 1917, as news came that the monarchy had fallen, a national government was created in Ukraine. Vsevolod immediately joined the leading circles of the Ukrainian national renaissance and took part in the formation of the Central Rada. Nearly a year later he was offered the post of prime minister.<sup>22</sup> He had been a member of the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR) since his days in the seminary, and by 1917 he was a member of the party's Central Committee. Before the revolution the UPSR was the largest party in Ukraine. It defended the interests of the peasants, whereas the Ukrainian Social Democrats oriented themselves on the workers, whom they considered the vanguard "people's class." In Ukraine the majority of people were peasants, and that is why the UPSR was popular among the Ukrainian intelligentsia. It was small wonder, then, that members of the UPSR dominated in the Central Rada and that a person like Vsevolod—talented, energetic,

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<sup>22</sup> Holubovych was prime minister of Ukraine from 31 January to 24 March 1918.—*Eds.*

with strong national and socialist convictions—rose to prominence in the government. Holubovych's later fate was closely tied to the fate of the Ukrainian Revolution, the Central Rada, and the events that followed the Rada's departure from the political arena. And my personal life became intimately tied with him and those political events as well.

I was a sixteen-year-old gymnasium student when I first met Vsevolod. He was thirteen years older. He fell in love with me with all the force of his passionate nature, whereas I, being rather naive in romantic matters, became interested in him as a hero of the revolution and the great political activist being written about constantly in the papers. I was flattered by the attention a person of his stature was paying me. I liked his intelligence and his sense of humor, his daring romantic nature, his inclination to take risks, his strong will, and his ability to inspire people and make them follow him. One could sense his tremendous dynamism and ability to accomplish great things. At the same time, Vsevolod had a great measure of spirituality—not the spirituality of structured religion (the years he spent at the seminary dispelled any illusions he might have had in this regard), but a kind of spiritual idealism gleaned from the writings of the ancient sages, which he knew well and loved to quote. Vsevolod loved literature. His favorite writer was Jack London, whom I also liked. Among poets he was fond of Igor Severianin, a poet popular at the time, whom I also liked but did not take very seriously. Just as Severianin bestowed imaginary riches on his queens and princes, Vsevolod loved valuables and frequently gave me rings with costly stones as gifts. I was totally indifferent to jewelry and so just put these away in a box. Whenever he came to visit, Vsevolod would speak more with my mother than with me: their talk was primarily about politics, which Mother understood very well. Though I was intrigued by this talk, I did not understand a great deal, so usually I just listened. In our romance the initiative was entirely Vsevolod's. When Vsevolod declared his love for me, I was taken aback—I had not thought of getting married. Nonetheless I gladly accepted his proposal.

We were married in the church of the Kyiv Cadet Corps from which my father had graduated. The site was Father's idea, but I supported it enthusiastically. Our wedding "banquet" was held at our home on Velyka Dorohozhytska Street. Only a few guests were invited. Mykhailo Hrushevsky, who was the president of the Central

Rada, and some other members of the government attended. Semen Petliura sat on my right and spoke to me very courteously.<sup>23</sup> The food was served by our orderlies. They were excited by the opportunity to see Petliura, whom they adored and all of whose public appearances they attended. One of our orderlies, a Cossack from the Kuban named Petro, especially idolized Petliura. If once he had been unsure of his national identity, now, under the influence of Petliura's fiery speeches, he became a true Ukrainian, ready to die for Petliura and for Ukraine. I also went to such meetings and listened to Petliura's speeches eagerly, but I did that only occasionally, for huge crowds assembled wherever Petliura appeared and it was nearly impossible to make one's way through them.

A humorous incident occurred as a result of one meeting I attended. The speaker was speaking in Ukrainian, which at the time I did not understand very well. Suddenly someone in the crowd shouted, "Hang the *prapor!*" In Russian this word is the colloquial short form for *praporshchik* (ensign), so I believed some officer was about to be hanged. Terribly shaken, I rushed out as fast as I could. When I got home and told my family that an ensign was going to be hanged in the square, everybody started laughing and then explained that in Ukrainian *prapor* means "flag." The incident was long the subject of mirth in my family, but it also had a positive result. I started studying Ukrainian seriously. In time I mastered it to such a degree that I could work as a copy editor and translator in Ukrainian publishing houses.<sup>24</sup>

The Central Rada's Ukrainianization policies aroused a good deal of dissatisfaction in Kyiv. Some people protested because of their disdain for all things Ukrainian; others objected to the way it was being imposed as the official language. The newspaper *Russkaia mysl*

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<sup>23</sup> Petliura (1879–1926), a prominent Ukrainian journalist and social democrat, was the general secretary of military affairs and commander in chief of the armed forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic from June 1917, and president of the republic (and later its government in exile) from February 1919 until his assassination in Paris.—Eds.

<sup>24</sup> I had to overcome several obstacles in my quest to learn Ukrainian. During the early Soviet years of the Ukrainization policy, every time I sought work at some institution, I was asked to demonstrate my knowledge of Ukrainian by translating a text from Russian. In one text, the word *protsent* (percent) appeared several times. I got confused about how to say the word in Ukrainian, so I wrote "*protsent*" instead of the more Ukrainian *vidsotok*, and did not get the job. The incident reminded me of one of Ostap Vyshnia's feuilletons, in which two Russian-speaking officials boast about how easily they passed the test in that "primitive" language and got a job; meanwhile, a Ukrainian peasant woman laments that because she did not know what "genitive case" means, she failed the test and did not get a job cleaning.

(Russian Thought) published long lists of signatures under the heading "I protest against the forceful Ukrainianization of the Southwestern Land." Most of the signatories' names were Russian, but there were also Ukrainian ones.

Aliosha joined the ranks of these protestors. He had a strong aversion against force being applied for any purpose. He knew Ukrainian, considered himself a Ukrainian, loved his nation, its songs and its soul, and wished to live in Ukraine. It was he who later prevailed on us to move back to Ukraine from "Katsapiia."<sup>25</sup> But he also felt that Ukrainianization was a manifestation of intolerance and nationalism. Later, when the Ukrainian intelligentsia was being destroyed en masse under Stalin, Aliosha remembered his protest with shame and bitter regret.

My relationship with Vsevolod Holubovych also played a large role in my own "Ukrainianization." Thanks to him, I began to feel more Ukrainian, and Ukrainians accepted me as one of their own. People would often recognize me on the street, for photographs of Vsevolod with me appeared regularly in the newspapers. People came up to greet me and sometimes even applauded, saying to one another, "Look—it's Holubovych's wife!"

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<sup>25</sup> A derogatory term for Russia.—*Eds.*

## CHAPTER 11

Early in 1918 Vsevolod and I moved to the former palace of the tsarist governor-general—the residence assigned to Vsevolod as prime minister of the Central Rada. This palace was enormous. A wide flight of stairs led upstairs to a great hall, where the floor was covered by a fluffy gray-and-pink carpet and gilded white chairs stood against the walls. It was in this room that official receptions were held.

Vsevolod and I occupied several rooms on the third floor, in what had been the private apartment of the governor-general and his family. I was struck by the curtains in the bedroom—layers of cream and rose-colored drapes over transparent curtains, flanked by heavy, burgundy velvet panels that were tied shut at night. I examined all of this luxury with interest and amazement—it spoke volumes about the life of the former tsarist viceroy. The governor-general's butler, a holdover from those times, came up and introduced himself to us. He had lived in the palace for many years and continued to have the utmost respect for his former masters. The revolution had destroyed his entire way of life, and he suffered everything that was happening deeply, viewing it all as a national and a personal tragedy.

After the governor-general and his wife had departed, leaving the old butler and the rest of the servants to fend for themselves, the palace had been occupied by every new regime that ruled Kyiv, each of which plundered the premises of everything it could. The butler spoke with great anguish about how much one female warlord distinguished by her brutality had plundered the palace's furnishings. He even mentioned Volodymyr Vynnychenko, who was not above taking some paintings and kilims when he left.<sup>26</sup> I listened to these stories with embarrassment, for I knew that in the butler's eyes I was part of yet another set of these "unlawful" rulers. But when the old man asked me who my father was and I told him he had been a tsarist general, I saw that he was greatly impressed. He became excited, because I represented a world that was familiar and dear to him. After this, he treated me with utmost regard and courtesy. For instance, he served me every morning from a special service whose tray, cup, sugar

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<sup>26</sup> Vynnychenko (1880–1951), the most popular Ukrainian prose writer and playwright before the revolution, and a prominent Ukrainian social democrat, was chairman of the General Secretariat of the Central Rada from 28 June 1917 to 31 January 1918.—*Eds.*

bowl, creamer, and coffeepot were all made of gold. The old butler said the service had been a gift from the governor-general to his wife, and he urged me to take it all: "Please take it, dear lady—otherwise it will disappear or fall into unworthy hands!" When I categorically refused to take part in any further plundering," he became very depressed. To cheer him up, I said it would be dangerous for me to take the service and that I would take a light-brown ceramic ashtray instead. This item had no monetary or artistic value—there were many like it in every room in the palace. This "historical" ashtray survived among my possessions for many years.

My "expropriation" of that ashtray brings to mind the episode in Bulgakov's play, *The Days of the Turbins*, in which Shervinsky takes a gold cigar case—accidentally left behind in the same palace by Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky—for himself as a memento. Indeed, while reading Lidiia Yanovskaia's biography of Bulgakov,<sup>27</sup> I was struck by the extraordinary similarity between the milieus to which my family and Bulgakov belonged—the same cultural level and spiritual needs, and an interest in music, theater, opera, literature, and art. Also striking, however, was a most fundamental difference: the contrast between Bulgakov's Russian chauvinism, monarchism, snobbism, and hostility and disdain for everything Ukrainian, and my family's democratic convictions and sympathy for the Ukrainian cause.

Vsevolod and I occasionally went out to restaurants. Once we went to a garden restaurant where tables were set out under trees and flowers bloomed all around. We ordered, and were served food that we found to be especially appetizing. Our waiter, however, was young and obviously inexperienced: he dropped first a fork and then a napkin, and he spilled tea on the table. Vsevolod, annoyed by the waiter's ineptitude, muttered something under his breath, and instantly my lyrical mood disappeared. When it came time to pay the check, Vsevolod suddenly took out five *karbovantsi*—a large sum at the time—and gave it to the waiter, saying sarcastically, "This is for the brainless service you gave us." The poor fellow blushed violently and stood before us, dumbfounded. I felt sorry for him, and I was embarrassed by Vsevolod's behavior. When I told Vsevolod how I felt, he recognized that his behavior had been unkind. For some reason, memory of this incident stayed with both of us.

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<sup>27</sup> *Tvorcheskii put Mikhaila Bulgakova* (Moscow, 1983).—Eds.



From the time I was a student, I liked going for walks in the cemetery. These walks would evoke gloomy thoughts and a quiet mood, and during them I would often read the inscriptions on tombstones. Some of the inscriptions were touching, and others were quite dramatic. I remember one in particular that sent Liza and me into gales of laughter: "On this spot, with thunder and lightning, the maiden So-and-so quietly departed this life." Vsevolod also enjoyed such walks. Once we went to the cemetery together and wandered along its paths to the far end, where everything was in disarray. A large stone cross barred the path in front of me. I walked around it and went on. Vsevolod, who was walking a little behind me, took note of my doing this and for some reason was very moved by it. After all, as a nonreligious person, I could have easily stepped on and over the cross, yet I did not do so. In this he saw my respect for things others held sacred.

At that time in my life I was learning to drive a car. I had been provided with a German automobile—a Benz, I believe—and a chauffeur. He was a jovial fellow, thrilled by the car, by his job, and by the chance to serve me. He drove me around the Tsar's Gardens with immense enthusiasm, and under his tutelage I began driving the car myself. I had a great deal of time on my hands then. I hardly saw Vsevolod—he would immerse himself in work for days on end, sometimes not even coming home to sleep. From time to time he would bring me some money—his salary—which I stored in the drawer of a night table. Friends advised me to deposit these Ukrainian *hryvni* in the bank, but I had absolutely no idea how to do that and thought it unnecessary. I didn't need to buy anything because everything was provided. But the main thing was that I didn't feel I had the right to use this money. For instance, at one point I needed a new coat and so asked my mother, "What do you think—is it all right for me buy myself a coat?" Mother laughed and said, "Of course it is." Nevertheless, I didn't work up the courage to buy one. When I became the prime minister's wife, I was suddenly obliged to act like an adult. But that meant I was being expected to act in accord with the experience that life gives, experience I did not yet have.

This fairy-tale life soon came to an end. It was dangerous to continue living in the palace, because the civil war was raging all around us and power was changing from hand to hand. Control of Kyiv changed some seventeen times in that short period, and every time someone seized power, he occupied the palace as a matter of course. Vsevolod's friends advised us to move into a private apartment, and we did.

Here I must interject something that happened decades later, during my trip to Ukraine in the 1970s. While in Kyiv, I visited the building of the Writers' Union with Yurii Smolych.<sup>28</sup> As we were ascending the stairs, it struck me that this stairway was familiar, as were the remnants of an old carpet on the stairs and, indeed, the building itself. "I think I remember this building," I said, turning to Smolych, "as if I lived in it once. When could that have been?" Smolych, who knew something of my personal history, smiled and said, "Perhaps in 1918? During the time of the Central Rada?" It turned out that the Writers' Union was now located in the building that had once been the governor-general's palace.

The new apartment to which Vsevolod and I moved was in the famous residential building designed and built in Kyiv by the architect Vladyslav Horodetsky. It was wonderfully asymmetrical, and various animal skulls hung on the interior walls. An avid hunter, Horodetsky had brought back various trophies from his travels in Africa—the skulls of antelopes, rhinoceroses, and other animals, which I found frightening. His wife lived in the building too. She was not very friendly towards us, fearing, understandably enough, that Vsevolod's presence did not bode well for peace and quiet. Her fears were not groundless. During the civil war, armed people seeking Vsevolod would knock on the doors of our apartment on Velyka Dorohozhytska Street. Some brought news, while others came to arrest him. I remember one such incident. We were fast asleep and suddenly someone started banging on the front door and yelling "Open up!" Mother was frightened and didn't know what to do. The person continued hammering on the door, practically breaking it down, until Mother finally opened it. A man ran into the room, bedecked from head to toe in firearms and rounds of ammunition. "I'm the Odesa satrap," he shouted, "I'm being pursued! Please, give me shelter—I must spend the night here." Without a word, Mother pointed to the couch. The "satrap" spent the night and disappeared the following morning. Vsevolod later explained that he knew the man, who indeed had the code-name "Odesa satrap" and was connected in some way to the Central Rada.

One night I went out to search for Vsevolod. As I have mentioned, he often worked late at the building of the Central Rada and did not spend the night at home. This time, though, he had been absent for several days and I had begun to worry. By then

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<sup>28</sup> Smolych (1900–1976) was a prominent Soviet Ukrainian writer.—*Eds.*

we had moved from the Horodetsky building to an apartment in a building in Chekhov Lane owned by some doctors. Though I didn't know it yet, I was pregnant at the time. I set out for the building that was formerly the Pedagogical Museum and was now where the Central Rada held its sessions, determined to find Vsevolod. As I approached, I saw that the building was surrounded by military men. I was taken aback—why were there so many guards? But in those days there were so many men in uniform everywhere that I didn't attach any particular significance to them. I headed for the door. One of the soldiers turned to me and asked what I wanted. "I'm looking for Holubovych," I answered. At that, the soldiers all burst out laughing, "We're looking for him ourselves," they declared. It turned out that in the past few days Hetman Skoropadsky had led a coup against the Central Rada and the Rada's members had been forced to go into hiding. The young Hetmanite soldiers were apparently so amused by my ignorance of political developments that they didn't bother detaining me.

## CHAPTER 12

I hurried to Velyka Dorohozhytska Street to find Mother and Vania. There I found a family conference in progress—what should we do now? No one knew. It was hopeless to search for Vsevolod, and staying in the apartment was dangerous. Suddenly Vania had an ingenious idea: we should all depart for Moscow. That was the only safe place for us to go, for no one would search for members of the Central Rada there. No sooner was the idea voiced than we took action. Grabbing together a few things, we headed for the railroad station. There was no train schedule, so we had to be very careful in determining where each train was headed. We were lucky, for we immediately came upon a cargo train bound for Moscow. We found a boxcar with empty space, climbed in, and sat down. The train began moving. A young officer sat next to me. He had a very friendly face and somehow inspired my trust, for I believed that his situation was similar to ours. Dispensing with any shred of caution, I told him everything—who we were, where we were going, and why. The soldier listened with great interest and, it seemed to me, compassion. At the train's first stop he got out, saying that he would be right back. But when the train started again, he had still not returned. My heart froze—what had I done? I didn't know him at all: he would report us, and we would all be arrested! I rode the entire distance to Moscow expecting disaster to strike at any moment. But none did. I'll never know whether the soldier reported us and then came back too late to find us, or whether, on learning who we were, he became fearful of traveling in the same wagon and decided to go elsewhere. I told no one of my impetuous trust and imprudence, but I never forgot this incident. Later it served me well when I was in a situation where I could have said too much and hurt others: then I passed the test honorably, without compromising anyone.

We were going to Moscow without any idea of what we would do there or where we would live. We had no friends or acquaintances in the city. On arrival, we decided that Mother would remain at the station with Liza and Seriozha while Vania and I went in search of an apartment. The whole city was buzzing like a beehive. Those were the days when the capital was being transferred from St. Petersburg to Moscow. We walked the streets, peering into windows and looking for signs advertising apartments or rooms for rent. We kept walking on and on, not daring to enter any of the apartments posted as being available,

for we did not know what kind of people we might encounter. Finally we found ourselves on a very quiet street. A sign on a two-story building said that there was a furnished three-room apartment for rent on the first floor. We knocked, but no one answered. We tried the door: it was open, and we entered. All the furniture was in disarray—some five or six beds, and some tables and chairs. Evidently the occupants had left in a hurry. Vania went up the stairs to the second floor and found the landlord. We soon came to terms, and with that our strange life in Moscow began. We lived in this apartment for several months. At first, we relied on the provisions we had brought with us, and when these began running out Mother began bartering Father's military decorations—his gold crosses and medals—for food. Thus those decorations helped us survive.

One day, while walking down the street, Vania noticed a broadside pasted to a fence. In those days newspapers were always posted this way, but this one was different—it was in Ukrainian! Vania's curiosity was piqued—what sort of Ukrainian newspaper was being published in Moscow? He started reading and was thunderstruck. The last page carried the following notice: "I have the honor to request the distinguished editors to publish an appeal to the persons I am seeking—Tatiana Holubovych and Ivan Kosach—to come forward." The address of the editorial offices to which one should apply appeared just below. The announcement had undoubtedly been written by a Galician from Western Ukraine. I was struck by its unique manner of expression and have remembered the text word for word.

Vania and I hurried to the address given. There we were told that the man who had placed the announcement had been looking for us for several days. We immediately made contact with him. He turned out to be a messenger from Vsevolod who had brought forged documents for us. Having lost hope of finding us, he had been getting ready to return to Ukraine. He gave us the documents, and very soon we were on a train bound for Kyiv. The man told us that Skoropadsky was no longer in power and that a new coup had taken place: the Central Rada had been restored to power as the Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR). In areas removed from the capital, the Directory's authority was so unstable that its opponents used to say derisively, "Here's the Directory, and beneath it [i.e., the train in which they were travelling] lies its territory."

The Galicians I first met during the civil war seemed to be people from another nation altogether and not like us at all. They looked different and behaved differently somehow. What made the biggest impression on



*Ivan and Olha Nemolovsky (Merefa, ca. 1926)*

me was their language. At times it was even difficult for me to understand them. But to be honest, the Sich Riflemen<sup>29</sup> did bring with them two songs I especially liked and related to—“Chuiesh brate mii” (My Brother, Do You Hear?) and “Yikhav strilets na viionku” (A Rifleman Was Leaving for the War). They enjoyed instant popularity, and soon all of Ukraine was singing them. There were, however, other Western Ukrainian songs that seemed strange and comical to me, with verses like “Yest u mene topir, topir, / Shche i kovana fliashka” (I have a hatchet, a hatchet, / as well as a forged canteen) or “Hop, chuk-chenchyk, / Chenchyk ladnyi, / Na chenchyku / Pas iedvabnyi” (Hey, little friar, / Charming little friar, / The little friar’s wearing / A satin sash).

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<sup>29</sup> Former soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army from Western Ukraine who had escaped from Russian POW camps and come to Kyiv to help build an independent Ukrainian state. Constituted as a battalion in November 1917, the Sich Riflemen later became a division of the Army of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR). They helped to overthrow Skoropadsky, and until December 1919 they fought against Bolshevik insurgents and the Red Army during the Ukrainian-Russian War.—Eds.

I disliked the way Western Ukrainians spoke to Jews: "Hey, *zhyd!* Bring us this or give us that." They used the word *zhyd* without anger or a desire to be offensive, but as a normal form of address. Of course, they were totally unaware of how degrading this word was.<sup>30</sup>

Later, in the 1920s, I became acquainted with Ukrainians from Western Ukraine of a very different kind, including the famous theater director Les Kurbas, the actor Yosyp Hirniak, and other cultured, intelligent individuals who had made valuable contributions to Ukrainian culture. Thenceforth I saw these Ukrainians in a completely different light.

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<sup>30</sup> In Russian-ruled Ukraine this age-old Ukrainian word for "Jew" had acquired a pejorative meaning because the Russian word *zhid* was a term of abuse and derision. But in Western Ukraine, which did not experience Russian rule until the First World War, and then not again until the Second World War, *zhyd* was used in its original, standard and neutral sense.—Eds.

## CHAPTER 13

We were on our way back to Ukraine. At first our train journey went well, and the miles passed by uneventfully. By our calculations we were not far from Kyiv when suddenly the train stopped in the midst of the steppe. What could be the matter? Anxious passengers peered out the windows and asked each other what was going on. Soon we had our answer, as shots rang out all around. We were in the middle of a combat zone. Hurriedly we jumped down from the train and ran for the whistle-stop nearby. We hid ourselves there, but Vania kept peeking out the window. He caught sight of a peasant who was unhurriedly making his way towards his wagon. It was unclear whether this man had a typically phlegmatic Ukrainian nature (“Things will turn out all right somehow”) or whether he was so accustomed to gunfire that he paid it no mind. But he clearly intended to go somewhere in his wagon. It suddenly occurred to Vania that he might take us along. He called out, “Can we get a ride with you?” The old man readily agreed to take us as far as his village.

At first we rode alongside the railroad tracks, and then we made a turn and set off through the steppe. Suddenly a group of riders on horseback appeared. They were heading straight in our direction. There was no place to hide, so our elderly driver continued urging his horses on. A minute later the riders caught up to us. The one in front—apparently the leader—pointed his rifle at us and barked, “Stop! Who are you? Show your documents!” We took out our meager papers, which stated we were innocent teachers on our way to take up posts at a village school and that we had no connection to politics whatsoever, as in a popular Russian song:

The little fried chick,  
The little steamed chick,  
Went on Nevsky Boulevard for a stroll.  
But they nabbed it,  
They arrested it,  
Demanded its I.D. and all.  
“I’m not a Soviet,  
I’m not a Kadet,  
You could crush me with ease.  
Please do not shoot me,



Don't execute me—  
Chicks too want to breathe."

We were caught in one of those decisive moments that happened all the time during the civil war. Not knowing who might stop them at any given moment, people carried several different sets of documents in separate pockets. If one was lucky and happened to show the "right" document at the right time, one lived to go on. If not, one bade the world farewell. And so it was with us.

The rider, who was armed to the teeth, examined our documents, clearly skeptical of every word. He scrutinized our party again—it included three women, one of them pregnant. Our appearance must have convinced him that we weren't worth bothering about. He handed us our documents. Then, wheeling around to his men, he called, "Forward, lads!" Turning back to us for a moment, he added, "Why are you heading straight toward the conflagration?! Imbeciles!" And off he and his companions rode, kicking up a cloud of dust. We breathed a sigh of relief and continued on our way. When we reached the village, we learned that the Directory of the UNR was no longer in power. All the members of its government had left for Kamianets-Podilskyi, and Kyiv was now occupied by the Bolsheviks. What were we to do now? It was decided that Mother and Vania would go on to Proskuriv (present-day Khmelnytskyi, near Kamianets-Podilskyi), where they had friends. Liza and Seriozha would accompany them. But I was expecting the birth of my child any day now and could not risk such a long journey. It was agreed that I would go to the apartment building on Chekhov Lane in Kyiv where Vsevolod and I had lived, and that Mother would join me there as soon as she could.

So I ended up alone in Bolshevik-occupied Kyiv. The building on Chekhov Lane had been built by a group of six doctors to house their families. All of these physicians had been mobilized and were serving on the front, but their families were still there. Vsevolod and I had rented a room in the apartment of a Dr. Smirnov. But when I showed up at the building, his wife told me that all the obstetric clinics in Kyiv were closed and there were no physicians to be found: in other words, I couldn't count on any medical help. A few days later, when she saw that I was about to go into labor, Mrs. Smirnov left, saying that she did not want to hear my screams. I was left completely alone. Luckily a neighbor's kindhearted servant came to visit and offered to help me give birth. The labor went quite smoothly, and I gave birth to a daughter. I gave her the name Lesia.

I had never had any experience with infants and knew nothing about feeding, changing, or caring for them. Moreover, I had very little breast milk, for I was undernourished. Three weeks later, when Mother finally managed to join me in Kyiv, she was appalled at my desperate condition. She prevailed on me to move to the village of Prokhorivka near Kaniv, where Zhenia and Aliosha were living at the time. Zhenia was working there as a zemstvo doctor, and Aliosha was overseeing some building construction. I was preparing to leave when suddenly a messenger from Vsevolod arrived. He took out a letter—it was actually a note—written on very thin paper that had been sewn into the stiff collar of his military shirt. It was from Vsevolod and read: “If you have given birth to a son, name him Viacheslav, and if to a daughter, name her as you wish.” That message angered me to the depths of my being. I was insulted for myself and for my daughter—for our common female sex. I had been treated like a slave—expected to bring male children into the world for her master and told how to name them. In typically Asian fashion, my baby daughter was considered unimportant, so I was allowed to give her any name at all, as if she were a kitten. On top of that, to my mind my husband was showing a total lack of consideration for my psychological and physical state—for everything I had suffered and endured. I could not forgive Vsevolod what I saw as his harshness and male condescension. At that moment I could not think calmly. I sat down and immediately wrote him a reply: “I have given birth to a daughter, and neither she nor I need you any more.” I sewed my note into the messenger’s collar and he left, bearing it away.

## CHAPTER 14

I managed to get to Prokhorivka with the baby, and Zhenia met me there. She had found a place for me in the home of a peasant woman called Haida, whose husband worked in Aliosha's construction detail. Zhenia had also found me a job in her clinic, and therefore I could earn some money for food. By this time, however, my breast milk had totally disappeared. My infant daughter became ill and grew weaker day by day. Within two months she died. By that time I had fallen into a state of stupor and apathy and nothing could affect me. I accepted my child's death without emotion. Little Lesia was buried in the village cemetery.

A small wooden church stood next to the cemetery. It was kept locked except for funeral services, which were infrequent because by then hardly anyone was being buried in that cemetery. A local legend had it that this was the same church Gogol had described in his horror story "Vii." That legend had aroused my curiosity earlier. But the first time I was able to step inside the church was for my daughter's funeral service. What I saw there surpassed anything I might have expected. In the semidarkness, to the right of the entrance, I saw a huge depiction of the face of Christ that covered the entire wall. In keeping with the traditions of Byzantine iconography, Christ's penetrating eyes seemed to be looking straight at me regardless of where I stood. The distinct impression created was that the eyes moved as I did. On the opposite wall was a floor-to-ceiling depiction of sinners being thrown into the fires of hell. These murals elicited a kind of mystical horror in me, and I began believing the story about Gogol and his "Vii." Later Aliosha sketched a watercolor of the church's exterior, but it was lost. The church itself was destroyed during the Second World War.

The peasants of Prokhorivka told other fantastic tales, especially about the Maksymovych family's estate that lay beyond the village, on the high bank of the Dnipro. They claimed the ghosts of Mykhailo Maksymovych, the renowned ethnographer and professor who was the first rector of Kyiv University, and of his son and grandson wandered about the estate. Their graves, like those of all the Maksymovyches, were not in the cemetery, but on the grounds of the estate. The villagers believed those ghosts existed so completely that they categorically refused to enter the estate's grounds even during the day. Still, they were very proud that the famous professor had

lived so near their village. They were convinced that the popular song “*Stoit hora vysokaia*” (A Tall Mountain Stands) was composed by a group of poets who had been invited to the estate and that the song celebrated the colorful landscapes around Prokhorivka. In fact, the song’s lyrics were by Leonid Hlibov,<sup>31</sup> but they could easily have been about that countryside:

A tall mountain stands serene,  
 And at its foot there lies  
 A little glen, lush and green  
 Like paradise.  
 Nearby a winding river flows,  
 It sparkles so like glass.  
 Its path along the valley goes,  
 Who knows where it will pass.  
 And at the shore, where boats are tied  
 In a secluded spot,  
 Three willows bend, as if immersed  
 In mournful thought.

This song was very popular in Prokhorivka when I was there, and hardly a day went by without someone singing it. In my memory it is connected with the story of a hapless young couple in love. The girl was from a wealthy peasant family, and her parents refused to allow her to marry her beloved because he was poor. The whole village knew about this unhappy affair and sympathized with the two lovers. In the evenings the young man would come out to the bank of the Dnipro and start singing this song, calling for his beloved. She would come out to join him, the two of them would sit by the bank and sing together, and their wonderful harmonies would echo above the river all the way back to the village.

The peasants of Prokhorivka would often mention Taras Shevchenko’s visits to Maksymovych’s estate and point to the old oak tree under which the poet liked to sit.<sup>32</sup> Some of Shevchenko’s paintings

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<sup>31</sup> Hlibov (1827–93) wrote poetry in Russian and Ukrainian, feuilletons, and some plays. He is best known for the over one hundred Ukrainian fables he wrote.—*Eds.*

<sup>32</sup> While visiting Maksymovych at his estate, Mykhailova Hora near Prokhorivka (seven km. south of Kaniv), Shevchenko painted portraits of Maksymovych and his wife and wrote his poem “*Mariia*.” In July 1859, he was arrested there. In 1964 a memorial museum was opened in Maksymovych’s house.—*Eds.*

hung on the walls of the Maksymovych family's house. I hope that both that building and Shevchenko's paintings have been preserved.<sup>33</sup>

In the nearby village of Sushky lived an old gentrywoman who knew the famous Taras. In 1918, when I made her acquaintance, she was 104 years old. She talked about the Ukrainian writers and poets who used to gather at Maksymovych's estate and the soirees she attended there as a young girl. The one thing she related about Shevchenko was that he enjoyed a drink and that she had often admonished him not to drink so much.

Chernecha Hora (Monk's Mountain), the hill where Shevchenko is buried, is not far from Prokhorivka—two hours upriver by rowboat against the Dnipro's current. Before the Great War began, our family became acquainted with the very colorful old man, called Grandfather Ivan, who had tended the poet's grave for many years. He lived in a rickety shanty at the foot of the hill and had been carrying out his labor of love since 1861, when Shevchenko's remains had been brought from St. Petersburg for burial in Ukraine. Ivan, then a teenager, had attended the bard's funeral, and it was then that he volunteered to tend Shevchenko's grave. In time a small cottage was built for Ivan so he could live near the grave. Half a century after Shevchenko's death, on the eve of the war in 1914, that cottage was falling apart, but its elderly occupant had no money to repair it. Our family—especially Vania Nemolovsky—was very fond of Grandfather Ivan, and we decided to help him. Each of us donated whatever money we could; in the end we collected a hundred rubles, a considerable sum at the

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<sup>33</sup> One of our own family's stories pertains to both Shevchenko and Maksymovych, one of the earliest collectors and publishers of Ukrainian folk songs. A copy of the first edition of Maksymovych's *Malorossiiskii pesni* (Little Russian Songs, 1827) found its way to Harvard University's Widener Library, and my daughter Assya came across it there as a student at Harvard in the 1950s. Impressed by the poetic beauty of the songs' lyrics, she began copying them and their musical notations. While doing so, she found that someone had underlined and marked the text and written comments in the margins in pale ink. On one page, next to an annotation by Maksymovych, she found a sardonic remark, and under it the words "Shevchenko's words" and the signature of one of Shevchenko's friends, the prominent writer, ethnographer, and historian Panteleimon Kulish (1819–97). Kulish's note indicates that the book had been in Shevchenko's possession and that the poet had marked images and motifs in it also found in Shevchenko's own poems. Assya told her professor, Dmytro Chyzhevsky, who was then teaching Russian and Ukrainian literature at Harvard, about her discovery, and he published a brief note about it in the *Harvard Library Bulletin*. Today this copy of Maksymovych's book is kept in the rare-book collection of Harvard's Houghton Library. In the 1960s the Soviet embassy in Washington tried to obtain it, but Harvard refused to part with it.

time. The old man was moved to tears by our gift: at last he could pay someone to build a new cottage for him, which he did without delay.

I now realize what a tremendous role Shevchenko played in the life of our family. After reading the great Taras's *Kobzar*, my father became fully aware of being Ukrainian. Shevchenko's writings were an important presence in my own childhood, and as a young woman I visited his grave in Kaniv and was reminded of him when I stayed in Prokhorivka. Years later my second husband, Serhii Pylypenko, would travel throughout Ukraine and even beyond the Aral Sea to gather information about the poet; Serhii also became the director of the first Shevchenko memorial museum in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup> Many years after that, our daughter Assya, while a university student in America, would find her "roots" after discovering the *Kobzar* for herself, and would write several articles about the bard's works. Later still, our second daughter, Mirtala, used a recording of Shevchenko's ballad "Dumy moi" (My Thoughts), performed by the Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus,<sup>35</sup> in a video film about her sculptures.

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<sup>34</sup> The museum was founded in 1932 at the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Research Institute. In 1933 the museum's holdings were transferred to the new Shevchenko Picture Gallery in Kharkiv. In 1948 and 1949 all of Shevchenko's art works at the gallery were transferred to the new Shevchenko State Museum in Kyiv.—Eds.

<sup>35</sup> A famous male chorus formed in Detroit in 1949 by bandura players and singers who were postwar refugees from Soviet rule. Over the years the chorus has toured extensively, produced many recordings of Cossack *dumy* and other Ukrainian songs, and attracted new, mostly American-born, members. For many years its musical director was Hryhorii Kytasty.—Eds.

## CHAPTER 15

After my Lesia died, I went to live with another peasant couple in Prokhorivka, who had two daughters and two sons. The father was at the front, and the elder son had joined the partisans and was rarely at home. At first this son was wary of me and remained silent in my presence. But when he learned that I was Vsevolod Holubovych's wife, his attitude changed completely. Subsequently he went out of his way to show me the utmost respect and, no longer reticent, told me a great deal about his partisan activities. The whole family was staunchly Ukrainian and wholeheartedly supported the national-liberation movement. They were peasants of average means, with two horses, two cows, and a bit of land that they worked with great vitality and devotion. Never in my life, either before or since, have I met people who were so hardworking. They put all of their energy, thought, and desires into their work. For them work was not merely a means of existence or even a means of acquiring wealth—it was what gave their life meaning.

They toiled from morning until late at night, the mother working alongside her children and energetically keeping pace with them. In the evenings she would cook borscht, adding to it not one of the usual sorts of meat, but pigeon. The family raised pigeons, and every evening the younger son would climb up the ladder to the top of the threshing barn, catch a few, twist their heads off, and bring them to his mother. The borscht she cooked would be left in the oven overnight, and it would still be hot when the family arose at 4:00 a.m. Breakfast always consisted of this borscht, hot cereal, buns, and other baked goods. The sons and daughters would then go out into the fields, taking food with them for the whole day. They would usually return at sunset, but if there was an unusual amount of work to be done that day, they would simply sleep out in the field. In the evening they would work in the house, stable, or vegetable garden without any respite, day after day.

The family was also very close-knit and, as was typical of Ukrainian peasant families, extremely respectful of the mother. During the winter the girls would embroider or spin cloth, and the blouses they finished embroidering were put into a chest that was nearly as tall as a full-grown adult. This was also where they stored clothes handed down from previous generations, all of them made of homespun linen and with beautiful embroidered designs. In the summer, when they worked

in the fields, the sisters and brothers would change shirts once a week, throwing the dirty ones into a separate chest. At summer's end, after their work in the fields was done, the women would start the task of laundering, which lasted two weeks. They would carry the dirty clothes to the river, wash them by beating them against the rocks, and then lay them out on the grass to be bleached by the sun. The clothes became white as snow. To me this family epitomized the industriousness and high moral standards of the Ukrainian peasantry.

I also observed how the peasants of Prokhorivka harvested buckwheat. I learned that the entire crop must be gathered in a single day, when it is fully ripe but has not yet begun loosening on its own and falling. Determining the precise, optimal moment for the harvesting was no mean feat: knowledge of special signs was required. One old man in the village had inherited this knowledge from his parents: it had been passed down in his family from generation to generation. Everyone in the village waited for this old man to say when the harvest should begin. When he finally announced, "Tonight, it will be ripe," everyone, young and old, went out to the field before dawn, and by noon all the buckwheat was harvested. I wonder how the harvesting is done today, given our "advanced technology." I suspect much of the crop falls to the ground, where it is harvested by gophers and birds.

Life in Prokhorivka brought me closer to the common people. By that time I was completely fluent in Ukrainian, and I felt very much at home with the peasants. They treated me with warmth and friendship. The girls and women would often come to admire the bouquets of field flowers I gathered and arranged, and they would beg me to teach them how to make such arrangements. The men and boys greeted me kindly; they always asked if I needed a lift anywhere and offered to take me there if I did.

During that time, the civil war was raging all around us. Time and time again it burst in on the life of the village. Once I was walking down a street when a cavalry division suddenly appeared—partisans of some kind were entering the village. Crying "Here's a Jewess!" they surrounded me and dragged me to their leader. Luckily, several peasants saw what had happened and ran up to the partisans, assuring them that they knew me well: I wasn't Jewish at all, they declared, but the niece of the widely respected local doctor. The partisans listened to them skeptically and then took me to the clinic to find out whether their story was true. Zhenia confirmed that we were related, of course, and the partisans let me go. Before they left, they apologized to me,



saying that it was my attractive appearance that had led them to take me for a Jewess. This was one of the many times in my life when I was taken to be Jewish.

Another time, at Easter, some partisans again rushed into the village, and rumors spread that a pogrom of Jews was about to begin. When Zhenia heard word of this, she quickly put together an Easter meal, laid it out on the table, and asked all the local Jews to come. Someone told the partisans that all the Jews were hiding in the infirmary, and the partisans rushed there. When they burst through the door, they saw the table with its lighted candles, the Easter meal, and some guests sitting peacefully and eating. When they asked if any Jews were present, Zhenia gazed at them wide-eyed, burst into laughter, and said, "Christ be with you! What kind of Jews could there be here?" With that, the embarrassed partisans departed.

Living and working in the town of Zolotonosha, not far from Prokhorivka, was Zhenia's good friend and colleague Petr Nikolaevich Zhebenev. He often visited Prokhorivka, and that is where I met him. An extraordinary person who dispensed help freely, Dr. Zhebenev was very popular among his patients. Legends circulated that his very touch would help a sick person get well. When a typhoid epidemic broke out, his infirmary was quickly flooded with patients. In those days treatment of typhoid was quite primitive, and during the revolution and subsequent years of civil war no medicine was available. Petr Nikolaevich spent entire days in his infirmary, providing whatever help he could and comforting his patients in his quiet, compassionate way. And these people, responding to his tender touch and gentle voice, did indeed get better. Soon sick people from outlying areas were brought to his infirmary. Not only was it filled to capacity, but the ill who could not be brought inside lay in carts and wagons outside its doors. So, after spending a whole day in the infirmary, Petr Nikolaevich would come out and tend to the sick and dying there. Through the night and into the morning, he would go from one cart to the next, placing his hand on each patient's forehead, speaking softly, and doing what he could. Whether because of their deep faith in the doctor's touch or his real medical skill, many of the sick did recover.

Zhenia admired Dr. Zhebenev greatly, and I also liked and respected him. But a problem developed: Petr Nikolaevich developed a strong romantic attachment to me. I knew about it, but what could I

do? I had no such feelings for him. Zhenia, who knew the state of my relations with my husband, tried to persuade me to divorce Vsevolod and marry Dr. Zhebenev. She could not accept my total disinterest: she thought I was simply being capricious, and took umbrage at what she thought was my "heartlessness." Later Petr Nikolaevich married a woman who, it was said, reminded him of me. But the marriage was not a happy one.

When Dr. Zhebenev noticed I was steadily losing weight, he urged me to move from Prokhorivka to Zolotonosha and even went to the trouble of finding me an office job there. Allowing myself to be persuaded, I moved to Zolotonosha and settled there in a small house with a garden in the back.

## CHAPTER 16

One day I returned from work to find an unexpected guest—my husband, Vsevolod, in ragged clothes, dirty, and unshaven. He had received my note and had risked his life to reach me, crossing a number of front lines on his way from Kamianets-Podilskyi. Along the way, somewhere near Proskuriv, he had fallen into the hands of the Reds. They took him to the train station and locked him in what had once been a storage room. It was already filled with people the Reds had arrested during that day's roundup. In his ragged clothing, Vsevolod looked suspiciously like a deserter, and he was noticed at once. Three people conducted the interrogations, which were brief: "Who are you?" "Where are you going?" "Where are your documents?" Those who had documents stating where they were going were let go. Most of those who had no documents were shot; a few were pressed into the Red Army. Vsevolod had a fake document that was very similar to the ones we had once carried—it stated he was a teacher on his way to a post at a village school. That was so at odds with his appearance that Vsevolod was certain it would be disbelieved and that he would be summarily executed. So when he was called in for questioning, he did not even show this "document."

The prisoners were taken out in groups to endure their fate. The turn of Vsevolod's group came, and they were taken out into the courtyard. Here Vsevolod had a severe attack of diarrhea, a result of his nervousness about what was to come. He begged the guard to take him to the outhouse. At first the guard refused, but finally he relented and took him to a small wooden building not far from the railroad tracks. Vsevolod stepped inside, while the guard stood outside and leaned against the door. Vsevolod looked up. The roof was pitched—like a house made of playing cards. Below the roof there was an opening just big enough for a person to slip through. He quickly stood on the seat, jumped up, and, grasping the edge of the opening, raised himself up to it. He wiggled through and tumbled down to the ground. Luckily, some twigs were stacked below, and these cushioned his fall. Behind the building there was open land and a forest in the distance. Vsevolod headed for the forest, forcing himself to move as silently as possible, which meant not running. But once he got to the woods, he ran as fast as he could, until he fell to the ground from exhaustion. He lay there

for a long time, expecting to be seized at any moment. But no one pursued him—he had escaped.

“And now I’m with you once again,” he said, finishing his story. Then he added, “And I’m not going anywhere without you.” I didn’t know what to say. I felt sorry for him—after all, he had risked his life on my account. But my feelings toward him were not the ones I once had, and I did not want to live with him any longer. I simply could not do that now, and I told him that openly. We also had another problem to deal with: Denikin’s troops were in Zolotonosha, and it was dangerous for Vsevolod to remain here. What, then, should we do? I resolved I would return with him to Kamianets-Podilskyi, where the Central Rada was based, but that we would live separately, to which Vsevolod agreed.

The following day I went to work as usual. Vsevolod went out into the garden and lay down under a tree to rest. My neighbor across the fence was an officer in Denikin’s army. His orderly stepped out into the yard and saw Vsevolod. Noticing the intensity of his gaze, Vsevolod knew that he had to leave immediately. That evening, when I returned from work together with Dr. Zhebenev, Vsevolod told us what had happened. Petr Nikolaevich said that he could get us the necessary documents and a different set of clothes for Vsevolod. We got our things together for the journey. Within an hour, everything was ready, and we left that same night. Later we learned that Denikin’s security agents had come to the house the very next day.

We arrived at the train station and got a place in an army transport filled with Denikin’s soldiers. In order not to call attention to ourselves, I sat in one car and Vsevolod sat in another. I found myself among officers traveling together with some women. The officers were enjoying themselves, and laughter and shouts rang out continually. One officer sat down next to me, ready to have some fun. Suddenly I felt his hand on my leg, moving upward. I cried out and shoved his hand aside, but he did not stop. Then, with all my might, I kicked him. That, at last, had the desired effect—the officer understood that I was not the kind of woman he thought. This was the only time during the civil war, or my life, for that matter, that anyone approached me in that way.

Finally we reached Kamianets-Podilskyi. Vsevolod found a room for me there and then immersed himself in work. At that time he was editing a Socialist Revolutionary newspaper called *Chervonyi*

*shliakh* (The Red Path), and work was also found there for me.<sup>36</sup> Pavlo Mykhailovych Hubenko—who later became famous as a writer and humorist under the pen name Ostap Vyshnia—was also working at that newspaper then. I became friends with Pavlo Mykhailovych, and that friendship continued for many years. Another friend I made there was Valeriian Polishchuk, then a student at the new Ukrainian university in Kamianets-Podilskyi and later a well-known poet.

Valeriian was very handsome and always in love with someone. He became enamored at first with me and then with my sister Liza, who had then come to Kamianets-Podilskyi. Liza was living with me and was also working at the newspaper. Valeriian and Liza, whom he called “Miss Li,” began a correspondence in verse—a poetic dialogue, so to speak. For instance, Valeriian spontaneously wrote her the following poem in Ukrainian:

On the grass beneath the tree  
I was sitting with Miss Li.  
Evening fell so softly  
On the cherry blossoms,  
And itty-bitty bats flew  
Overhead.

To this Liza replied in Russian:

Don't offer me orchids, my friend,  
I'm not fond of their fanciful shape,  
I prefer the friends of the fields—  
Cornflowers of a deep blue shade.

Later Valeriian and I became such good friends that I addressed him by the familiar form “*ty*” (thou), which was unusual for me.

Among the people I knew in Kamianets-Podilskyi, I also well remember Volodymyr Chekhivsky, who became prime minister in the

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<sup>36</sup> It appears that Mrs. Kardinalowska inadvertently misnamed the newspaper. At that time the central organ of the UPSR, *Trudova Ukraina* (Laboring Ukraine), was being published under Holubovych's editorship in Kamianets-Podilskyi, and Ostap Vyshnia debuted there as a humorist. Also published in that city was *Trudovyi shliakh* (The Labor Path), and this is probably the paper Mrs. Kardinalowska had in mind. Its first issue appeared on 26 June 1919. See Arkadii Zhyvotko, *Istoriia ukrainskoi presy* (Kyiv, 1999).—Eds.

<sup>37</sup> Chekhivsky (1876–1937) served very briefly as prime minister and foreign minister (26 December 1918–11 February 1919). A member of the Russian State Duma in 1906 and a

UNR government under the Directory.<sup>37</sup> Chekhivsky was a close friend of Vsevolod's. Their acquaintance dated from the time they were both at the Kamianets-Podilskyi Theological Seminary—Chekhivsky as a teacher and Vsevolod as a student. Chekhivsky was a very religious person and an impassioned preacher. Every Sunday, after the liturgy, he would preach with great fervor, gathering crowds of listeners. He traveled around to villages and towns, always preaching his sermons to great effect. At our first meeting, Chekhivsky was struck by my appearance—he said I embodied his idea of the Madonna. He also tried to persuade me to travel with him to the villages and help in his proselytizing. When I asked him in surprise how I could help, he replied, “Just stand next to me when I speak. Let people gaze at your face.” This was not the first time someone saw a Madonnalike quality in me. In my adolescence, when my brother Seriozha was in the hospital in Moscow, another patient there who was an artist begged Mother to be allowed to paint me as a Madonna: Mother held firm and refused.<sup>38</sup> Although I liked Chekhivsky very much, I declined his proposals, explaining that I had no connection with the church.

I would see Chekhivsky in Kharkiv years later, in 1930, when he was a defendant in the show trial of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine. I remember entering the courtroom and sitting down in one of the front rows. When Chekhivsky noticed me, he smiled and waved to me in greeting, to the surprise of the others present. After that day I never saw him again.<sup>39</sup>

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prominent Ukrainian Social Democrat, from 1919 he was a leading figure in the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. A defendant along with forty-four other prominent Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1930 Stalinist show trial of the so-called Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (*Spilka vyzvolennia Ukrainy*), he was executed by the NKVD on 3 November 1937 while serving a ten-year term in the infamous prison complex on the Solovets Islands in the White Sea.—*Eds.*

<sup>38</sup> In 1945, after the Second World War ended, an Italian artist I met asked me whether I would pose for a painting he was calling “Lazarus Resurrected”: he thought my countenance illustrated well the look Lazarus had when he came back from the dead.

<sup>39</sup> The defendants in the show trial were sentenced on the basis of fabricated charges, and almost all of them perished in the 1930s in Soviet prisons or concentration camps. See James Mace, “Union for the Liberation of Ukraine,” *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 5 (1993), ed. Danylo H. Struk, 491–2; and Oleksandr Sydorenko, “Sud nad perekonanniamy,” in *Represovane “vidrodzhennia,”* ed. O. I. Sydorenko and D. V. Tabachnyk (Kyiv, 1993), 63–153.—*Eds.*

## CHAPTER 17

In Kamianets-Podilskyi I became acquainted with a former landowner who owned a large library. His fascination with the occult had led him to amass many books on spiritualism and parapsychology, the majority of which were translations from English. During the revolution his collection was confiscated and became part of the city library. However, for some reason it was designated a classified collection and access to it was restricted. The collector was unhappy that his books were not freely available to potential readers. This piqued my curiosity, so I went to the library. There, saying that I was a journalist, I requested books on the occult. Once I received permission to use the collection, I became engrossed in reading the volumes. They opened up an extraordinarily interesting world of mysterious and supernatural phenomena. I should note that the occult was not foreign to me. Everyone in my family, with the exception of my father, had an avid interest in spiritualism, and we often held seances. My mother and her brother were acquainted with Madame Blavatsky and belonged to a student spiritualists' club. My father poked fun at them for this, but one day something happened to make him reconsider his view and take a somewhat different stance.

That day we were sitting in the dining room, summoning "spirits" and holding hands over a saucer. The general consensus was that our mother was the best medium among us, for in her presence the saucer would move with particular intensity. In this instance, it began moving almost immediately, and we asked, "Spirit, who are you?" The saucer started to point to the letters of a name—a Russian surname none of us knew—followed by the words, "Ask your father, he knows me." Amazed, we called Father, who was sitting in his study. Upon our mentioning the surname, Father jumped up and dashed to the table, where he began firing questions in rapid succession: "Tell me, were you guilty? How did it all happen?" We didn't understand what was happening, but Father's excitement was contagious: we were caught up in it too and followed the "conversation" with intense interest. Later, after he found out what he wanted to know and the seance ended, Father told us the following story:

"During the Russo-Japanese War there was a soldier by that surname in my brigade. He was accused of plunder and murder and was brought to trial before a military court. My high rank demanded that I participate

in the review of his case. The evidence was convincing, but for some reason I had doubts about the case. The judges were divided in their opinion, and I found myself on the side of the dissenting minority. The soldier was sentenced to be shot by firing squad. The memory of this incident hung over me all these years, because I could not shake the feeling that an innocent soldier had been executed."

Father had never told us about this incident until now, when the "spirit" of the executed soldier appeared to tell him the truth. It named the actual culprit and gave a full picture of what had happened, down to the last detail. Now, at last, Father understood what had happened and was fully convinced of the soldier's complete innocence. I'm not sure whether this incident changed Father's attitude toward the occult altogether, but certainly he, like all of us, was very moved by it.

As a young girl, I knew of encounters with the "netherworld" that were related to our "Black" grandmother. For instance, in 1919, during the height of the civil war, Grandmother was living with her ward, Raia, in Shuliavka, a suburb of Kyiv. The small old house in which they lived had windows facing a long winding street, which dipped steeply downward. The windows had wooden shutters that were locked by latches. One winter's day, a deep snow blanketed everything except for a narrow path that had been cleared from the doorway. Grandmother, who was nearly ninety years old at the time, suddenly got the urge to visit her native village—to bid farewell before dying, she said. In those years, the only trains in operation were military ones, and people who needed to go somewhere asked soldiers to let them ride along in the cars of these trains. When we learned of Grandmother's intentions, we all tried to dissuade her from embarking on such a dangerous journey, but, in a manner consistent with her temperament, she refused to listen and set out. Remaining in the small house were only Raia and a friend she had invited to stay with her during Grandmother's absence.

About five days later, Raia was awakened in the middle of the night by the rattling of the shutters. Thinking that Grandmother had returned, she ran to the window and shouted through the closed shutters that she was coming to the door immediately. But when she got to the door and opened it, no one was there. She opened the window and the shutters, but saw no one. Surprised, Raia shut the windows and exchanged looks with her friend, who had also been wakened by the noise. They went outside and walked around the house, but they saw no one. And there were no footprints in the snow other than the ones they themselves had just made.



It was a moonlit night, and the empty street was brightly illuminated. Standing near the gate, the girls asked each other how they could possibly have heard what they did. Just then, Raia spotted my grandmother far off at the bottom of the hill, making the ascent with her basket. Both girls ran to meet her, calling, "Where have you been you? Where are you coming from?" "Why, from the train station, of course," Grandmother replied in surprise. "But you were just knocking at our window," the girls said, and then told her the story. "That was Death coming after me," said Grandmother with finality, "I'll die soon." The next day she did not get up from her bed. Grandmother had contracted typhus on her journey, and she died a few days later.

A second strange incident occurred shortly after Grandmother's death. Mother and I were then living in Kyiv, in a large building, on the third floor. That day I was out and Mother was at work. When she returned home, the landlady asked, "Did you see your friend?" "What friend?" asked Mother in surprise. "The one who was just here a short while ago. She just left. You couldn't have missed her," replied the landlady, puzzled in turn. "She did not introduce herself, but waited for you for almost an hour, asking a lot of questions about you and particularly about your daughter, Tania. She said that Tania's fate worried her greatly. Is it possible that you did not see her?" Mother, bewildered, asked the landlady to describe the guest. "She looked rather strange," began the landlady. "She was dressed in an old-fashioned coat, in a style that nobody has worn for a long time; and she was wearing rubber boots, though it's not raining or snowing outside. She had on a fur hat, with a black kerchief tied over it. But it was her discolored teeth that made the greatest impression on me. They were totally black, as if they had been painted." Mother went completely pale and said: "You've given an exact description of my mother-in-law, who died a short while ago." Now it was the landlady who went pale. Mother told her that our "Black" grandmother refused to accept anything modern and always dressed in the same old-fashioned way, just as the landlady had described her. As for the black teeth, in her youth Grandmother had suffered toothaches and was told to rub nicotine into her gums. The nicotine acted as a narcotic and eliminated the pain. Grandmother became used to it, and after many years of nicotine being rubbed into her gums, her teeth had turned completely black.

These are only a few of the many puzzling and incomprehensible incidents I experienced or heard about from someone who was close to me. In the course of my story, I shall share more of them.

## CHAPTER 18

A few months after our arrival in Kamianets-Podilskyi, members of the Central Rada who had been in the Ukrainian government began fleeing abroad. Once again Vsevolod declared that he would not go anywhere without me: "If you don't come with me, I'll stay behind too." I faced a choice that would determine the course of the rest of my life—whether or not to emigrate. Those who were part of the Central Rada—and, especially, their wives—insisted that I leave and appealed to my sense of duty and patriotism. But it was precisely patriotism that was holding me back—I was very committed to Ukraine and did not want to leave it. The arguments these individuals advanced did not convince me, for they did not have the same meaning for me as they did for people who were politicians. Furthermore, there was another factor, which these people were unaware of but for me was decisive—my feelings toward Vsevolod. Leaving with a person whom I no longer loved seemed totally absurd to me.

Just before their departure, the members of the Central Rada made a last attempt at convincing me to go. They sent a government car for me, but I refused to get in it. Then Vsevolod declared he would remain in Kamianets-Podilskyi as well. That decision had grave consequences for him—shortly thereafter he was arrested, and later he was sent to a concentration camp. I've carried a sense of guilt about this all my life. Yet in an objective sense I was not guilty, for I acted in accord with my heart and my conscience. Later, during the Second World War, when the Germans seized my daughter Assya and sent her to a forced-labor camp in Austria, I made the decision to go with her instantaneously. Then I had no doubt whatsoever about what to do, for I knew that if we became separated I would never see her again, and I followed the dictates of my heart. I was the only mother who went voluntarily with her child to the camp, to which the four hundred young people seized at that time were sent.

Fate conspired in such a way that I again met the people who had tried convincing me to emigrate. It was after the Second World War in Graz, Austria, where the wives of former members of the Central Rada was then displaced persons. Once again I had to listen to many bitter reprimands and accusations of being selfish and lacking patriotism. None of these women seemed to want to understand the emotional state of a very young woman who was being exhorted to abandon

her country and family and go abroad with someone she no longer loved for the sake of political ideals. Though I knew I had made the right decision, I could not free myself of the guilt I felt, which probably stemmed from an inherent mind-set of self-sacrifice that I and many women of that time had.

After the exodus of the Ukrainian government, I resolved to return to Proskuriv, where Mother and Vania were still living. The suitcase I packed with my belongings was so heavy that I could barely lift it with both hands. The station was overcrowded with refugees waiting to board any train going west. I managed to drag my suitcase to the platform and looked around for a conductor. A soldier was standing, waving to someone and calling out, "Semen! Come this way! The train to Proskuriv is over here." I was overjoyed to hear this much-needed information. Semen made his way over to his comrade. They both sat down on some crates and lit up cigarettes.

"Could you possibly tell me when the train will depart?" I asked Semen's comrade.

"Not very soon. There's probably at least an hour's wait," he answered. "So sit down, Miss, and have a rest."

I took his advice and made myself comfortable on my valise. A group of soldiers gathered around us. One of them had an accordion and began playing the song "Yablochko" (Little Apple), a lively ditty popular at the time. Everyone joined in the singing. A young sailor stepped forward; saying "Move aside, guys," he began tap-dancing. He was a wonderful dancer—he tapped very rapidly, grinning the whole time. All the spectators cheered and beamed with pleasure at the entertainment. After a while the accordionist began playing the Ukrainian dance called the "Kozachok" (Little Cossack) and a young fellow dressed in a Ukrainian embroidered shirt jumped into the center of the ring and began dancing. He made incredible turns, unlike any I had seen before. Only a professional dancer could have danced with such dexterity. His performance was both audacious and humorous, in the true spirit of the Ukrainian Cossacks. I was so mesmerized by his dancing that I was oblivious to what Semen was saying to me as he and his friend got up. It was only after hearing voices in the crowd shouting, "Look, the train for Proskuriv is leaving!" that I remembered where I was and jumped to my feet. Freight cars filled with soldiers were slowly moving past me. I stood stock-still, not knowing what to do. The train was gathering speed and its last cars were approaching. Suddenly I heard a voice from one of the cars, "Miss, get in here! Give

me your valise!" It was my new acquaintance, Semen. Stretching out his hand to me, he cried, "Hurry! Hurry up!" Then something incredible happened: I picked up the huge valise and, lifting it up above my head, handed it to the soldier. He grabbed it and then pulled me inside the car. Only after my breath came easily again did I realize what had happened. It was physically impossible for me to pick that valise up with one hand, let alone lift it above my head. Yet I had done just that. The act made me recall something someone had once told me about an incident in the Caucasus he had heard about. A mountaineer was fleeing from some men who were pursuing him. In the chase he came to a wide mountain stream that completely blocked his escape. Having no alternative, he mustered his will and strength and in a superhuman effort jumped to the other side. His pursuers were so stunned that they abandoned their pursuit. Later I learned that such feats of "supernatural strength" in moments of extreme duress are not as rare as one might think.

Thankfully, the rest of the train trip was uneventful, and I reached Proskuriv and found Mother and Vania without difficulty. The following day, Mother and I were walking down the street when we suddenly overheard part of a conversation: "Did you hear the news?" one person asked another. "They've arrested Holubovych in Kamianets-Podilskyi." I felt as if I had been struck by lightning. In an instant, all my resentment toward Vsevolod vanished: I declared to Mother that I was going to Kamianets. I didn't consider what I would do there—all I knew was that I had to go there and do whatever I could to save Vsevolod. Mother understood and made no attempt to dissuade me. Soon I was boarding yet another train, headed back to Kamianets.

When I reached my destination, I went directly to the local headquarters of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police. I was told that Vsevolod was no longer there: he had been transferred to Vinnytsia. I took the train to Vinnytsia, and there again I went to see the head of the local Cheka. In difficult or dangerous situations, I always went to the person in charge. In Vinnytsia that turned out to be a young man. He told me that Vsevolod and other arrestees were in the ice cellar beside the Cheka building. "They've all been sentenced to execution by firing squad," he said. Then suddenly, to my great relief, he promised to try to persuade the other members of the Cheka tribunal not to shoot Vsevolod, but to transfer him to Kharkiv instead. He told me to come back every day to check on developments and said he would let me know how things were going.

It dawned on me that the Chekist had taken a liking to me and had decided to help me for that reason. The next morning and every one thereafter, as I left the house where I was staying, I found a bouquet of roses on the porch—a gift from the enamored young Chekist. During my daily visits he told me he was having difficulty convincing the other members of the Cheka to spare Vsevolod, for they feared an attack by anti-Bolshevik partisans, who were extremely active in the area and would surely try to free Vsevolod if they found out he was being held there.

Finally, when he encountered me in the street one day, the Chekist told me that he no longer had the power to save Vsevolod. The only recourse remaining was to get an order for Vsevolod's transfer from Kamianets-Podilskyi to Kharkiv from Volodymyr Zatonsky, the head of the Galician Revolutionary Committee,<sup>40</sup> who was then in Przemyśl. I immediately decided to go to see Zatonsky. As Vsevolod once told me, Zatonsky had been the rector of the Kyiv Polytechnical Institute and knew Vsevolod well when he was an exemplary student there. I therefore had some hope Zatonsky would be sympathetic and would help Vsevolod.

On the eve of my departure a young man came to visit me. He said he was a student working for the Cheka on secret orders of the Central Rada: he had learned that I was planning to visit Zatonsky and wanted to help me. He handed me an official-looking packet addressed to Zatonsky. "This is a letter to Zatonsky from the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow," he said. "Taking such a long journey without documents is dangerous. This letter will help you." I thanked him, and to add to the packet's importance I wrote "VERY URGENT" on it.

At the train station I found a military train heading west. I showed the "document" I had received and immediately discovered its magical powers: I was taken to the engineer, who seated me right beside him! There were several changes of train along the way, and the packet was of help at every one. In those days the trip from Vinnytsia to Przemyśl usually took several days, but I made it in twenty-four hours. The train station in Przemyśl had been bombed, so the train stopped several kilometers from the city. I got off the train and stood there, not knowing

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<sup>40</sup>This was the name of the Soviet provisional government during the Red Army's occupation of eastern Galicia in the summer of 1920. Zatonsky (1888–1938) served in various senior Soviet Ukrainian government and Party posts until he was arrested by the NKVD in 1937. He was later executed.—Eds.

how to get to the city. Suddenly two young men approached me and asked where I wanted to go. Hearing the name Zatonsky and seeing the package, they gallantly offered me a ride in their car. Of course, I accepted the fantastic offer, and the three of us settled into the front seat, with me in the middle.

During the ride the fellows entertained me with humorous stories, paid me compliments, and overall behaved in a most gentlemanly manner—I wasn't sure whether that was because of me or the packet with the magical powers. When we arrived at the building that housed the Communist government's headquarters, the two young men offered to wait for me in the car and then take me back to the train.

I entered the building, showed the packet, and was taken to Zatonsky immediately. When he saw what I carried, Zatonsky presumed that I was a messenger from the Central Committee in Moscow and greeted me very graciously. But as soon as I mentioned Vsevolod's name and stated the purpose of my visit, Zatonsky's manner changed abruptly and his face became severe. Nonetheless, he listened to what I had to say. When I finished speaking, he promised to order Vsevolod's release. Writing something on a piece of paper, he stuffed it into an envelope, sealed it, and handed it to me. I thanked him and left.

The young men were waiting for me. I got into their car and we drove off. One of them took out a small book. Writing an inscription inside, he gave it to me, saying "This is for you to remember me by. It's a collection of poems I wrote in English when I lived in Canada." I didn't know any English, but I took the book and thanked the poet. Years later, a friend noticed the book in my library and opened it: he asked if I knew what was written in the dedication on the first page. When I shook my head, my friend laughed, read the inscription, "I love you," out loud, and then translated it for me. Later still, when I was working as an editor, I crossed paths again with the poet who had lived in Canada: his name was Ivan Kulyk, and he reminded me of our first meeting.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Kulyk (1897–1937) was a socialist activist in North America from 1914 until he returned to Ukraine in 1917 and became a member of the first Soviet government there. He was a member of the Galician Revolutionary Committee (1920) and the Hart proletarian writers' group; the Soviet consul in Montreal (1924–27); a founding member (1927) of the All-Ukrainian Association of Proletarian Writers; chair of the organizing committee (1932) and head (1934–37) of the Writers' Union of Ukraine; and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine (1937). He wrote many newspaper articles, eight poetry collections, and several collections of prose, and translated an anthology of American poetry into Ukrainian before he was arrested by the NKVD. He perished during the Yezhov Terror.—*Eds.*

The young fellows drove me back to the station and bade me farewell. I decided to go to the ladies room and check what Zatonsky had written. I was overcome by doubt that he had kept his promise. My intuition was right: the note read, "I consider Holubovych to be dangerous and recommend that he be executed immediately." I tore the note to shreds and flushed it down the toilet. The train arrived, and soon, filled with desultory thoughts about the failure of my rescue mission, I was sitting in one of its heated cars.

The train was slowly moving eastward when it suddenly stopped. Two military men jumped up into our car. They quickly looked everyone over and then one of them pointed to me and shouted, "Here she is!" The two of them grabbed me, picked me up, and dragged me off the train and into the station. There they questioned me. "Where are the papers you took from Zatonsky's office?" I was totally confused: "What papers? I neither saw nor took any papers." "Really? Then what are these?" they said triumphantly, pulling a whole sheaf of papers out of my handbag. The head of the station started checking the documents and comparing them to the list he held. Convinced that they were all there, he smiled and said, "You're lucky that nothing is missing. You say you don't know what's in them? It's Vynnychenko's correspondence with our government."<sup>42</sup> When he said this I was overcome by fright, for I expected to be arrested and perhaps even summarily shot. To my amazement, they let me go.

This unbelievable episode continues to be a mystery to me. Were the papers hidden in my bag so they could be recovered later, or were they planted as a provocation against me? Should I suspect that the two young men who drove me to the station had a concealed purpose? To this day, I cannot say.

Once back in Vinnytsia, I immediately went to the Cheka headquarters there. To my surprise, I discovered that the Chekist who had befriended me had somehow succeeded in persuading the tribunal to transfer Vsevolod to Kharkiv and that he had already been taken there. I breathed a sigh of relief and soon left for Kharkiv.

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<sup>42</sup> Vynnychenko resigned as president of the Directory of the UNR in February 1919 and moved to Vienna, where he headed the Foreign Group of the non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Communist Party, which promoted the creation of a completely independent Ukrainian socialist republic. In 1920 he visited Moscow and Kharkiv for high-level discussions with Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders. Disillusioned by their positions and policies, he rejected the invitation to become deputy chairman of Soviet Ukraine's Council of People's Commissars and people's commissar of foreign affairs. In Vienna, and later in France, he remained a vocal left-wing critic of the Soviet regime.—*Eds.*



I recently read a book of memoirs about the Ukrainian anarchist leader Nestor Makhno. According to them, the young Chekist in Vinnytsia who had been so friendly toward me, and seemed to be so humane and even a good person, was an infamous sadist who was captured and hanged by partisans.

## CHAPTER 19

As soon as I arrived in Kharkiv, I went to the prison and said that I wanted to speak to the warden. When I asked him whether Vsevolod was there—and acknowledged that I was his wife—that official confirmed that Vsevolod was an inmate. I thanked him for the information and left, surprised not to have been detained. I was only a few streets away when a man caught up with me. “Are you Holubovych’s wife?” he asked. When I replied I was, he asked me to return to the prison to answer a few questions. I went back with him, and this time I did not emerge—I was placed under arrest and spent the next nine months in prison.

At first I was put in a huge preliminary detention room with hundreds of other people. The room was so packed that it was impossible to turn around. Some people were standing, others sitting. There were men and women, military people and civilians. We were brought food once a day—a pot filled with some mush that passed for soup. Everybody pounced on this pot and tried to get at the food with any utensil they had. I had no implement with me, and in any case the beastly battle around the pot filled me with disgust. I didn’t eat for two days. On the third day my neighbor, who appeared to be an officer in Denikin’s army, turned to me. Extending his cup toward me, he said, “Take it. I won’t be needing it anymore—I’ll be shot today. Take it!” I looked at him in terror, not wanting to take a gift from a person about to die. But he insisted, and I did take the cup from him. That same day the officer was taken out of the room, and he did not return.

After a time I was transferred to another prison, on Hubernatorska Street. In the early 1920s, the Kharkiv offices of the Cheka were housed in several buildings on that street, which had once been where the town’s affluent people lived. It was here, in their mansions, that the Cheka set up its administration. Prisoners were kept in the mansions’ cellars, and many were shot there.

I was brought to a large room that had obviously once been a parlor but was now filled with bunks. Some fifty or more women were sitting on the bunks or on the floor. The room’s windows faced out onto the street, and across from them was the Cheka’s information bureau. The mothers, sisters, and wives of those arrested would make daily trips there to learn the fate of their loved ones. They stood in long lines, making their way one by one to the information window. Time and

again we would hear an agonized cry as yet another woman was told of the execution of her husband, brother, or son. After all these years, those cries still echo in my ears, and I remember how I shuddered at every one.

There were women from all walks of life in our cell—prostitutes and thieves, as well as political prisoners. Each one found a spot for herself as best she could on a bunk bed or on the floor, putting something under her head and throwing a coat over herself. I had nothing with me—it was summer when I was arrested, and all I had was the summer dress I was wearing at the time. I slept on the bare boards. When my neighbor received two pillows from home, she gave me one. One night, as I was settling down to sleep, I saw the pillow move. I picked it up—and saw that a mouse had given birth to several babies under it! What a commotion the women made then!

They fed us so miserably that we suffered constantly from hunger. Consequently all the women talked about was food. They took turns describing how to cook one dish or another, savoring every detail. Food and culinary affairs had never interested me, so I did not participate in these discussions. That immediately set me apart and alienated me from the other women. In addition, the prison administration assigned me to clean the halls, a job that entitled me to an extra portion of food. This set the women against me even more, and they displayed their hostility and jealousy at every turn, making my imprisonment doubly hard to bear.

One day a group of young schoolgirls was brought to the prison. No more than thirteen or fourteen years old, they had been arrested in Poltava together with the schoolboys of the same age who were their friends. These youngsters had a patriotic and national frame of mind: they were convinced that the cause of the Ukrainian revolution was not yet lost and that they could be of service to it. They had formed an “organization” they believed was secret but was, in fact, well known to the Cheka. The girls had stayed in Poltava, while the boys traveled around “to set up contacts.” They carried on a lively correspondence in which they shared their plans and hopes for the future. The letters were delivered on time, even too punctually, but the young people never suspected that these were being monitored by the Cheka. One day they were all arrested. The evidence against them was iron-clad, and it was certain that they would be executed. Their desperate parents went to see the writer Vladimir Korolenko, whom some of them knew, and implored him to intercede on their children’s

behalf. Korolenko immediately wrote to Moscow and then traveled there himself. He begged the Party to spare the children, arguing that their actions were all child's play and adolescent enthusiasm, that their "organization" had no political clout at all and posed no threat to Soviet rule. Korolenko even came to Kharkiv and visited our prison to see these young people. But all his efforts were in vain—the children were condemned as "enemies" and sentenced to be shot. The sentence was carried out. I remember that as the boys were being led past our cell on the way to their execution, one of them shouted out "Farewell, Halia!" to the girl he loved. The prosecutor later told us with what courage the boys had faced their execution and spoke about their heroic deaths with genuine admiration.

Oddly enough, this prosecutor quite often came to our cell to talk to us. We were given considerable freedom of movement in prison—the doors to the cells leading into the long hall were open at all times, and we prisoners could wander through from cell to cell. I recall a woman inmate who walked into our cell one time: she came up to me and started telling me about all the thefts in which she had taken part. Another time, the sister of one of our prison mates ran into our cell. Her husband was an officer in Denikin's army who had been wounded and remained behind when Denikin's forces were retreating from the city; he had been caught and arrested together with his wife, and both were sentenced to death. As this woman ran in, someone in the hallway was calling out in a loud voice the names of people who were to be led away to be shot. On hearing her own name, the woman caught hold of her sister's hands and cried, "I beg you, swear to me that you will not abandon my children!" Her sister, our prison mate, swore that she would take the children into her home and care for them. At that moment, the officers on duty came in and led the woman away. For a long while afterwards her distraught sister could neither eat nor drink and just kept repeating her vow that she would take care of the poor orphans: she was released from prison a short time later, I believe. There were many such episodes in prison: the toll of human suffering I saw around me was too great for me to remember it all.

Five months later, I was transferred to the old prison on Kholodna Hora (Cold Mountain) in Kharkiv. Kharkiv was then the capital of Ukraine, and this prison was probably the principal one in the country. It was here that Vsevolod was incarcerated together with his colleagues, as was my stepfather Vania, that is, Ivan Nemolovsky. The news that Holubovych's wife was also now an inmate spread through

the prison like wildfire. The other Ukrainian prisoners started sending me food and sharing their packages from home with me. Among the prisoners who cleaned the halls and brought the meals were supporters of the Central Rada, and they all tried to be of help to me. Through them I promptly established contact with Vsevolod, and that continued throughout my imprisonment.

Once a gift from Vsevolod was passed along to me—his portrait drawn on a piece of gray paper that had been a book cover. It was done in pencil and had undoubtedly been drawn by an incarcerated artist, for it was a very good likeness. The portraitist had captured Vsevolod's facial features very well, and it was clear that he was a true artist. Beneath the portrait Vsevolod had written "My last prayer is your name, my love." I kept this portrait for years. I remember the day, months later, when I went to Dietrich's, a German store selling art supplies on Prorizna Street in Kyiv, to buy a frame for it. The clerk, seeing the portrait, immediately recognized Vsevolod and excitedly exclaimed, "Ah, isn't this Holubovych?!" She had obviously seen his photograph in the newspapers during the time of the Central Rada and remembered it. Her every gesture made it clear that she had great admiration for him. She diligently searched for the frame that would best suit the drawing and then refused to take any payment for it. In 1933 this beautiful, even historic portrait was confiscated by the secret police who had come to arrest my second husband, Serhii Pylypenko, and search our apartment. Perhaps it still exists, filed somewhere in their archives.

After a short while I was transferred to the main prison building, and there I was at last interrogated. The questioning lasted almost a full twenty-four hours. The interrogators took turns in shifts, while I continued to sit in the same position the whole day. They asked me about the members of the Central Rada and their activities. They also asked questions related to party matters—something I knew nothing about. For example, in my attempt to say positive things about Vsevolod and convince my interrogators how revolutionary an individual he was, I recalled the slogan "Long live the International!" which I remembered reading in the Socialist Revolutionary paper Vsevolod had been editing. To my surprise, my interrogators broke out in peals of laughter and asked: "Now, do you know what International they were referring to?" It was only then that I learned there were several internationals: the second one was supported by the Socialist Revolutionaries and the third—completely different—by the

Bolsheviks, and that was the major principle on which they had parted ways. When Vsevolod and his friends heard about my “testimony,” they laughed harder than the interrogators had. For a long time after that my ignorance and naïveté sparked great mirth among them. Nonetheless, it was these qualities that actually saved me and the members of the Central Rada who had been arrested: not knowing any of their secrets, and guided by my intuition, I answered cautiously but truthfully and managed not to betray anyone. I didn’t know that at the time, however, and after the interrogation I greatly feared that I might have said something that would harm these people. Once I was returned to my cell, I wrote down all the answers I could remember giving and passed them on in a note to Vsevolod. He responded quickly, reassuring me that I had answered superbly and that he and his friends were very grateful to me. Several other inmates who were friends of Vsevolod’s also sent me notes of gratitude.

Several months went by, and I was not recalled for questioning. Somehow the idea occurred to me that I should go on a hunger strike to protest being held behind bars without cause—after all, I remembered reading the stories in *Byloe* of hunger strikes by revolutionaries imprisoned by the tsarist authorities. I asked that the prosecutor be informed of my intention to refuse food. He promptly appeared in my cell and tried to convince me that hunger strikes were valid only in tsarist times and that now, under Soviet rule, they were totally uncalled for. Furthermore, he said, “This is the first time since the revolution that anyone in this prison has mentioned a hunger strike. Drop this silly notion of yours.” I firmly refused. The prosecutor, apparently at a loss for words, turned on his heel and left. I put my plan into action even though I was convinced that nothing would come of my “silly notion.” On the third day of my hunger strike I received an official letter: it informed me that my case had been suspended and that I was free to go. I couldn’t believe my eyes! That very same day the prison door opened and I walked out, a free person once more.

## CHAPTER 20

Upon leaving prison, I was at a total loss as to what to do. I had no family or friends in Kharkiv. Where should I go? Where should I spend the night? I decided to go to the train station, where at least there would be people milling about and waiting for trains.

It was summer again, as it had been the day I was arrested. I was wearing the same thin dress I had on then, except now I was barefoot—I had thrown away my dilapidated shoes. Walking along the street, I noticed that I was not the only person without shoes. Many people were walking on wood soles tied to the bottoms of their feet with straps of leather or rope. Times were hard, and shoes were not easy to find. I went barefoot for months after leaving prison, and during that time my feet were often bloody.

I spent that night dozing fitfully at the train station. The following morning I resolved to find a job. While walking down a street, I caught sight of the building of the Council of People's Commissars. "Why not try my luck there?" I thought, and went directly to the building. A man came up to the building alongside me and politely held the door as I stepped into the lobby. Turning to me, the man asked, "Are you looking for anyone in particular?" Without hesitation, I said, "Yes, I'm looking for the chairman of the commissariat." To my surprise, the man smiled and said, "I am the chairman. What can I do for you?" I told him everything frankly—who I was and where I had been. The chairman—it was Rakovsky himself<sup>43</sup>—heard me out and then, without asking anything more, offered me a job as registrar. I had no idea what the job involved: the one connection that kept spinning in my head was Gogol's character Akakii Akakievich, who had a similar position and spent day after day copying official papers. I confessed to Rakovsky that I had never worked in an office, but he assured me I would soon learn whatever I needed to know. True enough, the job turned out to be very straightforward. And that is how I became a Soviet civil servant. Such miracles could

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<sup>43</sup> Khristian Rakovsky (1873–1941), who was of Romanian origin, was a Bolshevik functionary from 1918. He headed the Soviet Ukrainian government (January 1919–July 1923) and served as the Soviet ambassador to Britain (1923–25) and France (1925–27). He was expelled from the Party in 1927 for belonging to the Left Opposition and exiled to Astrakhan (1928–34). He was rearrested in 1937, tried as a spy, and shot in an NKVD prison.—*Eds.*

happen only then, when Soviet institutions lacked educated or even literate people.

I worked at that institution for almost two months, and then someone advised me to look for a job in a publishing house. I learned that Vasyl Ellan-Blakytny, who had been a member of the UPSR and then became a Borotbist, was now editing the daily newspaper *Visty VUTsVK* (The All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee News).<sup>44</sup> I knew that at one time he had been close to Holubovych and Nemolovsky, and I hoped he would help me.

Ellan-Blakytny greeted me in a very friendly manner. He listened sympathetically to the story of my imprisonment and that of Vsevolod, who was still behind bars. But when I asked about a job, he said with regret that there were no positions available at his newspaper. However, he offered to introduce me to Serhii Pylypenko, the chief editor of *Selianska pravda* (Peasant Truth), where, he said, there were some openings.<sup>45</sup> We walked down the corridor to the offices of that newspaper, which were located on the same floor, and there Ellan-Blakytny introduced me to Pylypenko. Serhii listened to my story quietly, just as Ellan-Blakytny had. When I finished, he offered me a job as copy editor and translator. He explained that his newspaper received all its material from Moscow in Russian, which then had to be translated into Ukrainian. By this time I was fluent in Ukrainian, so I was confident I had the skills necessary for the job.

My first translations were of news reports about the 1921–22 peasant famine in the Volga region and Ukraine. These reports, which came to our editorial offices daily, gave detailed accounts of all the famine's horrors, including cannibalism. In practically every case the latter involved hunger-crazed mothers killing their infants and

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<sup>44</sup> Ellan-Blakytny (1894–1925) was a prominent early Soviet Ukrainian poet, journalist, critic, and satirist. He was also one of the leaders of the Borotbists, the large left faction of the UPSR that formed the pro-Ukrainian-independence UPSR (Communists) in March 1919 and merged with the pro-independence left faction of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers' Party to form the Ukrainian Communist Party (of Borotbists) in August 1919. The latter party, with some 15,000 members, voluntarily merged with the Bolshevik Party in March 1920. Many former Borotbists played important roles in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and were repressed and killed during the Stalinist terror.—Eds.

<sup>45</sup> *Selianska pravda*—originally called *Selianska bidnota* (The Peasant Poor)—was the organ of the central committees of the Bolshevik Party and the Committee of Poor Peasants in Ukraine, published daily in July 1921 and then three times per week until December 1925. Members of Pluh, which Pylypenko headed, were frequent contributors, and the paper did much to popularize Ukrainian literature among the peasantry. Pylypenko left *Selianska pravda* after it was merged with *Radianske selo* (The Soviet Village).—Eds.



feeding their flesh to their older children. Such horrors would be repeated during the great famine of 1932–33, which, unlike the famine of 1921–22 in the aftermath of the civil war, was not the result of a poor harvest, but an artificial one created by the Party to smash all opposition to its policies.

The poor harvest of 1921 did not affect all of Soviet Ukraine, and consequently many peasants came there from the Volga region in search of salvation. Help and food for the starving came from abroad, including from the American people via the American Relief Administration. But the millions who perished during the famine of 1932–33 received no help from anyone. The Soviet government regarded them as “enemies of the people” and strictly forbade anyone to assist them.

At the newspaper I met people who soon became my friends. The staff consisted of three people—the editor, Serhii Pylypenko; Ostap Vyshnia, my old friend from Kamianets-Podilskyi; and Ivan Kyrylenko. Ostap Vyshnia was the newspaper’s secretary, and his desk was next to mine. He had no enthusiasm for his job and often did not show up at work.

One day Ellan-Blakytny paid a visit to our office—he liked dropping by to see Pylypenko, with whom he was on very friendly terms. Ellan-Blakytny was a cultured and well-educated man with a gentle nature. However, he deliberately adopted coarse mannerisms and peppered his conversation with obscenities in an effort to show he was “close to the common people.” The men who printed our newspaper sometimes complained to me about their superior’s behavior, protesting that they themselves did not use such language, especially in front of women. They considered his manner personally demeaning—something I’m sure the “proletarian writer” Ellan-Blakytny never suspected.

One particular morning Ellan-Blakytny entered the editorial office and, seeing that Ostap Vyshnia was not at his desk, muttered to no one in particular, “You mean that dirty rascal hasn’t shown up yet?” These words irritated me immensely. With unaccustomed sarcasm, I retorted, “I’ve been here since early morning, and before you arrived there was no dirty rascal here.” For a moment Ellan-Blakytny was stunned, but then he began roaring with laughter. “That’s really well put!” he commented, and with that he turned on his heel and left. My coworkers burst out laughing and congratulated me on my wit. My retort was quoted in our offices for months afterwards.



*Ostap Vyshnia (1928)*



*Vasyl Ellan-Blakytny (early 1920s)*

There was another incident involving Ellan-Blakytny and me. One day he suddenly took note of my wedding band, which was wide, heavy, and made of dull gold, as was the fashion in those days. "What do you have there?" he said, "Let me see that." Surprised, I extended my hand. He grasped it, slid the ring off my finger, and threw it out the window, muttering, "Oh, these bourgeois superstitions!" Later I went out into the courtyard and tried to find the ring, but it was hopeless—the area was totally covered with trash.

One day, however, fate itself played a joke on Ellan-Blakytny. He had fallen gravely ill and had gone to a sanatorium to recuperate. During his absence word spread that he had died. On their own initiative the workers at the print shop composed an obituary of him and printed it in his own newspaper. Shortly afterward Ellan-Blakytny returned from the sanatorium. Everyone was embarrassed, but he turned the whole matter into a joke, saying: "Not everybody is lucky enough to read his own obituary." The joke soon became a sad one, however, for he died a short while later.

In 1926 a monument to Ellan-Blakytny—a bronze bust on a marble pedestal—was erected at the intersection of two paths in the Myronosytskyi Public Garden. It stood there a short while, only a few months, and then it disappeared one night without a trace. Even the cobblestones were reset so that there was no way of finding where the monument had been. Ukrainian Communists were perplexed, for there had been no official notice or explanation for its disappearance. Everyone perceived the act as the authorities' desire to erase public memory of a Ukrainian patriot and former member of the UPSR and, simultaneously, to issue a grave warning to others involved in the Ukrainian national rebirth. Soon every Ukrainian with even a bit of national consciousness—every "bourgeois nationalist," in Soviet jargon—would be in danger.

## CHAPTER 21

I liked my work at the newspaper. The atmosphere there was friendly and cheerful, owing largely to the inexhaustible humor of Ostap Vyshnia, whom his coworkers addressed by his real name and patronymic, Pavlo Mykhailovych. He had an amazing talent for punning—and he did so nearly effortlessly. At times, as we were all working, one of us would say something quite prosaic and Pavlo Mykhailovych would pick it up and give it such a twist that we would all burst out laughing. Pavlo Mykhailovych introduced me to his brother and sister, both of whom turned out to be as witty as he was. He assured me that, in fact, his sister had a much better sense of humor than he had and that the wittiest person in their family was their father.

Pavlo Mykhailovych loved Ukrainian folk songs: he liked to hum them and listen to bandurysts sing them.<sup>46</sup> He had many friends in the State Banduryst Kapelle, and he often invited them to his house. He also befriended an old and blind banduryst who used to come to the Myronosytskyi Garden with a boy guide. This banduryst knew a great number of old songs and *dumy* and performed them masterfully. Every day, when he and his guide arrived in the garden, people who had come especially to write down his songs would already be waiting for him. That banduryst was admired by many Ukrainian writers, who loved to come to hear him sing. His songs always reminded me of my childhood trips with my “White” grandmother on holy days to the

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<sup>46</sup> Bandurysts (*bandurysty*) or kobzars (*kobzari*) were originally itinerant, often blind, minstrels who preserved and sang Cossack *dumy* and historical and other folk songs while playing the bandura or kobza, both of which are many-stringed musical instruments. Known since the sixteenth century, these musicians travelled about the countryside and performed for alms. Bandurysts were persecuted by the tsarist regime during the nineteenth century, particularly in the cities. They survived, however, and banduryst ensembles were organized in Ukraine after the revolution of 1917. The traditional itinerant bandurysts were persecuted by the Soviet regime as carriers of Ukrainian national consciousness, and many of them perished in Soviet prisons and concentration camps in the 1930s. Nonetheless, bandura playing became a popular musical form that has survived in Ukraine to this day. See M. Hnatiukivsky [Mykola Mushynka], “Kobzars,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 2 (1988), ed. V. Kubijovyč, 575–6; and Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: And the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk, N.Y., and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998).—Eds.

monastery in Mezhyhiria, where blind bandurysts, surrounded by rapt listeners, would sit and sing under the monastery's walls.<sup>47</sup>

Of other people who joined our editorial staff, I particularly remember an agronomist named Pushkarov, whose articles had appeared in journals and newspapers even before the revolution. He told us about his work among the peasants and attempts at changing the agricultural practices they had inherited from their forebears. For example, he tried convincing them hawks were a positive presence on a farm because they fed on field mice. But the peasants continued chasing away and shooting the hawks because "they stole the chicks." Pushkarov would say, "But each one of those birds eats a hundred field mice a day! The loss of a few chicks is worth that benefit!" His arguments fell on deaf ears. One of his colleagues had a similar experience while trying to reeducate the peasants. She created a model garden in her yard, and soon peasants from the surrounding villages were coming to see the beautiful vegetables she had grown. Shaking their heads in amazement, they would say, "Oh yes, the vegetables here are beautiful, but in our fields they won't grow like that." In protest, the woman would assure them they would and offer to teach them the cultivation principles she applied. They would smile politely and leave, convinced that for them that kind of achievement was impossible. The woman's work was not totally futile, however, for some of the more literate peasants would borrow Pushkarov's articles from her to read, thus opening their minds to new possibilities. Pushkarov became a good friend of mine and, being older, served as my protector. Indeed, everyone at the editorial office treated me very well.

I was asked to translate various Russian literary texts into Ukrainian. Many of these texts were already translations from Czech, Polish, German, English, and other languages. So, for example, I translated Mayne Reid's *Osceola the Seminole*, a novel that presented the life of the Seminole Indians respectfully and portrayed Osceola as a very admirable character.<sup>48</sup> I also translated a good number of books

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<sup>47</sup> The Transfiguration Monastery was established no later than the sixteenth century in Mezhyhiria (now Novi Petrivtsi), some twenty kilometres north of Kyiv. It long benefitted from support by the Orthodox nobles and metropolitans, Cossack hetmans, and Zaporozhian Cossacks. The monastery was closed down by the tsarist authorities in 1786, and its main edifices were destroyed in a fire in 1787. It was allowed to reopen in 1886. The Soviet authorities closed down the monastery and confiscated its valuables in the early 1920s and had it demolished in the 1930s.—*Eds.*

<sup>48</sup> Many years later, I visited an Indian reservation in Florida named after Osceola. The Seminoles did indeed appear to be a very dignified people. Proud and independent, they

on politics, including works by Lenin. I did scientific translations as well, even helping to compile the first Russian-Ukrainian dictionary of chemistry. In all, I translated over thirty titles.<sup>49</sup>

Naturally enough, Serhii Volodymyrovych Pylypenko was the major figure in our office. He was not only an editor, but also an inspiration to his coworkers and everyone who came into contact with him. The *Pluzhany*—members of Pluh, the large Soviet Ukrainian peasant writers' association that Pylypenko had organized—adored him and affectionately called him "*Papasha*" (Papa). Many retained a deep gratitude to him throughout their lives. Typical were the sentiments about Serhii that Dokiia Humenna,<sup>50</sup> a former member of Pluh, expressed: "The number of encounters I had with Pylypenko can be counted on the fingers of my hands. But they are etched in my memory as the brightest moments in my literary life. All of my tentative steps in literature are connected in some way or another to this noble, kind, and fatherly person. I can name three specific times when I was on the edge of despair. Each of these times a miracle happened: Pylypenko would stretch out his hand and pull me out of the abyss."<sup>51</sup>

Mariia Romanivska, another member of Pluh, wrote the following about Pylypenko: "I see a tall, broad-shouldered figure wearing a lambskin hat, a long sheepskin coat trimmed with gray fur, and high boots. A manly face with a proud, chiseled nose, black moustache, and a sharp, cleft chin looks out from under his hat. The eyes behind his glasses look out at you benevolently. But his entire countenance seems stern and his voice is low, as wise *Papasha's* should be...." For her, this nickname expressed everything—warmth, fatherly support, humaneness, and friendliness. In a word, his was the strong shoulder of a father one could lean on and fear nothing."<sup>52</sup> In her article Romanivska relates

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treated tourists with a reserve bordering on hostility, which is understandable, given their history and struggle for freedom and independence. The Seminoles are the only Indian nation that has not signed a peace treaty with the American government. Thus, they are theoretically still at war with it.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Kasinec, then the librarian at Harvard University's Ukrainian Research Institute, told me he had identified thirty-four titles I had translated.

<sup>50</sup> Humenna (1904–96) survived the Stalinist terror and lived as a postwar refugee in the United States, where she published over fifteen books of prose.—*Eds.*

<sup>51</sup> Cited from my article "Mii borh Serhiievi Pylypenkovi," *Ukrainski visti* (Detroit), 20 February 1979.

<sup>52</sup> "Pluhatar Ukrainy," *Vitshyzna* (Kyiv), 1968, no. 1, 197. I must say that Serhii's seemingly severe countenance was a disguise. He had a gentle nature and, as he admitted to me more than once, grew a moustache to hide the soft contours of his mouth.

how *Papasha* Serhii did all he could to get a winter coat for the writer Oleksander Kopylenko; how, when she herself fell ill with tuberculosis, Pylypenko used his own money to buy a permit for her to convalesce in the Crimea; and how he sat up all night correcting his colleagues' reports and stories, texts for which they had already been paid.

The list of Serhii's good works goes on and on. For example, at the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Research Institute, where Serhii served as director, there was a nearly destitute cleaning woman who worried about how she would be able to buy a winter coat for her son.<sup>53</sup> Serhii gave her his permit card for the purchase, saying he didn't need a new coat (even though his was a decade old). Another time, in the early 1920s, Serhii was riding in a train. It was cold outside, the train was packed, and all the windowpanes were broken. Serhii was sitting in a window seat. The woman sitting next to him had an infant in her arms. The baby was shivering, coughing, and crying. To protect the infant, Serhii stood in front of the window, his broad shoulders cutting off the chilly wind. He had on his famous sheepskin coat—the one he is wearing in Oleksander Dovzhenko's drawing of him. Serhii spent the entire four-hour trip at that window. As a result, he contracted a nearly fatal bout of double pneumonia.

I have never encountered anyone who knew Serhii and didn't speak of him as an extraordinarily noble and sensitive human being. He seemed to have a unique ability to sense people's needs. With his innate democratic convictions, he treated everyone with equal respect, regardless of what position a person held. His idea of creating Pluh grew out of his admiration for the Ukrainian peasantry and their many talents. He believed there could be many talented writers among them and all they needed was direction and a better education. From dawn to dusk he was involved in this cultural mission—teaching, patiently explaining, and helping by both word and deed. Contemporary critics accused Pylypenko of “massism,” saying he allowed everybody who showed the slightest interest in literature to join the organization, thereby giving rise to many mediocre scribblers. Serhii always rebuffed

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<sup>53</sup> Pylypenko was the managing director of the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Research Institute. Established in Kharkiv by the People's Commissariat of Education in 1926, it was the primary research institution in Soviet Ukraine devoted to the study of Shevchenko in particular and Ukrainian literature in general. It ceased functioning after most of its scholarly associates were repressed during the years 1930–33, and its archives and library were transferred to what is now the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv. See Roman Senkus, “Taras Shevchenko Scientific Research Institute,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 5: 162–63.—Eds.



*Pylypenko (second row, fifth from the left) and other Pluh members (Kharkiv, 1923)*

his critics, saying that increasing the involvement of the common people in literature was a positive step and time would show how many good writers would emerge from the ranks of Pluh.

Indeed, if one were to name all the writers whose literary careers began in Pluh, the list would be quite long.<sup>54</sup> Some of these writers eventually left Pluh to join other organizations, and some even preferred to forget their humble beginnings in Pluh and omitted references to it in their official biographies. But the facts speak for themselves. Thanks to Pylypenko's selfless work with novice writers and his extraordinary organizational talents, a new Ukrainian literature developed in the 1920s. This fact has been discussed widely in modern-day Ukraine. In an article in the Kyiv magazine *Ukraina* in 1971, Vitalii Oleksiuk wrote: "Young beginners oriented their voices ... on this active, wise person.... The Pluh Association of Peasant Writers with Serhii Pylypenko at its head ... gave wings to an entire generation of creators of literature."

In 1981 the Kyiv literary journal *Dnipro* published an article commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of Serhii's birth. Its author, Volodymyr Basiuk, emphasized Serhii's role as "the organizer of literary forces in Ukraine" and cited Petro Panch: "Pluh ... was the

<sup>54</sup> It would include Volodymyr Sosiura, Petro Panch, Ivan Senchenko, Andrii Holovko, Vasyl Mynko, Leonid Pervomaisky, Oleksander Kopylenko, Natalia Zabyla, Sava Bozhko, Vasyl Chaplenko, Volodymyr Gzhytsky, Kost Hordiienko, Oles Donchenko, Hryhorii Epik, Vasyl Mysyk, Dokiia Humenna, Mariia Romanivska, and Yurii Lavrinenko.



Soviet writers' first cradle ... this cradle nurtured writers who laid the foundation of Soviet literature and enhanced it."<sup>55</sup> This point was stated even more succinctly by the postwar émigré critic Yurii Lavrinenko in a letter he wrote to my daughter Assya: "... as an organizer and leader of Ukrainian publishing, *Papasha*, as everyone called him, was, in a real sense of the word, the father of the Ukrainian literary renaissance of the 1920s. For this he paid with his life.... [He played] a historic, unique, and incomparable role as the organizer of an independent publishing base, without which there would have been no ... literary renaissance."

Lavrinenko was referring to Serhii's role as the chief editor of the State Publishing House of Ukraine, which published works by Ukrainian writers with diverse literary styles and profiles. Serhii also played numerous other roles: he was secretary of the Federation of Soviet Writers of Ukraine; chairman of the editorial board of the scholarly journal *Literaturnyi arkhiv* (Literary Archive); managing editor of a number of scholarly editions of the Ukrainian classics; compiler and translator of an anthology of Belarusian poetry in Ukrainian translation and of an anthology of Ukrainian poetry in Russian translation; and the Ukrainian representative at the First All-Slavic Congress of Philologists, which was held in Czechoslovakia in 1929.

Serhii's contribution to Ukrainian scholarship deserves particular mention. Hryhorii Kostiuk assessed that contribution in these words:

Pylypenko was not a degree-holding scholar, but as the director of a scholarly institution<sup>56</sup> he accomplished everything that was possible under the circumstances. He personally selected students for postgraduate work. He kept a close eye on every talented student enrolled in the Department of Literature of the [Kharkiv] Institute of People's Education,<sup>57</sup> sought out those who displayed an aptitude for scholarly work, and made sure they enrolled in postgraduate studies. It was thanks to his efforts ... that an important scholarly library was created and valuable archival material was collected. Under his editorship, the [Shevchenko] institute published irregular but solid *Arkhiv* collections containing many materials and documents that

<sup>55</sup> "Talanovytyi orhanizator i pysmennyk" (A Talented Organizer and Writer), Dnipro, July 1981, 130–1.

<sup>56</sup> That is, managing director of the Taras Shevchenko Scientific Research Institute.—Eds.

<sup>57</sup> In the 1920s the Soviet government transformed every university in Ukraine into an Institute of People's Education (Instytut narodnoi osvity). See I. Bakalo, "Education and Schools: 6. The Ukrainian SSR," in *Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2, ed. Volodymyr Kubijovyč (Toronto, 1971), 347–8; and "Institutes of people's education," in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 2: 335.

are still valuable today. Thanks to his initiative and direct involvement, an art gallery containing many valuable works of art was established at the institute. Owing to his initiative the famous exhibition “Fifteen Years of Belles Lettres in the Ukrainian SSR” was held in 1932. On display were many extremely rare publications that were thought to be lost. This exhibition was also remarkable in that it was illustrated by numerous portraits of Ukrainian authors and cultural figures. It was a unique presentation of objectively selected works that were excluded forever from future [Soviet] exhibitions.<sup>58</sup>

Serhii’s capacity for work was nothing short of phenomenal. He often worked through the night while chain-smoking several packets of cigarettes—a habit that resulted in grave damage to his lungs. His life’s motto was “To work with one’s hands, / To work with one’s mind, / To work without rest / Both day and night.”

Little has been written about Serhii’s literary legacy, for literary critics do not hold the genre of fables in high esteem. As a fabulist, Serhii himself alluded to this in his *Baikivnytsia: Chvert kopy baiok* (Collection of Fables: Fifteen Fables, 1922)<sup>59</sup>:

If you should see a collection of fables,  
 Hold back your scornful label,  
 Let me remind you, if I may,  
 Of what the old folk used to say:  
     “Sing some songs!”  
     —“Don’t know how.”  
     “Tell some fables!”  
     —“Don’t dare now.”  
 What do you think, my dear,  
 Whence comes this sudden fear?

At the end of the 1920s, literary critics were involved in a heated debate over this old and once venerated genre in Ukrainian literature. Then, as the literary critic Viktor Kosiachenko wrote, “a certain segment of the Proletkult critics did considerable harm to this genre.”<sup>60</sup> Serhii’s *Baikivnytsia* was the first collection of fables in

<sup>58</sup> Hryhorii Kostiuk, *Zustrichi i proshchannia: Spohady*, vol. 1 (Edmonton, 1987), 413.

<sup>59</sup> A *kopa* consists of sixty sheaves of grain; hence a *chvert* (quarter) is fifteen.—Eds.

<sup>60</sup> In the early 1920s, the theoreticians of the Soviet literary mass movement called Proletkult (Proletarian Culture) were opponents of Ukrainization and the Soviet Ukrainian literary

Soviet Ukrainian literature, and his neologism *baikivnytsia* became part of the Ukrainian language and literature. Although Serhii was also the author of short stories and military sketches, he considered his fables to be his true contribution to Ukrainian literature. He often said that “should my name ever be included in Ukrainian literature, it will be as a fabulist.” He recalled how the poet Oleksander Oles hailed his literary debut, saying: “At last Ukrainian literature has acquired a talented new fabulist.” It was Oles who published Serhii’s first fable, “Voly” (Oxen) in his newspaper. Incidentally, it was this fable that later brought trouble on Serhii’s head—it was seen as a manifestation of “Makhnivshchyna,”<sup>61</sup> this is, of anarchism, and as anti-collectivization propaganda. The fable goes:

The old master died,  
                     and to his son  
 Went all the land  
                     and all thereon.  
 A neighbor to his oxen said:  
 “You must be overjoyed,  
 The old whip you can forget,  
 For you are now employed  
 By a new master,  
 Luck is on your side  
 At last.”  
 “Not so fast,” one ox replied,  
 “They’re all the same brand—  
 The young Cossack has a heavy hand.  
 No matter who the boss may be,  
 An ox will stay  
 A slave.  
 Wicked fate will flog us—you’ll see.”  
 You know, my friend, of course,  
 All power relies on force.  
 Want no ruler in the nation?

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renaissance in general. See George S. N. Luckyj, *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine*, rev. ed. (Durham, N.C., 1990) and Ivan Koshelivets, “Proletkult,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 4 (1993), ed. Danylo H. Struk, 237.—Eds.

<sup>61</sup> The pejorative term for the anarchist insurrection and army headed by Nestor Makhno (1889–1934) against the Central Powers, the Russian Volunteer Army, the UNR, and the Bolsheviks in Left-Bank and Southern Ukraine during the years 1918–20.—Eds.

Join the Global Federation—  
 Workers only. Lords—out the door!  
 Oxen-slaves we'll be no more!

I found it gratifying to read not long ago that “Serhii Pylypenko is rightly considered one of the most notable initiators of the fable genre in Soviet Ukrainian literature.” In his book *Ukrainska radianska baika* (The Soviet Ukrainian Fable [Kyiv, 1972]), Viktor Kosiachenko devoted much space to Serhii’s works, pointing out the originality of their plots and use of literary devices, in particular Serhii’s introduction of new allegorical characters, rhythms, meters, and strophic structures. Kosiachenko concluded that “Pylypenko’s approach significantly broadened the formal search for new forms in Ukrainian fable writing.”

As for the ideological focus of Serhii’s involvement in literature and civic life, there is no question that it was governed by his deep-seated conviction that Communist ideas were just. He truly wanted, as Romanivska wrote, “his *Pluzhany* to grow up to become ... the apostles of socialism and future communism.” Serhii was a convinced internationalist, but, of course, he also had profound sympathies for Ukraine. Though he subscribed to the Marxist theory of class struggle, at heart he was an idealist and a humanist of the purest kind. He dreamed of a “universal commune,” of a society united by mutual love and harmony where complete freedom would reign. He dreamed of the same kind of society that Shevchenko, his favorite poet, dreamed about: “and there will be a son, and a mother, and people on the earth.” Serhii honestly believed that communism was the right path to the achievement of that noble goal. He loved the Ukrainian people, and for that he was accused of being a nationalist. He aspired to complete freedom for the individual, and for that he was labeled an anarchist. He loved all human beings, and for that he was castigated as “an idealist” and “abstract humanist,” that is, an anti-Communist. And in the end he paid for his convictions with his life.<sup>62</sup>

Serhii was born in Kyiv in 1891. His father, Volodymyr Pylypenko, was a school teacher who traced his ancestry to non-landowning Cossacks. One official version of his biography stated that Serhii’s

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<sup>62</sup> In his memoirs, Hryhorii Kostiuk described his last meeting with Serhii. Serhii came to him with the sad news that he had been “not only banished from the institute,” but “was also ... a non-Party citizen.” Kostiuk, greatly distressed, asked, “What are you saying? When did this happen?” Serhii replied, “Yes... Just now... Thrown out... For fifteen years I was ... I fought ... I risked my life ... I was ready to die ... because I believed that this was for the

father was a member of the Russian revolutionary terrorist organization Narodnaia volia (The People's Will), and that he took part in revolutionary activity. According to another version, his father merely had "a revolutionary temperament" and sympathized with Narodnaia volia's ideas. He was unable to keep a job for any length of time and switched from one civil-service post to another, until finally he was labeled politically unreliable and lost the right to work for the government. Consequently the family became impoverished, and Serhii was forced to work and support his family at a very early age. He had two brothers, Yurii and Borys, and a sister, Liudmyla. Serhii, who was the eldest sibling, inherited his father's independent spirit. At the age of thirteen he began reading the forbidden works of socialist writers, including Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Drahomanov, and became interested in the anarchist views of Peter Kropotkin, but this interest soon evaporated. He received his secondary education at the First Kyiv Gymnasium—the same school where the Russian writer Konstantin Paustovsky was a student, a year ahead of Serhii. Serhii spoke of the atmosphere that prevailed in the school and also of several of the same teachers that Paustovsky described in his memoirs.

Serhii's literary talents manifested themselves early on, and upon graduating from the gymnasium he enrolled in Kyiv University's Faculty of Philology. He was interested in Slavic folklore, and he researched and wrote about Serbian epic poetry. This may have stemmed from his interest in his mother's ancestors, Serbs who had migrated to Russia during the time of Catherine the Great.

At the university Serhii became a member of a student group of Socialist Revolutionaries and was given the task of disseminating banned literature. When the police uncovered this group during his third year at the university, he was expelled and banished from Kyiv. In the nearby town of Boryspil he found a job as a teacher of history, literature, psychology, and logic and took part in the activities

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people's good, for the future happiness of my nation, for Ukraine... And it turns out ... I'm a *kontra* [counterrevolutionary]. They threw me out... They probably want to throw me out of existence as well... But ... they won't throw me out of literature... Never!" (*Zustrichi i proshchannia*, 1: 414). In trying to understand why the Party destroyed people like Serhii, Kostyuk writes: "Pylypenko, Richytsky, and people of their ilk, though organized members of the Party, were nonetheless organic sons of their nation—they were Ukrainians. Everything having to do with the fate of the Ukrainian people and its culture was dear to them. And this, obviously, is what made them dangerous to the Party" (*ibid.*, 403). In other words, the destruction of people like Serhii was dictated by the deliberately anti-Ukrainian policies of the Party in those years.



Serhii Pylypenko at the front during World War I

of the local Socialist Revolutionary organization. When the Great War broke out in 1914, Serhii volunteered for duty at the front, on the party's orders—his job was to disseminate propaganda among the soldiers. He served at the front near Riga until it collapsed. He returned to Kyiv in 1918 on the eve of Hetman Skoropadsky's coup. He fought alongside other Socialist Revolutionaries in the popular uprising against the hetman, was taken prisoner, and was incarcerated for three months. When the Directory of the UNR regained power, Serhii was a member of the Central Committee of the UPSR. While still at the front near Riga he had edited a socialist newspaper called *Ukrainskyi holos* (The Ukrainian Voice), and now he became an editor of *Narodnia volia* (The People's Will).<sup>63</sup>

As we know all too well, Ukraine's independence did not last long. The Bolsheviks moved a huge military force into Ukraine and occupied the country. Kyiv fell to the Red Army. Like Holubovych before him, Serhii had to make fundamental decisions—how to live and whom to support. Like many other members of the left faction of the UPSR, he joined the Bolshevik Party, in March 1919. He also continued his journalistic career, as a technical editor of the newspaper *Bilshovyk* (The Bolshevik); in time he became a member of its editorial board. Once again, however, the vortex of the civil war drew him in and forced him to take up arms, and he took part in battles against Denikin's Russian Volunteer Army and against the Poles.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> This daily newspaper was published in Kyiv from May 1917 to February 1919 by the Ukrainian Central Co-operative Committee. The organ of the Ukrainian Peasant Association (*Ukrainska selianska spilka*), a fraternal civic organization of the UPSR, it was the most widely read Ukrainian newspaper of its time. Pylypenko edited the paper until the end of 1918, the year he was a member of the Central Committee of the UPSR, and published his fables in it.—Eds.

<sup>64</sup> Serhii organized a partisan detachment and later commanded a brigade of the Thirteenth Red Army.—Eds.

When hostilities finally ended, Serhii resumed his editorial career. He worked as an editor for the newspapers *Visty VUTsVK* and *Komunist* (The Communist), the publishing co-operative *Knyhospilka* (Book Association), the press of the literary journal *Chervonyi shliakh* (Red Pathway), and the State Publishing House of Ukraine (DVU). Serhii led the initiative group for the creation of Pluh in 1922, and he served as that association's one and only head until its liquidation in 1932. Concurrently he was the editor of *Selianska pravda*, in whose offices we first met.

## CHAPTER 22

I liked Serhii from the moment I saw him, and I soon learned he liked me as well. But neither of us did anything to initiate any intimacy. In those years people began and ended affairs easily, but that did not appeal to Serhii. For my part, I had been so traumatized by my relationship with Vsevolod that I had no interest in a romantic attachment. By that time my husband Vsevolod had been released from prison and our relationship had ended, though we did meet from time to time, usually in a park. I recall one such occasion. While we were sitting on a park bench, Vsevolod told me how sorry he was that our baby Lesia had died and how he would never stop loving me. His words moved me, but I knew in my heart that our relationship had ended and could not be revived.

One day my friend Valeriiian Polishchuk asked me how it could be that I was working with such an interesting person as Serhii and we were not spending any time together. "You've never gone out with him? Not once, not to the theater or even for a walk?" he asked incredulously. His words struck me and started me thinking in a new direction. The following day I suggested to Serhii that we go to the movies. He was not at all surprised and promptly accepted the invitation. Later he admitted to me that Valeriiian had also expressed his surprise to him about the formal relationship Serhii and I maintained. We went to the movies, and a few days later Serhii asked me to dinner and to a concert. That is how our closer relationship began, and it soon deepened into strong mutual feelings.

Overall our friends and families were very happy at this turn of events. But a few of his friends expressed dismay that he, a Communist, had fallen in love with a tsarist general's daughter. Serhii turned this into a joke, saying that they should view the development as yet another Communist victory. As for Vsevolod, soon after he learned about Serhii and me, he remarried. His wife was Jewish, and I subsequently heard that when guests came to visit, Vsevolod warned them against telling any anti-Semitic jokes. I do not know what later happened to Vsevolod or his wife. After I emigrated to the United States, I found a reference to him in an encyclopedic dictionary at Widener Library. It stated that he had been rearrested and sent to Siberia, but was later released. There was no mention of his death. Later Dmytro Kyslytsia, editor of the monthly magazine *Novi dni* (New Days), published in





*Yivha Mykolaivna Pylypenko*

Toronto, told me that Vsevolod's wife was said to be living in Argentina. But Adam Antonovych, editor of *Ekran* (Screen), had other information—Vsevolod and his family had lived in Berlin, and when Vsevolod died his wife and their son moved to the United States and lived in Chicago. I had neither the desire nor opportunity to verify this information.<sup>65</sup>

My relationship with Serhii was welcomed especially by his sister Liudmyla, a tall, beautiful woman with curly brown hair. The fact that her brother was still unmarried and paid no attention to women had begun worrying her, and she fully approved of me as his choice. But as Serhii began spending more time with me, Liudmyla became jealous, and in the end we did not become

friends. I did become very close to Serhii's mother, Yivha Mykolaivna Pylypenko. She was a charming, sensitive woman, and Serhii loved her dearly; indeed, all her children and grandchildren adored her. When Yivha Mykolaivna decided to give up her job as linen-keeper at the Selianskyi dim (Peasant Residence) apartment building, where she lived, and to move in with one of her children, they vied with each other for the opportunity to take her in. We were fortunate to have her live with us for some time. Our friends, many of whom were writers, respected her intelligence and taste. They would often drop by to read their works to her, and they usually heeded her comments. Yivha

<sup>65</sup> In fact, Holubovych died on 16 May 1939 in an isolation cell in the Yaroslavl prison. A defendant in the show trial of seven UPSR members held in Kyiv in May 1921, he was released from prison in October 1921 but kept under police surveillance and not allowed to work for some time. He later found employment in Kharkiv at the Supreme Council of the National Economy. In 1931 he was again prosecuted during the show trial of the fictitious "Ukrainian National Center" and then imprisoned for the remainder of his life. See Anatolii Bolabolchenko, *Vsevolod Holubovych i "sprava UPS-R"* (Kyiv, 1993), published in the year that Tatiana Kardinalowska died.—Eds.

Mykolaivna was an incredibly beautiful woman: statuesque, with curly hair, a high forehead, and classic features, she attracted attention wherever she went.

Serhii physically resembled her in many ways. He was also tall, and extremely well built. During his student days he had often worked as an artist's model. He engaged in athletics and was an excellent swimmer—on several occasions, he saved people from drowning. In fact, he received twelve medals for his heroism. Whenever we went to the river for a swim, it seemed that someone was drowning and Serhii would have to drag the poor soul out of the water. One of Serhii's youthful romances began with his rescue of a peasant girl from drowning during a summer vacation. Subsequently she fell hopelessly in love with him. When he went back to the city at the end of that summer, the girl kept hoping he would return to her. Serhii later learned she had never married, and that information distressed him.

Serhii loved marathon running. As a student, he and a friend would often race each other, keeping pace with the fastest horses pulling carriages through the streets of Kyiv. He laughed as he told a story of how he was once running down the street and overtook a carriage rolling along at high speed. An old woman passing by was so startled that she began to crossing herself at the sight. Serhii and his friends continued jogging during the winter months—as much to keep warm as for the exercise, since they could not afford winter coats.

Although Serhii had very little money during his student years, unlike other students he did not go in for gambling. Once, however, his friends coaxed him into going to the racetrack and betting on a horse. They teased him, saying, "Perhaps you'll get lucky and win a thousand rubles." Serhii acquiesced and bet a ruble on the horse least likely to win. To everyone's surprise, the horse led the race right to the finish line, crossed it first, and then dropped dead. Serhii's one-ruble bet won him a great deal of money, since he was the only one who put money on this horse. I don't remember how much money he got, but I do know that he spent it all on renting a yacht for a sail down the Dnipro and a dinner party on board—complete with orchestra—for his friends.

Among other sports that Serhii practiced was Greco-Roman wrestling. This physical conditioning proved life-saving during the First World War I, when he was wounded in four places by a single bullet that went through his arm into his chest, passed through his lungs, and exited through his back. Blood spurted from all four wounds, and his trench

coat was drenched in blood. Serhii had no idea how long he lay on the ground unconscious. Finally he heard the voices of medics searching for casualties who were still alive. They saw Serhii, but, thinking he was dead, started to pass by. Mustering his last bit of strength, Serhii pressed the trigger of the revolver he was still holding. The shot rang out, summoning the medics back to him. They quickly moved him to the field hospital, where he was operated on immediately. The medical staff could not believe that his body was able to withstand such a severe loss of blood—he had lost almost two-thirds of it.

Serhii had another experience in which his physical conditioning and stamina saved his life. He had fallen asleep on wet ground and caught double pneumonia. The doctors told his mother that the crisis would come during the night ahead and solemnly expressed doubts he would survive. When the doctors left, Yivha Mykolaivna sat by his bedside, refusing to let her son die: summoning all the force of her love, throughout the night she kept repeating to him that he would live. The doctors thought it miraculous that Serhii weathered the crisis.

Serhii spoke very little about his wartime experiences. The only information he volunteered was that he never deliberately sought out and aimed at the enemy. Once, however, he came face to face with a German soldier, who had emerged from nowhere. Serhii's only choices were taking the German's life or relinquishing his own. They started shooting at each other, darting around trees, until Serhii's shot finally felled the German. His war experiences were reflected in his story collection *Tysiachi v odynytsiakh* (Thousands One by One, 1928) and in his military diary.<sup>66</sup>

When Serhii and I first married, we lived separately. I had a tiny room in an apartment owned by a poet and translator, which had been assigned to me through my job. Serhii continued living with his mother and brother in the building called Selianskyi dim. Later, when I was expecting a baby, we were assigned a room in a three-story building. The room was very large, and we put up dividers in it to create a five-room "apartment" of sorts. One of the "rooms" was set up as a nursery. Having five "rooms" was considered a great luxury, but this apartment of ours was actually part of a communal one, with a shared kitchen and lavatory. Three families lived in it: Serhii and I, a lawyer and his wife,

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<sup>66</sup> In 1963, after Serhii was posthumously rehabilitated, a small collection of his works was published under the title *Baiky ta opovidannia* (Fables and Stories). Unfortunately this collection does not include the stories Serhii considered his best.

and an old Communist and retired miner named Dubovy and his wife. The Dubovys were a pleasant couple. She was a typical peasant, illiterate but blessed with innate intelligence and a good heart. I taught her to read, and it was a pleasure to see her joy at being able to understand once-mysterious street signs. During her long life she had given birth to many children—at least twelve—all of whom had died as infants except for one: a son named Ivan, of whom the Dubovys were both very proud. Her account of his whereabouts was confusing, but I gathered that he had a high-level position in the Red Army.

One day, when the Dubovys were out, a military man knocked on our door and inquired whether they lived there. Thinking that he was their son Ivan, I asked him in. Soon I learned that the fellow was a messenger sent to find Commander Dubovy's parents. Shortly afterwards Ivan himself arrived. A very handsome man, he was a much-decorated hero of the civil war who did indeed hold a very important position. Later, in 1937, during the Yezhov Terror,<sup>67</sup> Ivan Dubovy and another prominent military leader, Yona Yakir, were arrested. They were both shot as "enemies of the people."

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<sup>67</sup> Nikolai Yezhov (1895–1940) was appointed the USSR commissar of state security in January 1937 by Stalin himself. Yezhov initiated the largest of the Stalinist purges, targeting Party members and military officers as well as ordinary citizens. Lasting until late 1938, it has been popularly known as the "Yezhovshchina"—*Eds.*

## CHAPTER 23

We lived in that apartment for several years. Our daughter arrived during the first year. At first we called her Esta, a combination of the first letters of our names—"S" and "T." But later, when other children began teasing her about her unusual name and she insisted, we changed it to *Asia*, now spelled "Assya" in English. There was no comparison between my first pregnancy and this second one, which brought me great joy. The time before Assya's birth was filled with happy expectation at creating new life. I listened with interest to what doctors said about the various stages of fetal development and tried to follow all of their recommendations. To me it was vital to influence the intellectual and spiritual development of this new human being as positively as possible. I attended concerts, went to art exhibits, and tried to remain calm, knowing that all these things had an effect on the child. The birth of our baby was a wondrous event for everyone in our family.

When Assya was born, it was rumored in the maternity ward that babies were sometimes sent home with the wrong parents, so new mothers like me feared they might be sent home with someone else's infant. Resolving to take precautions, I had my last name written on our newborn's back with an indelible pencil. "Kardynalovska" is a very long name and barely fit across such a small back! Once the baby and I were home, the letters did not wash out for a long time, much to the amusement of our family, who loved teasing me about it.

I was very involved in my work as a translator, so we hired a nanny and I continued working at *Selianska pravda*. Later, when our second daughter was born, we hired a second nanny and a cook. Such "upper-class" ways were commonplace then. Peasant girls were eager to work as housemaids, for they welcomed the opportunity to come to the city and earn some money, while urban women preferred continuing their education or working professionally to staying at home caring for children and keeping house.

We found a very sweet peasant girl named Kylia to take care of Assya. She had previously worked for the family of man named Kharytonenko, who had owned a renowned sugar factory in Kharkiv.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Probably Ivan Kharytonenko (1820–91), who was one of the wealthiest industrialists in prerevolutionary Ukraine and a well-known philanthropist, or one of his sons.—*Eds.*



*Serhii Pylypenko and his daughter Assya  
(Merefa, 1926)*

Kylia always spoke highly of the Kharytonenko family, saying that they were good-natured, kind to their servants, and well liked by everyone, including the people who worked in their factory. Kylia had taken care of the family's small son and had become very attached to him. At the age of five the child contracted scarlet fever and died. This was a great tragedy for the family, especially for the grandmother, who loved her grandchild dearly. The funeral was solemn and grand, and the child's coffin was a lavish one made of

silver, or perhaps even gold. Many people followed the pallbearers as they carried it down the road from the church to the cemetery, along a path that had been covered by Persian rugs.

I, too, would know overwhelming grief at the death of a beloved child. Two years after Assya was born, I gave birth to a son, whom we named Rostyslav. He was a beautiful boy, with green eyes like mine and a bewitching smile. We adored him and enjoyed spending as much time with him as we could. When he was three months old, Assya and I took a trip to our dacha at Merefa, near Kharkiv. When we returned, Serhii told me that our little boy had contracted grippe. I wasn't overly worried; this is a very common illness, especially in children. But the following day I heard an awful scream. Our infant son was writhing in his crib, his tiny body racked with pain. I ran to him, called the doctor, and later listened to his diagnosis: the grippe had brought on complications, and our son now had meningitis. We were stunned—in those days there was no cure for meningitis. Serhii and I lived through three days of hearing our baby scream constantly in pain, each scream tearing at our hearts. He died on the third day. My grief knew no bounds—it was feared I might lose my mind. I looked so grief-stricken that friends would cross the street to avoid seeing me. For months I

visited his grave daily and spent hours in total forgetfulness there. Finally life reclaimed me and forced me to come back to my senses. But the wound did not heal for years—I could not stop remembering the baby son who had left us so young and so tragically.

Two years after he died, I gave birth to another daughter, whose arrival was quite extraordinary. When my labor pains began, I went to the hospital, where the cramps continued coming with increasing frequency. I did not scream, but other women did, and I recall that these sounds brought to my mind some lines from a poem by Aleksei Tolstoy: “Even psychopathic women do not scream the way / Those seized by pain did as they in labor lay.”

Suddenly I noticed one pregnant woman walking around the room without any indication that she was in pain. Soon the nurses were persuading her to lie down, for she was about to give birth. And, indeed, no sooner did she lie down than her child was born. This made a tremendous impact on me. “Obviously,” I thought to myself, “being in pain is not obligatory.” I began to wonder whether what was crucial in labor was the woman’s thoughts and will power. If this woman was able to dismiss pain, why shouldn’t I try to be devoid of it as well? Lost in thought, I didn’t realize that my own pain had lessened and then totally disappeared. When I did realize this, I thought something was amiss and called a nurse to examine me. She assured me that everything was proceeding normally, that the contractions were coming at increasingly brief intervals, and that the child would be born soon. And, indeed, our daughter soon arrived without my experiencing any pain at all! Later, when I told doctors about this, they said that instances of painless childbirth were not all that rare, and that in my case auto-suggestion might have played a role.

We named our second daughter Mirtala, after the heroine in a historical novel by the Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkowa, which I had read in Russian translation. Based on historical fact, the work portrayed the life of a beautiful courtesan of ancient Rome who knew many senators and was influential in politics, but died a tragic death. But to me this story was essentially insignificant—I named our daughter Mirtala simply because I loved the name.

On the topic of names, I should note that when I married, I retained my maiden name, which was quite common in those days and is not infrequent today. An amusing incident occurred in connection with this. At the end of the 1920s Serhii and I traveled to Moscow with a group of Ukrainian writers to attend a conference. Our delegation was staying

in a hotel, and that is where Serhii and I took a room. Tired after the day's travels, we went to bed early. In the middle of the night we were awakened by a loud knock on our door. A rough voice called out, "Get rid of the woman!" When Serhii voiced bewilderment at what was going on, the hotel official stated succinctly that his establishment operated on strict moral principles and that only married couples were permitted to stay in the same room. Since Serhii and I had different surnames, to him we were obviously not married and therefore I had to vacate the room. The official would not entertain any explanation: I had to go to another room. Serhii was more amused than angry, and the next day he told the members of our group about our adventure. One of them related the incident to the editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta* (The Literary Gazette), who made it into a story called "Likvidiruite zhenshchinu" (Get Rid of the Woman), published in the 15 July 1927 issue.

Our family now included two small children. In time Liza's daughter Roksolana—whom we called Roksanochka and Roksia—joined our ranks. Liza's life had become very difficult after the revolution. For a while she lacked any professional training and had difficulty finding a job. Later she found work as a translator and illustrator and also studied part-time at the Department of Architecture of the Kharkiv Art Institute, where in 1930 she received a degree in art and architecture. Her interest in literature did not abate, however, and she continued translating from Russian and Belarusian. She also wrote poems, children's stories, and novelettes. Together we wrote a fantasy we called "We Want Sun!" Liza's stories for children always had interesting plots and revealed deep insight into child psychology. Children were especially fond of the ones titled "The Wolf and Ralf," "The Benz," "The Train," and "Hanusia and the Pests." Liza had a gift for language: during the revolution she had mastered Ukrainian and become enchanted by it. She adored the poetry of Pavlo Tychyna and memorized all of the poems in his first collection, *Soniashni klarnety* (Sunny Clarinets, 1918).<sup>69</sup> Her artistic talent was also noteworthy: later, during the Second World War, she supported herself by selling her watercolors.

Liza was somewhat shy and unsure of herself, and her personal life was not as adventurous as mine. But she too experienced pain and distress in a personal relationship. At the end of the 1920s she

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<sup>69</sup> Tychyna (1891–1967) was one of the greatest Ukrainian modernist and Soviet Ukrainian poets.—Eds.



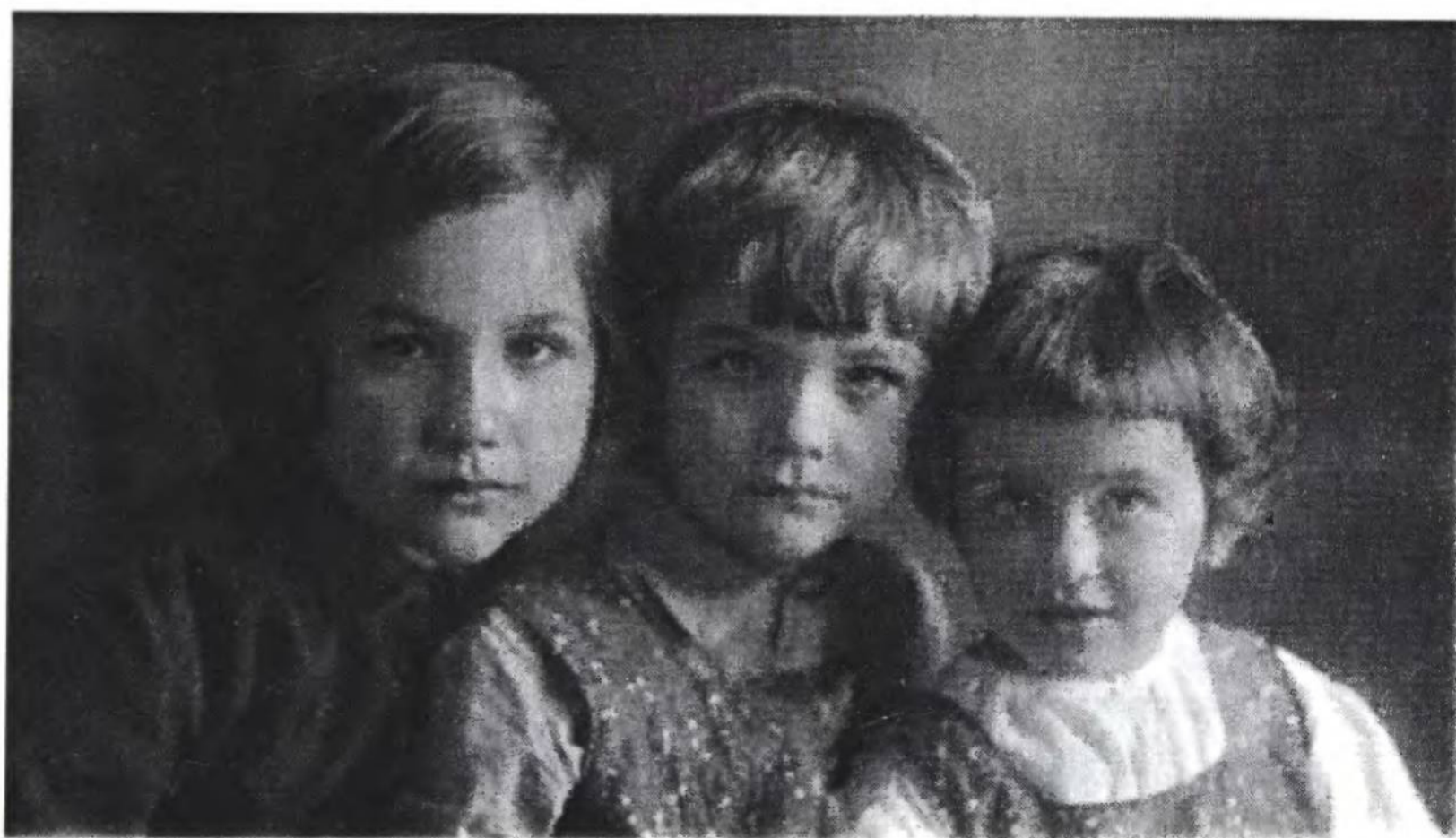
met a chemical engineer named Ivan Kostiuk. He became the father of her daughter Roksolana, but they separated when the baby was just a year old. Liza and her daughter came to live with us in the Slovo (Word) apartment building, a residence for writers and their families in Kharkiv. Though she was not a member of the Writers' Union, her literary accomplishments were sufficient for Serhii to get her a small room of her own in the building. She lived with little Roksolana and worked day and night on her translations. Whenever Roksolana woke up crying during the night, Liza would pick her up and hold her in one arm while continuing to type with her free hand, until the monotonous clatter of the keys being struck lulled the baby back to sleep.

When Roksolana was a little older, Liza would leave her with us during the day. In time Roksolana's bed was moved to our apartment, and thereafter the three girls grew up together like three sisters. Roksolana's family now consisted of her two "sisters," her uncle Serhii, who loved her dearly, and two "mothers"—"Mama Liza" and "Mama Tania."

All too soon the terrible year of 1933—the year Serhii would be arrested—would be upon us. That year Liza would lose her job, and the doors of every publishing house would close to her. When that happened, she returned to work as an architect. She also worked as an illustrator, making just enough to support herself and her child. Later, when my children and I were exiled from Ukraine, Liza felt alone and abandoned. She needed attention and support, and Kostiuk extended a helping hand. They got together again. Roksolana was five years old when she saw her father for the first time since she had been a baby. Their family life was quiet and peaceful, but it did not last long. In 1937 Kostiuk's former wife, driven by jealousy, denounced him, and he was arrested. The woman was a witness at the trial, which for some reason was an open one. During the proceedings she withdrew her charge, admitting that it was a complete fabrication. But the court refused to dismiss the case. The judge insisted that Kostiuk had admitted to his "crimes" and that the charges against him could not be dropped. As an "enemy of the people," Kostiuk was sentenced to four years of hard labor at Kolyma. When his term ended, he was given to understand that if he returned to Ukraine, he would be imprisoned again, and so he remained in Siberia for many years, working at a factory. Only after the Second World War, when he was already in his seventies, was Kostiuk able to return to Ukraine and live out his life with his family. With the earnings he had saved during his long years of exile, he and



*Tatiana's sister, Liza (Kharkiv, 1926)*



*Assya, Mirtala, and Roksolana (1932)*

Liza bought a home in Kyiv. That is where their daughter Roksolana and her husband live today.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Roksolana's husband, Marian Malovsky, a talented artist, died in 1993.—Eds.

## CHAPTER 24

The year Mirtala was born, Serhii traveled to Czechoslovakia to attend the First All-Slavic Congress of Philologists. There he and Professor Kostiantyn Nimchynov represented Ukraine.<sup>71</sup> Czechoslovakia made a great impression on them. They loved its beautiful, well-ordered cities and the level of civilization and culture they saw. Serhii spoke with great enthusiasm about how the Czech farmers tended their land. All of them had collected small, personal libraries of publications having to do with farming, and those who grew special crops or raised animals subscribed to journals devoted to these topics. Serhii was equally impressed by the farmers' industriousness. On one occasion he noticed a farmer working his field at night—to make that possible, he had strung up electric lights the length of the plot.

Serhii brought gifts from Czechoslovakia for me and the children: a wind-up phonograph for the girls and a portable, German-made typewriter with a Russian keyboard for me. At the border he had a great deal of trouble with these gifts, and in the end the customs agents refused to allow them through. Serhii later had to write to several different ministries for permission to bring in these "scarce" and "bourgeois" items, especially the typewriter (Soviet law prohibited anyone from owning a personal typewriter, because it was assumed that it would be used to produce anti-Soviet propaganda). Eventually Serhii succeeded in convincing the Soviet bureaucrats I needed the typewriter for translations I produced at home. Later this wonderful typewriter literally saved our lives: when Serhii was arrested and I was sent from Ukraine to live in Kalinin, I used it to subsidize the meager salary I earned at the pedagogical institute by typing students' dissertations and professors' papers at home. It was a miracle no one denounced me than as the owner of a forbidden item.

In addition to his work as an editor, Serhii headed the State Publishing House of Ukraine. He was paid a mere two hundred rubles per month, the so-called *partmaksymum* (the maximum salary allowed a Party member regardless of his position). Serhii's salary was less than

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<sup>71</sup> Nimchynov (1899–?) was a professor of Ukrainian linguistics and a lexicographer in Kharkiv during the 1920s and 1930s. He was arrested in 1937 and was most likely killed by the NKVD in a prison or concentration camp.—Eds.

what an accountant earned, but he considered that to be completely fair. Moreover, as a committed Communist, he wanted to be closer to the people and so worked the night shift at a factory as an ordinary worker. But even with his prodigious strength and good health, he would probably not have been able to endure such a schedule for long. As things happened, an accident intervened—a heavy metal tool fell on Serhii's foot, and the injury made it impossible for him to continue working at the factory.

In regard to Serhii's health, there was one incident that gave some basis to a rumor that he suffered from a nervous condition. A fellow writer got the idea of visiting the Kharkiv Psychiatric Hospital and talking with the patients there. About ten other writers, including Serhii and Mykola Khvylovy, became intrigued with the idea, and the visit was arranged. On the appointed day they went to the hospital, where the doctors briefed them on the medical histories of the patients they would be seeing. When they actually met the patients, however, the writers were at a loss and asked things like "Where did you study?" and "Where did you spend your childhood?" The doctors, taken aback by the writers' simplistic questions, protested that even if the patients gave answers, they would shed no light on their mental problems.

One young doctor was particularly annoyed by the writers' visit and decided to turn the tables on them: he offered to make a psychiatric diagnosis of the writers themselves. The writers agreed, became animated, and started cracking jokes. The doctor spoke with the writers one by one, interviewing each for about five minutes. Then he made a solemn declaration: "I must say that not a single one of you can be said to enjoy full mental health." The writers became very uneasy, for the doctor seemed to be absolutely serious. Then one of them said: "Well, perhaps the nerves of the rest of us are not completely in order, but surely you cannot say that about Serhii Pylypenko. After all, he's a most calm and well-composed person." The doctor laughed sarcastically and said, "You are mistaken. He suffers from hysteria, and his condition is actually quite acute. He only gives the appearance of being calm." The writers were shocked: not one of them had suspected that the doctor was giving them a comeuppance. Gratified by the effect he was having, the doctor lectured the writers further: "You see, the concept of 'being normal' is very relative. All of you have lived through the civil war. We doctors see the effect this has had on your nerves. On top of that, writers are creative and very sensitive people—which my observations today confirm." Later, when Serhii told me about all this,



*Serhii Pylypenko (center of the middle row) among Ukrainian writers, painters, and composers (Kharkiv, 1923). Front row from left: Maksym Rylsky, Yurii Mezhenko, Mykola Khvylovy, Maik Yohansen, Yukhym Mykhailiv, Mykhailo Verykivsky, Pylip Kozytsky; middle row: Natalia Romanovych-Tkachenko, Mykhailo Mohyliansky, Vasyl Ellan-Blakytyn, Serhii Pylypenko, Pavlo Tychyna, Pavlo Fylypovych, Savelii Khutoriansky; back row: Dmytro Zahul, Mykola Zerov, Mykhailo Drai-Khmara, Hryhorii Kosynka, Volodymyr Sosiura, Todos Osmachka, Volodymyr Koriak, Mykhailo Ivchenko, Borys Yakubsky*

I saw that he gave credence to the diagnosis of his "latent hysteria." I gave it some credence too, even though it contradicted common sense, for in the ten years of our married life together I had never once seen Serhii lose control or yell hysterically.<sup>72</sup>

Khvylovy must also have believed Serhii's "diagnosis," for the protagonist of his short novel "Sanatoriina zona" (The Sanatorium Zone, 1924), a hysteric named Anarkh, bears a physical and psychological similarity to Serhii; indeed, Khvylovy dedicated the work to Serhii. Also, Khvylovy's description of Anarkh's emotional state closely parallels the doctor's "diagnosis": "It was hysteria, and it could not have been otherwise—after the long years of the civil war in which he took active part, Anarkh could expect to fall prey to this illness. And with it came emotional imbalance—heightened sensitivity,

<sup>72</sup> Only when I began composing these memoirs did it occur to me to check this "diagnosis of hysteria" with an American psychiatrist who is a friend. When he heard that the diagnosis was based on a five-minute interview, he laughed. From the medical point of view, it is impossible to determine "latent hysteria" on that basis.

eccentricity, attacks of depression and fear." In fact the character Khvylovy created resembles Serhii only slightly. Anarkh is more a reflection of the author's thoughts about himself, his generation, the individual's role in a Communist society, and particularly the role of the writer compelled by the Party to sing of the "heroism of everyday life." To quote Khvylovy's novel, "heroic day-to-day life is more difficult to depict than a heroic holiday.... I accept day-to-day life with both my heart and my mind. Still, there is anguish."

The quarrel between Khvylovy and Serhii on matters of principle is well known. It was evident in the public polemics they carried on with each other, which were not always couched in politeness. Khvylovy tried directing the development of Ukrainian literature along Western lines, while Serhii felt that it should follow its own path, which he believed would be closer to Russian literature. In this debate I sided with Khvylovy. This was one of the rare instances in which my view on aesthetic matters differed from Serhii's.<sup>73</sup>

Serhii and Khvylovy had a common goal: creating a Ukrainian culture with its own national profile. But their goal turned out to be threatening to the Soviet authorities. For that reason it was condemned as "nationalist," in other words, counterrevolutionary. As for their personal relationship, I recall that it was not inimical, but, on the contrary, quite cordial. The émigré critic Yurii Lavrinenko wrote that Khvylovy highly valued Pylypenko as a civic activist and a person. The truth of his statement is evident in Khvylovy's "Sanatoriina zona" and in his story "Redaktor Kark" (Editor Kark), whose protagonist has some similarity to both Serhii and Ellan-Blakytny.

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<sup>73</sup> Soviet critics later declared that the differences between Khvylovy and Pylypenko were insignificant, because both of them were Ukrainian nationalists who opposed Russian culture. For example, in an article about Pluh published in the Soviet Russian-language *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (Literary Encyclopedia), vol. 8 (Moscow, 1934), 733–4, Dmytro Kosaryk wrote that "in conducting his polemics with Khvylovy on narrow organizational issues, he [Pylypenko] nonetheless was in agreement with him and his nationalist program of severing Ukrainian culture from Russian socialist culture." This official explanation does not reflect the true picture. Hryhorii Kostiuk has a much deeper understanding of both Pylypenko's and Khvylovy's positions, an understanding based not only on their polemics, but also on their actions. Noting that he personally supported Khvylovy's stance, Kostiuk states: "In my consciousness I have come to understand that these were people of one generation and one era who had a common goal, but that they had different intellectual and emotional temperaments and were talented in different ways. What Pylypenko did for the establishment of Ukrainian culture could not have been done by Khvylovy. And vice versa. They followed different paths and the steps they took were different, yet the goal they were pursuing was the same" (*Zustrichi i proshchannia*, 1: 413).

That story contains a detail that probably has little relevance for the general reader but was meaningful to us: namely, mention of the bust of a Roman that stood in an editor's office. A bronze bust of this kind did indeed belong to the editor of a local newspaper. Larger than life and very realistic, it stood on a pedestal inscribed with the words "Civis Romanus sum." After the revolution that newspaper's editorial office on Sumska Street became the headquarters of the Communist newspaper *Visty VUTsVK*, and its editor in chief was, alternately, Serhii or Ellan-Blakytny. At first Ellan-Blakytny paid the bust no mind, but after a time its presence began annoying him and he decided to get rid of it. When Serhii learned of this, he declared that he liked the sculpture and wanted to take it home. And so the Roman was brought to our apartment and put on the buffet in our dining room, where we thought it would be safely out of everyone's way. But we forgot about our children's favorite game, which was running around the dining-room table, with "briefcases" under arm. They would race about, pretending to be dashing off to their "offices" as they chanted this verse from a favorite children's book:

Chief bookkeeper's running fast,  
Tries to catch his breath at last,  
Can't be late to work, no way—  
Lots for him to do today.  
"I'll be done perhaps by noon  
And will enjoy my kasha soon."

Naturally enough, the stomping of small feet would make the bust shake, and we constantly feared that it might come crashing down on the children's heads. Soon the Roman found himself relegated to another room.

## CHAPTER 25

We were staying at our dacha outside Kharkiv when Serhii returned from the city one day looking distraught. Holding a newspaper in his hands, he said: "Listen to what it says here! Andrii Holovko shot his wife and little daughter!<sup>74</sup> He's been arrested and is awaiting trial in Poltava. I know him—he's a member of Pluh. Something's not right about this—I must look into it."

The following day Serhii placed a call to Poltava. He was told that Holovko had probably committed the crimes while temporarily insane and that he had been placed in a psychiatric ward for medical observation. Because he knew Holovko well, Serhii was asked to come to Poltava and see him. Serhii and I made the journey there together. Upon arriving we were received by the hospital's chief psychiatrist. He told us that we would probably detect nothing odd when we spoke with Holovko, for he was speaking logically. Serhii asked whether it would be too stressful for Holovko to talk about what had happened. The doctor assured him that, quite to the contrary, Holovko spoke about it willingly. Then the psychiatrist asked that the patient be brought in. Holovko looked dreadful. He was wearing a pair of long underwear; one leg was ripped off at the knee and the other was ragged. His shirt was torn to shreds, and his body was bruised and blood-stained.

Taking no note of us, Holovko threw himself at the doctor. "What are you doing to me?" he asked angrily. "Why did you put me in a room with raving lunatics? They beat me unmercifully! Look at what they have done to me!" The doctor was horrified: "I didn't give any order to put you in a room with lunatics! There has been some mistake." He immediately summoned an orderly and told him to transfer Holovko to another ward. At this point Holovko noticed us. His face brightened and he shook Serhii's hand, thanking him for coming. "I want to tell you everything that happened. Everything," he said. And then he poured out his story.

He and his wife were both teachers, but their jobs made it necessary for them to live apart. Holovko's wife lived with their daughter in a small village near Poltava, and they would come to visit Holovko in

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<sup>74</sup> Holovko (1897–1972) was a member of Pluh and a well-known Soviet Ukrainian novelist. He survived the Stalinist terror and remained a writer, receiving the Shevchenko State Prize in 1969 for the first two volumes of his trilogy, *Artem Harmash*.—Eds.



another village where he was teaching. The visits were rare, and he suffered greatly from the separation. He loved his wife passionately, indeed, practically deified her—she was the only woman he had ever loved. The feelings did not mellow with time—on the contrary, they intensified to the point of obsession. He was tormented by the fact that they were poor and had to live apart. But what upset Holovko even more was the fact that his constant thinking about his wife was preventing him from doing any writing. Gradually he became convinced that his love for his wife and child was the source of his misery and that he had to rid himself of them. He decided that the only solution was to kill them both. He became more and more convinced of this as time went on, and he began writing down these thoughts in his journal.

During their winter vacation, Holovko's wife and child came to visit him. He was away when they arrived. His journal lay open on the table, and his wife began reading it. When Holovko returned, he found her in tears. She cried out that she never wanted to interfere with his writing and declared that she would leave immediately with their child and he would never see them again. Holovko tried to calm her, saying that he no longer felt that way and that all would be well. They talked until dawn, and his wife was somewhat consoled. They agreed that it would be better for them to separate for a while. After his wife and child returned home and some time passed, Holovko wrote asking that they both come for a farewell visit before they parted ways.

By that time it was late spring or early summer. The weather was warm and sunny. Holovko suggested they ride out into the woods for an outing, and his wife agreed. The three of them boarded a train, rode a few stops, and got out. They were in an area of meadows and woods where people had summer homes. They walked through the woods the whole day. Holovko's wife wanted to stop and rest, but he kept coaxing her to walk a bit farther. Finally, completely exhausted, she lay down on the grass, saying that she could go no farther. Holovko did not insist, but said that he would go on with their daughter a bit. In a few minutes the little girl also begged to rest—after all, she was small, only three or four years old. He sat her down under a tree and told her to wait for him, that he'd be back soon. He returned to his wife, who had fallen asleep. Taking a red kerchief out of his pocket, he covered his wife's face and shot her in the head.

Then Holovko returned to take his daughter to the station. There they boarded a train and, after a few stops, got off again. When his

daughter asked where her mother was, Holovko replied that she would join them shortly and led the child into the woods. Evening was approaching. The little girl was stumbling from fatigue. Holovko finally laid her down on the grass, sat down next to her, and asked what children's stories she would like to hear. He told her all her favorites until she finally fell asleep. Afterwards, he took out another red kerchief from his pocket, covered the child's face, and shot her. After that Holovko went back to the station, boarded the train, and went back to Poltava.

He rented a room in a hotel and stayed there for two days. On the third day he read in the paper that a woman who had been shot in the head had been found in the woods near Poltava and that in another area a little girl shot to death had been discovered. In both cases the faces had been covered with a red kerchief. Holovko immediately went to the hospital where his wife had been taken—she was still alive, but unconscious. Holovko told the doctor he had killed the child and had also tried to kill his wife, but the kerchief must have gotten in the way. He insisted that he be allowed to see his wife. Promising to obtain permission, the doctor left the room and called the police, who arrested Holovko. At this point Holovko ended his story. He took a deep breath and said, "Now I feel free."<sup>75</sup>

After he had been led away, the doctor asked Serhii whether he had noted something especially peculiar about Holovko's story. Serhii answered that one detail in particular had struck him—the red kerchief. Holovko had written a story by that title. His "Chervona

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<sup>75</sup> The case has prompted interest to the present time. The summer 1990 issue of the student journal *Khoma Brut* (Zhytomyr) printed the official record of Holovko's interrogation after his arrest. Although it contained some discrepancies with the account Holovko gave Serhii—for instance, it said that his daughter was killed the day after his wife was shot—the facts and motives he gave to the police were identical to those he related to Serhii. In his brochure *Ukrainskyi renesans XX stolittia* (The Ukrainian Renaissance of the Twentieth Century [Toronto, 1953]), Prof. Hryhorii Vashchenko mentions the double murder and says that the motive was Holovko's desire to get rid of his family in order to marry another woman: "While living in Bilyky, Holovko fell in love with a beautiful young teacher at an orphanage. In order to eliminate any obstacle to his getting together with the woman, he decided to get rid of his wife and daughter in a criminal way." Vashchenko provides the following false information: that Holovko's daughter was saved by peasants, that he merely feigned insanity, and that he became a member of the Writers' Union after his release from prison. These statements make Vashchenko's testimony very suspect. In regard to Holovko's second marriage, Volodymyr Kulish writes in his memoirs, *Slovo pro budynok "Slovo"* (A Word about the Word Building [Toronto, 1966], 15), that Holovko's second wife was not a teacher at an orphanage, but a niece of the Yiddish writer Lev Kvitko.

khustyna" was set during the time of the civil war and included an episode in which a little girl covered the face of a peasant murdered by Haidamakas.<sup>76</sup> The story had been published the previous year. The doctor thanked Serhii for the information, saying that it shed some light on what had taken place.

After spending two months in the hospital, Holovko was discharged, having been judged to be completely sane once more. Later he remarried, and the doctors advised the couple to live with Holovko's brother. The three of them came to live in the Slovo (Word) apartment building, where we too were living then.

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<sup>76</sup> Most likely a reference to members of one of two formations in the Army of the UNR: (1) the Haidamaka Battalion (*Haidamatskyi kish*) of Slobidska Ukraine, which became the Third Haidamaka Infantry Regiment of the Zaporozhian Corps in March 1918, a brigade in June 1919, and later that year mutinied against the UNR and acted independently until it was destroyed in 1920; or (2) the Haidamaka Cavalry Brigade, which also became part of the Zaporozhian Corps in March 1918.—Eds.



*Tatiana and her brother Serhii  
(Kharkiv, ca. 1925)*



*Tatiana and her daughter Assya  
(ca. 1928)*



*Tatiana, Serhii Pylypenko, and their daughter Assya (Kharkiv, 1927)*



*Serhii Pylypenko and his daughters Assya and Mirtala in the country near Kharkiv (1931 or 1932)*

## CHAPTER 26

The Slovo building and its inhabitants deserve some discussion. The idea of establishing a building cooperative of “our own” was the brainchild of a group of writers in Kharkiv at the end of the 1920s, and Serhii was the idea’s prime mover. According to the plan, each shareholder was to make annual payments for his apartment for some fifteen years, after which it would become his private property. The plan was never realized, however, because most of those who developed it were arrested and imprisoned in the 1930s and their families were exiled.

Construction of the building proceeded at the usual Soviet tempo: it took three years, from 1927 to 1930. When it was finally completed, Serhii and some other members of the founding group were given the opportunity to choose their apartments, and the other shareholders were asked to draw lots. The future residents had to choose whether to heat their apartment by coal or gas; the majority chose coal because they had heard stories of people being poisoned by gas. So coal was brought to the building and left in the basement for every resident to drag up the stairs to his apartment (there was no elevator). The charred remains of spent coal were taken out and dumped in the backyard. Over time they formed hills of considerable size, on which the residents’ children loved to play.

The apartments were spacious and had a great deal of light. Each had a living room, a study, a kitchen, one or two bedrooms, a pantry, a bathroom, and a small balcony. The entire building, including the balconies, was made of reinforced concrete. The balconies had high parapets, which were not attractive but made the balconies quiet and safe and thus a good place for children to play. The balconies also served as coolers—ours was where we kept our milk, eggs, meat, and produce. After a while we noticed that our food was disappearing. Other residents on the first floor and second floors began noticing that their food was disappearing too. Who was stealing it and how? We soon had an answer to the mystery: the police called to tell us that they had caught the culprits—a gang of adolescents. When the residents were told they could attend the interrogation of these juvenile delinquents, we decided to go and hear what the culprits had to say.

The teenagers, who were homeless and dressed in rags, said the main impediment to their foraging for food was the fact that writers

did not go to bed at a reasonable hour but sat at their desks writing until the wee hours of the morning. This meant that the thieves had to wait late into the night until, at last, all the lights were out. As for the second-floor balconies, the young people said that they had no difficulty reaching them—the drainage pipes along the walls facilitated that. In the end, as I remember, the punishment the judges meted out to them was not very harsh. These were the years immediately after the civil war and the famine of the 1920s, when orphans numbered in the thousands. They would wander about in packs or alone, foraging for food, begging, and stealing. Sometimes they acted in gangs: some would whistle and raise a commotion so that others could snatch women's purses. I developed the habit of wrapping the strap of my handbag around my hand several times and clutching it close to me whenever I walked down the street.

While the Slovo building was being constructed, the workers often stayed there overnight and brought food with them. The food attracted mice, rats, and bedbugs, which soon multiplied so much that it was impossible to get rid of them. We tried, though: we got a cat and placed traps throughout the apartment. Our cat was rather lazy and soon figured out there was no need to expend any energy hunting mice. Instead he would simply lie in the kitchen and listen. As soon as a trap snapped, he would run to one of us, meowing to announce that his dinner had been caught.

Our battle with mice and rats made a great impression on little Mirtala, who was then nearly four years old. We discovered this the day she surprised us by writing, in block letters, "KLADOVKA. KRYSY. KLADOVKA. MYSHI" (PANTRY. RATS. PANTRY. MICE). We never suspected she had learned the alphabet and could write, let alone write words in verse with alliteration, rhythm, and a semblance of rhyme. We should have known then and there that she would grow up to be a poet.

Mice figured in several of our family's recollections and life experiences. The first such incident happened many years earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century. The Kyiv Military Commissary was then home to millions of mice. The authorities had tried everything possible to get rid of the pests—poison, traps, cats—but to no avail. Then one day, just as in the old legend about the Pied Piper of Hamelin, there appeared a man who promised to get rid of the mice. He asked a handsome price for his services, and his sole other condition was that no one interfere with what he was doing, to which the authorities

agreed. That evening the man visited all the storage rooms and pantries and inspected all the mouse holes; the following day, at dawn, he began playing a reed pipe. The unbelievable happened: mice started appearing from everywhere—in the hundreds and then thousands. They squealed, dashed about back and forth, and obediently followed the man, who walked toward the Dnipro while continuing to play his pipe. When the mice came to the river, they jumped into the water, and all of them drowned! This event was reported in the daily newspaper and was remembered by Kyiv's denizens long afterwards. The story was related to me by our "White" grandmother.

Another incident happened during the civil war, when Aliosha, Mother, Seriozha, Liza, and I were living in Bessarabia (Aliosha had gotten a job there). We had settled in an abandoned country house, where the mice reigned supreme. They lived off the books in the library, where their feast of choice was the leather-bound volumes. They were so much at home that they dashed through the rooms without any concern for us at all, and when we sat down to eat they brazenly ran across the table! One night, when there was a full moon, I witnessed an amazing sight: mice standing on their hind legs in a circle and squealing as they gazed up at the moon.



## CHAPTER 27

Although I was a member of the Writers' Union, I did not participate in its literary debates, for they were of little interest to me. But I gladly accompanied Serhii to Pluh meetings, where, in a very amicable atmosphere, people read and discussed the new works of Pluh writers. Serhii was very diplomatic in his comments, for he understood that many of the young writers had to learn their craft from scratch. Ostap Vyshnia wrote a humorous sketch describing how new members were admitted to Pluh:

—Is there anyone else here today who writes? Here's someone.  
Greetings! Who are you?

—Me? I'm Semen Liubystok!

—Are you a writer?

—No!

—Perhaps you're a writer anyway. Are you writing anything at the moment?

—Why, yes. I just wrote a letter to my father asking him to send me money for postage stamps.

—There you are! And you said you're not a writer!

I also paid visits to the Blakytny Building, which was a meeting place for the writers, artists, and composers who comprised Kharkiv's Ukrainian intelligentsia. The gatherings there were always boisterous and lively: people drank, sang, and engaged in animated conversation. There Ostap Vyshnia reigned as master jester supreme. Whenever I entered the room, I immediately knew where he was, for invariably peals of laughter were reverberating from that direction. Elsewhere in the room there might be people reading from their latest literary work, drawing pictures, reciting poetry, or acting out scenes from a play. Yosyp Hirniak, the famous actor from the Berezil Theater,<sup>77</sup> was often

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<sup>77</sup> The avant-garde Berezil (March) Theater association (1922–33) was the brainchild of its famous and influential artistic director, Les Kurbas (1887–1937). Based in Kyiv from 1922 and in Kharkiv from 1926, Berezil staged modern plays by European and Soviet Ukrainian playwrights, including those by its playwright in residence, Mykola Kulish (1892–1937). Berezil was closed down in 1933 after Kurbas and his ideas were condemned by the regime and he was dismissed as artistic director. Both he and Kulish were arrested—in December 1933 and December 1934, respectively—and killed on the same day, 3 November 1937, by the NKVD after years of imprisonment in the Solovets Islands prison complex. Many of Berezil's actors were also repressed, but not all of them perished, for instance, Yosyp Hirniak (1895–1989) survived and reached the U.S. after the Second World War.—Eds.

there—he excelled at impersonations. Once a Georgian poet came to the club and demonstrated his skill at playing glasses. Having filled several glasses with varying levels of wine, he tapped them lightly with a fork to determine the pitch. Then he played some sad and hauntingly beautiful Georgian melodies.

Among the Blakytny club's many regulars was the talented storyteller Antin Dyky.<sup>78</sup> Writers would listen spellbound as he related his civil-war experiences. He gave them permission to use episodes from these stories in their own writing. Everyone, including Dyky himself, thought he had no writing ability, but this proved to be untrue: in 1925, he began, and his works were subsequently published.

One of the rooms in the Blakytny building had a billiard table, and one day a humorous incident occurred there. Vladimir Mayakovsky had arrived in Kharkiv for a poetry reading. Scheduled to appear after him was the Ukrainian poet Ivan Kulyk. Kulyk's poetry was hardly on the same level as Mayakovsky's, and it must have taken some courage for him to appear together with the renowned poet. When Kulyk began reciting his verses, Mayakovsky went to one side and stood there, rocking back and forth on his heels, keeping his hands in his pockets. He made a point of looking down from his great height at Kulyk, who was not a tall man. Mayakovsky was well aware of what a comical scene he was creating. Someone in the audience began laughing, and soon everyone had joined in the hilarity. Poor Kulyk had to stop reciting and leave the stage. Soon enough, however, the tables were turned.

After the reading Mayakovsky was invited to meet with local writers at the Blakytny club. When he arrived, he spotted the billiard table and announced that he wanted to play. Mayakovsky was known to be an excellent player, so no one was in a hurry to take up the challenge. Confident of his skill and eager for an opponent, Mayakovsky urged someone to step forward, suggesting that whoever lost the match be obliged to crawl around under the billiard table on all fours. A poet who was a member of Pluh accepted the challenge. This time it became Mayakovsky's turn to be embarrassed—he lost the game and had to crawl around under the table as a roomful of people roared with laughter.

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<sup>78</sup> Dyky (1900–54) was a member of Pluh. He was repressed during the Stalinist terror, but was not killed by the NKVD.—*Eds.*

I liked Mayakovsky's early work very much, as did my mother and Liza. Serhii, however, was more impressed with the poetic gifts of such Russian poets as Fedor Tiutchev. He also loved the works of the Ukrainian poets Tychyna, his contemporary, and Shevchenko. Serhii revered the great Taras and wrote many articles about him. He also wrote a biography of Shevchenko in verse for children. It began:

There once was a boy by the name of Taras,  
Who watched over lambs while geese fed on grass.  
His family owned a small shack by the road,  
Merchants with salt rode by with their load.  
No tooting of engines was heard in those parts,  
Oxen and horses still pulled all their carts.

Our daughter Assya first learned of Shevchenko from this poem, and it played the same role in her life as my father's reading of the *Kobzar* did in mine.

Serhii made it a goal to collect as much material about the great poet as he could find. To accomplish this he traveled to the Aral Sea coast, where Shevchenko had lived while in exile. He was lucky enough to locate the descendants of the commandant, Uskov, whose home Shevchenko had frequented; Shevchenko had also painted portraits of the commandant's wife.<sup>79</sup> This family revered the memory of Shevchenko and had carefully preserved letters, drawings, and small items related to their acquaintance with him. They gladly donated these memorabilia to the museum that Serhii established and directed. Today the former holdings of this museum are part of the Shevchenko State Museum in Kyiv. When I visited that museum in the early 1970s, I saw a large portrait at the entrance—it was of Ellan-Blakytny! Very much taken aback, I asked the guide why his portrait was placed there. After all, Ellan-Blakytny had nothing to do with the museum, for its creator was Serhii Pylypenko. The woman nodded her head fervently in agreement and said, "But you know, today people have forgotten—nobody remembers that." And, I thought, someone was clearly making sure that people forgot. I wonder if that portrait still hangs in the museum today.

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<sup>79</sup> As commandant of the Novopetrovsk fortress, Major Iraklii Uskov (1810–82) allowed Shevchenko to paint while the poet was exiled there (1853–57) and often invited him to his home. Shevchenko drew a portrait of Uskov and painted three of his wife Agafiia, including one with her daughter Nataliia.—*Eds.*

Other writers I got to know well in the 1920s were Mykola Bazhan, Petro Panch, Vasyl Mynko, and Yurii Smolych. I worked with Smolych for a time. During my trip to Kyiv in 1973—when I saw my sister for the first time in thirty years—I met with Smolych and we talked about the past. I reminded him of an episode in his life that he had totally forgotten. Once Serhii, Smolych, and I, together with a number of other writers, traveled to the Caucasus, to a place not far from the Soviet-Iranian border. We had wandered in the mountains the whole day, and that evening we sought some place to get something to eat. We found a small restaurant and were led out into its garden, where the three of us—Serhii, Smolych and I—sat down at a small table. We ordered bowls of soup, and when these were brought out we started eating. Suddenly a bird landed in Smolych's bowl. The hot liquid splattered all over the table, but Smolych, dexterous and quick as usual, managed to grab hold of the bird. Our waiter came running, calling out excitedly: "It's a bird of paradise! It's very rare for them to fly here across the mountains from Iran! Please, let me have it!" And he related the local inhabitants' belief that a bird of paradise brings good fortune. Smolych hesitated over the request—the bird was so beautiful and exotic that he wanted to keep it. But how would he take it with him? Moreover, the waiter's entreaties to give him the unexpected avian visitor were so heartfelt that Smolych relented and let the waiter have it. Afterwards he told all his friends and acquaintances about how luck had fallen right into his soup bowl and he had let it go. When I reminded him about this incident so many years later, Smolych greatly regretted that he had not remembered and had not included it in *Rozpovid pro nespokii* (A Tale of Disquiet).<sup>80</sup>

Natalia Zabyla, the well-known author of children's books, was an acquaintance of mine. She came from an old noble family and took pride in speaking of it. Like many women in those days, she had many lovers and several husbands who fathered her children. Before moving into the Slovo building she had an affair with the writer Sava Bozhko, and they had a son named Taras. This boy grew to be a holy terror, and all the children in our building feared him, except for our Assya, whom he befriended and even took under his wing.

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<sup>80</sup> The title of the first volume of Smolych's memoirs about Ukrainian literary life and writers in the 1920s and 1930s, published in Kyiv in 1968.

When a kindergarten was established in our building, we enrolled Assya, and Zabila enrolled her Taras. The boy was constantly flaunting the teachers' rules. For example, during the so-called quiet hour, when the children were supposed to be resting, he took to teaching Assya how to count to a thousand. After a while the teachers despaired of turning these two into model students, and they asked that Assya be removed from the class because she was "a socially underdeveloped child." Indeed, many of the writers' children would not conform to the pedagogical norms of the time, and teachers regularly left our building's kindergarten because they couldn't control the pupils.

After Assya was expelled from the kindergarten, we put her in a private school. The teacher's forewarning that her methodology was not based on the principle of "Arise, ye branded by damnation" (the opening line of the Russian version of the "Internationale") or "Lie down, ye branded by damnation" certainly raised no objection from me. Assya continued her schooling there, and at the age of nine she entered the third grade. As for Natalia Zabila's son Taras Bozhko, in 1985 I read in *Ukraina* that he was a Second World War hero.

To complete the series of portraits of Ukrainian authors I knew well, I offer two more—of the poets Valeriiian Polishchuk and Volodymyr Sosiura. Valeriiian was a friend from the old days at Kamianets-Podilskyi, and he and I had many things in common. We even resembled each other—we both had large greenish eyes—so people often mistook us for brother and sister. Our relationship was always platonic. In fact, after Serhii and I became involved with each other, neither of us had any other romantic interests. That was something so rare in those years and in that milieu that we were pointed to as a model couple: it became common to define some close and happy relationship by saying, "they live like the Pylypenkos." Polishchuk, in contrast, had an amorous nature that seemed incompatible with monogamy. At the time he was living in our apartment building, he was in love with two sisters simultaneously. The sisters were terribly jealous of each other and finally gave Valeriiian an ultimatum—choose one and marry her. So he had to make a choice. The sister who became Valeriiian's wife gave birth to a baby boy, who was named Marko. He was an exceptionally handsome child with huge, dark-blue eyes and long lashes, and passers-by would stop in the street to admire him. Marko became Assya's second good friend. When he reached the age of nine or so, in the mid-1930s, his father presented him with a dagger and said, "If they arrest me, use this to avenge me." Valeriiian was



*Serhii Pylypenko at a meeting of the Pluh writers' association. Left to right: Pylypenko, Anatol Hak, Andrii Paniv, Ivan Dniprovsky, Sava Bozhko, Vasyl Mysyk, Volodymyr Sosiura (Kharkiv, mid-1920s)*



*Anatol Hak and Serhii Pylypenko in a train compartment (late 1920s)*

*Valerian Polishchuk and his  
son Marko (1926)*



*Volodymyr Sosiura (1923)*

arrested,<sup>81</sup> but, of course, there was no way his young son Marko could avenge his father. Years later I learned that Valeriiian's son perished at the front during the Second World War.

Volodymyr Sosiura was another handsome man whose love affairs were legion. He was always coming into our office and talking about his current love, each time assuring us that he had finally met the woman he was destined to marry. I recall his first meeting with Serhii very vividly. He stood unshaven and in a torn military coat, having come directly from the battlefield. He opened a backpack he was carrying and took out some rolled-up sheets of paper. "These are my poems," he said, handing them to Serhii. Serhii was accustomed to reading awkward first attempts at writing, so he did not expect anything exceptional. But as soon as he started reading Sosiura's poems he realized that this former soldier had real talent. Serhii was overjoyed at the discovery and complimented the fledgling writer. He took Sosiura under his wing and literally taught him the fundamentals of writing. Sosiura never forgot that Serhii had "made a person out of him," and he always expressed great gratitude, love, and respect for *Papasha*. Sosiura joined Pluh and quickly became not only a prominent peasant writer, but also a prominent Ukrainian poet of the 1920s in general. He was very popular among young Ukrainians; his lyricism and youthful sincerity appealed to many older readers as well.

In the early 1930s, a wave of arrests among the Ukrainian intelligentsia began. One writer and then another and another disappeared from our building. Late one evening, Sosiura knocked on our door. When we opened it, he held out a roll of papers clutched in his hand, just as he had the first time he and Serhii met. In a trembling voice he said, "Please hide these poems in your apartment. I am certain that I will be arrested, if not today then tomorrow, but you—they will not dare touch you, Serhii Volodymyrovych." Sosiura had served in the UNR Army, and he was sure he would be arrested. By an irony of fate, Serhii, a Communist by conviction who was completely devoted to the Party, was arrested a few days later, while Sosiura remained free and later even received awards.

In the memoirs that were part of his autobiographical novel *Tretia rota* (The Third Company), Sosiura recalled Serhii with fondness: "Serhii Volodymyrovych's face reminded me of ancient Ukrainian frescoes. I

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<sup>81</sup> Polishchuk was arrested in December 1934 and executed on 9 December 1937 in the NKVD prison complex on the Solovets Islands.—Eds.



loved him very much and regarded him as my [second] father.... We [young writers] all affectionately called Pylypenko *Papasha* and shamelessly abused his kindness by plundering his cigarette case.... [We] were ready to give our lives for him" (p. 225).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The novel was first published only twenty-three years after Sosiura's death: in 1988, during the perestroika period.—Eds.

## CHAPTER 28

The horrors of the 1930s were coming closer and closer. Toward the beginning of 1933, rumors of famine in the villages began circulating in Kharkiv. The newspapers carried no official confirmations of these rumors, nor was there any mention of them at Party meetings. But before long, starving peasants began appearing on the streets of Kharkiv. They came not in groups or whole families, but individually. Most often they were young mothers with infants; less frequently they were adolescents. There was one scene that I saw over and over again. A mother with a baby would enter the city and search out a busy street. Spreading a kerchief on the sidewalk, she would lay her child on it and walk away, peering from around a corner to see if anyone picked up her infant. Invariably, no one did. She would return, pick up the child herself, and walk to another street, where she would do the same again, in an effort to save her child from the fate that awaited it.

For about three months there were few people on the streets who were obviously suffering from hunger. Then their numbers increased, becoming a steady stream of starving people. Children and mothers died first. Special trucks patrolled the streets daily and picked up the dead. The bodies were transported outside the city limits and buried in mass graves. Those who were still breathing were taken to barracks at so-called *spetspunkty* (special centers), where they received neither food nor medical care but were simply left to die slowly of starvation. The city dwellers knew this, but for a long time the peasants did not—they thought that the authorities were sending the trucks to help them. Mothers themselves lifted their children into them and gratefully climbed in themselves, expecting to be fed. Slowly the peasants realized the horrible truth about the *spetspunkty*. Then, when a mother could not find her child on the street, she knew a truck had taken the child. All she could do was lament in anguish and grief.

Soon the peasants who got to the city were so feeble that they were barely able to put one foot in front of the other. I remember walking along a street one day and seeing a teenager being held up on either side by adults, probably his parents, who could barely walk themselves. From a distance I thought the boy was smiling. But as I drew closer I realized that it was not a smile but a horrible grimace—starvation had drawn the skin on the youngster's face so tight and in such a way that his teeth were bared. Another time, while leaving a

theater one evening, we saw a group of children no older than five. They were curled up in a niche near the theater's entrance and slowly drifting off into death. After that, every time I left home I took along bread and other food to give to the starving children I encountered on my way. Soon, however, many of them became so feeble they no longer had the strength to eat.

Gradually city people also began feeling the consequences of the famine, as food began disappearing from the stores. As a Party member and noted writer, Serhii received food stamps and special coupons entitling the bearer to eat dinner in the dining hall of the Radnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) building. This was a cafeteria for the privileged to which common people had no access. The first time we went there we were told we could either eat on the premises or take the food home. The next day we arrived with bowls and pots. Filling them with food—soup, meat, vegetables—we went out into the street and gave the food to a crowd of hungry children. Since they had neither spoons nor forks, we sat down on the street beside them and fed them one by one, straight from the pot. A number of mothers were with the children and they helped us to feed them. Some of Serhii's coworkers who frequented the Radnarkom cafeteria saw what we were doing and followed our example, but they were few. I should add that in addition to coupons, we ourselves received special rations and did not go hungry. The same was true of all high-ranking Party officials.

In the summer of 1932, the Writers' Union of Ukraine organized a summer vacation for members and their families at a Black Sea resort near Skadovsk, not far from the city of Kherson. On the way there I saw brimming granaries guarded by armed military personnel—not from thieves, of course, but from starving peasants. There was evidence of a bountiful harvest that year: cart after grain-laden cart was making its way to the granaries. Had some foreign tourists found themselves traveling along this route, they would undoubtedly have concluded that they were visiting a land of plenty.

As we approached the sea, we saw an expanse of sandy soil dotted here and there by shrubs. There were no buildings in sight, and the whole locality looked rather desolate and sad. Suddenly we saw movement in the distance, near the mouth of the Dnipro. As we approached, we saw hundreds of peasants who had fled there to escape starvation. Whole families were living in dugouts along the riverbank. Here they could at least catch fish and stay alive. Summer was ending, and the peasants living there were worried about the crops

in their native villages: who would harvest them this year? They sent representatives back to their villages to find out. These people came back with the report that the crop of grain and produce was bountiful, but because there was no one in the villages who could harvest it, the authorities were sending factory workers from the city to do the job.

The same bleak picture greeted us in Kharkiv upon our return at the end of summer. By then extending aid to “enemies of the people” was strictly forbidden. It would have been impossible to help everyone who needed help, in any case.

One day Serhii was walking in a market on the outskirts of town, not far from our home, when he spotted a young peasant woman and was struck by her strange appearance—she was barefoot and wearing a long embroidered shirt. Her walk was unsteady, and her eyes had a peculiar, vacant look. Serhii walked up to her and asked who she was and where she was going. In a barely audible voice she replied that everyone in her village had died and she had nowhere to go. Her wretchedness so moved Serhii that he asked her to come with him, and she did. When our cook took her into the kitchen and offered some food, the young woman burst into tears—she hadn’t eaten in four days. After she had eaten a little, we saw to it that she was bathed and gave her some clothes. She stayed with us for six months, and then Serhii found her a job at a factory.

This was not the only time that Serhii saved people who were in danger of dying from hunger. Nearly every day he saw people who had come from the villages in search of help from relatives who were Pluh members. Serhii tried helping them any way he could, usually by finding some kind of work for them in the city.

As a member of the Party, Serhii had to take part in the collectivization drive and the dekulakization campaign. He traveled to various villages, where he witnessed the horrors that were taking place by order of the Party. Although he suffered deeply over what he saw, he continued defending the collectivization policy, on the grounds that it was the only way the village could progress. I did not agree with that point of view. I took the position that the use of violence is evil and unjust, and that the brutal and inhumane methods used to promote collectivization were the epitome of such evil. This was the major political issue over which Serhii and I disagreed and had heated disputes. He shared Lenin’s view of the peasantry as a backward, conservative mass of people steeped in the psychology of private ownership, which prevented them from seeing the benefits

that would accrue to them from the collective ownership of land. In his writing Serhii consistently propagandized the idea of the "commune." Thus, for example, in his fable "Rivnist" (Equality), he describes the progressive impoverishment of a family in which the father divides the land among his sons, who in turn divide it among their own children, until they all become beggars. The solution, suggested Serhii, lay in collective work:

Equality, I can tell,  
Is the Commune's goal as well,  
But rather than dividing,  
It gives us this advice:  
Work all together, brothers,  
And earth, our dear old mother,  
Will always be providing  
A hundredfold for us.

In his novel *The First Circle*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn portrays an idealist and Communist named Rubin whose prototype was Lev Kopelev.<sup>83</sup> Rubin travels through Ukrainian villages to enforce collectivization, believing in the correctness of the Party's stand on the issue. But when he lands in prison, Rubin begins wondering if those policies were not a horrible mistake. Finally he must admit to himself that the Party had deceived him, and that he had deceived himself.

Several years ago Kopelev came to Ann Arbor, where he met my daughter Assya. She asked him whether he had heard of Serhii Pylypenko. Kopelev, visibly moved, said that he had not only heard of him, but had known him during the years of collectivization. And, like Rubin in Solzhenitsyn's novel, Kopelev uttered words of contrition, bitterly regretting that a true understanding of what was happening then had come to him so late. Perhaps after his arrest Serhii, too, had second thoughts about the collectivization policy.

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<sup>83</sup> Kopelev (1912–97) was born in Kyiv. He was active in the Jewish section of the Bolshevik Party in Ukraine in the 1920s and was a Party agitator during the collectivization drive there. He worked as a journalist and literary scholar in the 1930s and wrote poetry in both Russian and Ukrainian. A prisoner of conscience from 1945 on, he was incarcerated for over ten years in the Gulag, where he met Solzhenitsyn. After his release in 1955, Kopelev was active in the Soviet dissident and human-rights movements. He emigrated to West Germany in 1980 and died in Köln. His first volume of memoirs, *The Education of a True Believer* (1980), contains much information about life and politics in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s.—Eds.

In the 1930s the majority of Communists in Ukraine shared Serhii's views on collectivization—they justified and supported it. This was particularly true of the young members of the Communist Youth League, who served the Party devotedly, body and soul. But there were also those who, in their hearts of hearts, had no hostility toward the peasants and did not agree with the methods being used to impose collectivization. For the most part, however, they remained silent out of fear of being denounced to the authorities. Those who ventured to criticize the policy did so only within the confines of a small circle of friends. There were, of course, opportunists who were indifferent to the sufferings of others and ready to do anything to promote their own careers. But there were also the few who spoke out openly against the genocidal policy and paid for it with their lives. This brave group included Mykola Skrypnyk and Mykola Khvylovy.<sup>84</sup>

Khvylovy was sent to the countryside at his own request—he wanted to see for himself that the kulaks were hiding grain from the state. But when he arrived and saw that whole villages had been depopulated, he immediately telegraphed the following to the Central Committee: “The countryside is dying. Immediate assistance is necessary.” In response he received an order to return to Kharkiv and explain his message. When he did so, he was told that everything was proceeding according to plan and the Party's directives. People “at the top” knew everything that was happening and there had been no mistake: confiscating all the grain was the only way to break peasant resistance to progress. Shortly thereafter Khvylovy committed suicide. Everyone who knew him said that it was what he saw in the

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<sup>84</sup> Mykola Skrypnyk (1872–1933) was one of the old Bolshevik leaders and a senior government official in Soviet Ukraine. There he served as the people's commissar of internal affairs (1921–22), justice (1922–27), and education (1927–33). In the latter post he was a leading proponent of national-communism and the Soviet policy of Ukrainization. After his policies and theories were condemned and he was removed from that post, he committed suicide in protest against the Stalinist mass repression of the nationally conscious intelligentsia and the physical destruction of the peasantry in the famine-genocide of 1932–33. Mykola Khvylovy (1893–1933) was the most famous and influential writer and cultural figure of the Ukrainization period. He also committed suicide in protest against the Stalinist terror and the famine-genocide. See Ivan Koshelivets, “Khvylovy, Mykola” and “Skrypnyk, Mykola,” in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 2: 500–2, 4: 737–8; idem, *Mykola Skrypnyk* (Munich, 1972); James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 120–60, 192–231, 264–301; and Mykola Khvylovy, *The Cultural Renaissance in Ukraine: Polemical Pamphlets, 1925–1926*, trans., with an intro., by Myroslav Shkandrij (Edmonton, 1986).—Eds.

villages that made him take his own life. Then, nearly two months later, Skrypnyk shot himself. These two suicides depressed Serhii greatly—especially that of Skrypnyk, whom he particularly admired and esteemed.

Serhii and I had long talks about where the Party's policies in Ukraine were leading. By this time Ukrainization was no longer part of the Communist Party's program. Serhii told me with bitterness how he had been shown secret instructions to the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences from Moscow. They unequivocally "recommended" that academicians do everything they could to make the Ukrainian language as similar to Russian as possible. All Ukrainian writers, playwrights, and scholars—in fact, every member of the intelligentsia who considered himself to be Ukrainian—began experiencing persecution and harassment. In the press a relentless campaign began against these "bourgeois nationalists," who were accused of every crime under the sun. The press included increasingly hostile references to Serhii, which did not bode well for the future.

## CHAPTER 29

Arrests were sweeping Soviet Ukraine. People began to disappear from our building, taken away in “black ravens”—the black cars driven by the NKVD—during the night, never to return. We noticed that our building was under surveillance day and night. Everyone wondered if his or her turn would be next.<sup>85</sup>

Just at that time I found myself pregnant again. Serhii and I thought long and hard about what we should do. The future was so totally uncertain—who knew what awaited us? If Serhii were to be arrested and I was left alone with an infant, none of us would survive, neither the little one, nor I, nor our two small daughters. In the end we decided I had to have an abortion.

I went to the hospital with a heavy heart, and the abortion was performed. They said the baby was a boy—we would have had a son! Thoughts about this forced murder under duress haunted me for years to come. I kept thinking that our son might have resembled Serhii, that he might have grown up to be as intelligent and handsome as his father. Much later I pondered what his fate might have been during the Second World War—whether he would have been drafted and gone to the front, perhaps to be killed or to come back disabled. What bitter thoughts these all were.

Finally, in the winter of 1933, Serhii’s turn came. The first step was his expulsion from the Party. That was followed by dismissal from all the positions he held.<sup>86</sup> Then one night, as expected, the NKVD knocked on our door. As soon as they entered our apartment, they began going through the drawers in Serhii’s study, confiscating all his papers. Then they searched the other rooms. The search lasted an unbearably long time, but finally they had taken everything they wanted, including my father’s gold sword. I stood on our balcony and watched as Serhii was led to the car, climbed in, and was taken away. I

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<sup>85</sup> According to Volodymyr Kulish, thirty-four people living in the sixty-six apartments in our building were arrested.

<sup>86</sup> Hryhorii Kostiuk describes his reaction to the news that Serhii had been expelled from the Party and the danger he would be “expelled from life itself”: “Somewhere in the depths of my soul I felt acutely that the attack on Pylypenko was an attack on me and the many others like me. This was a tragedy of the whole generation of the 1920s, which had grown up under the authoritative influence of Serhii Volodymyrovych Pylypenko” (*Zustrichi i proshchannia*, 1: 415).



still see that scene vividly, as if it happened yesterday. I remember how my heart contracted with pain—and my strong presentiment that this separation would last forever.

Long, painful days ensued. I was completely devastated. I moved about numbly, doing and saying things mechanically, with grief my constant, weighty companion. I could think of nothing but Serhii. What was happening to him? I knew he was being held in the new prison in Kharkiv, not the one where Vsevolod and I had once been confined. Finally I gathered up enough strength to go there and investigate.

I was granted a visit. My first meeting with Serhii was excruciatingly painful, as all the subsequent ones would be. A prosecutor was present at all times. He would intrude into our conversation to ask questions and transform our meeting into an interrogation. He made every effort to catch Serhii in some incriminating remark and to prove Serhii was lying. The prosecutor asked me where Serhii had traveled and whom he had met, and he compared my answers with Serhii's own testimony. He did this coarsely and mockingly. At the first meeting he cynically declared: "You realize, of course, that he will never leave here a free man." Subsequently the prosecutor never missed an opportunity to reiterate that there was not a shred of hope Serhii would ever be released.

One day I came to a meeting with Serhii accompanied by his mother. All that had happened weighed very heavily on her. The prosecutor said to her: "You realize that this Tatiana was the reason for your son's arrest. It was she who pulled him into counterrevolutionary activity." Fortunately Yivha Mykolaivna knew me well and did not believe this ugly lie.

Serhii would ask me about the children. During one of our meetings he passed along a gift to them—a little house with a removable roof he had made out of his prison ration of black bread. He looked drawn and thin, but he did not complain; under the prosecutor's scrutiny he couldn't very well have done so even if had he wanted to. But I noticed that his hands trembled and that he was trying to keep them still.

Serhii came to one of our meetings without his glasses. It was strange to see him without them. He was very nearsighted and had worn glasses since childhood—without them he could barely see two steps ahead of him. And now suddenly he had no glasses. Alarmed, I asked him where his glasses were. Looking at me strangely, he replied: "Yes, I have no glasses now. I no longer need them." His reply frightened me so much that I did not dare ask any other question.



*The last photo of Tatiana and Serhii Pylypenko (winter 1933)*

Another exchange of this sort with Serhii makes me shudder even now. One day I brought him a package with some underclothes and soap. As he took it, Serhii held out a rolled-up towel and said, "Please wash this." Taking the towel, I noticed with surprise that the towel was not one of his and that a piece was missing, as if someone had ripped it out with his teeth. When I asked Serhii about it, he became morose and said, "Don't ever ask me about that." These words were so terrifying that I felt chilled to the bone. For a long time afterward I imagined horrible things of every kind. After all, I had heard about people being beaten and tortured in prison. I kept wondering what the secret was—what had happened that was so awful it could not even be asked about.

Immediately after Serhii's arrest I was fired from my job. All the books I had been translating were taken away from me, and I did not receive payment for the translations I had already completed. I tried to find another job, but as soon as people learned I was Serhii's wife, each of my applications was turned down. If they saw me approaching on the street, many of our friends would cross to the other side out of fear of being seen with me. At other times I would be walking down

a street and hear someone's quick steps as he or she caught up with me from behind. "Please do not turn around," the person would say softly. "I'm so-and-so. I want to know what's happening with Serhii Volodymyrovych. I'll pass you in a second and walk ahead of you. Then please tell me." The person would pass and walk ahead of me, and in a low voice I would tell him or her whatever I knew.

## CHAPTER 30

Several months passed. In May of 1934, I and the wives of other writers who had lived in the Slovo building and had been arrested received notice that we and our children were being resettled outside Soviet Ukraine, and that we had been stripped of any right to return. We were given three days to vacate our apartments. Furthermore, we were ordered to surrender our internal passports to the police immediately. This was a death sentence, for in the Soviet state it was impossible to get a job or a residence permit without a passport. We were thunderstruck, but what could we do? We took our passports to the police station and then came back to the Slovo building to decide what to do next. The first to speak up was the wife of Andrii Richytsky, a former UPSR member who had held an important position in the Communist Party—as a member of the Central Committee, I believe. He had been arrested and was sentenced to be shot, but every day Mrs. Richytska came to the prison and received a note from her husband that read, “I’m still alive.” Now, as we wives contemplated what to do next, she voiced an idea: we should turn for help to the famous Russian writer Maxim Gorky. Everybody knew that Gorky had been a defender of imprisoned people, and surely the case of writers who had been arrested would be of concern to him. When all of us expressed support for the idea, Mrs. Richytska told us that she had already composed a letter to Gorky and proceeded to read it. But no one liked the letter’s tone: it enumerated all the rights that had been stripped from us, but read like a stiff business letter. Then I volunteered to write a different letter, and everyone agreed to the plan. I went home and sat down to write. I wrote in a kind of frenzy, all the while raging with indignation at the unjust treatment we had received. My letter was strongly worded and very emotive in tone. When I read it aloud to the women, they all approved of it. But only five or six of them, including Mrs. Richytska, had the courage to sign it. Now we were faced with how to get the letter to Gorky—after all, we had to leave Ukraine in just three days. I volunteered to be the one to take the letter to him, and that same day I left for Moscow by train.

In Moscow I went straight from the railroad station to the two-story house where Gorky lived. I rang the doorbell; a servant opened

the door and allowed me to enter. When I said I wished to see Aleksei Maksimovich,<sup>87</sup> I was told he wasn't seeing anyone but I could state my business to a secretary. One of Gorky's secretaries entered and I gave him the letter, explaining who I was and why I had come. He shook his head: "I don't have the right to take your letter. It has been a long time since my employer has accepted petitions involving imprisoned people. Aleksei Maksimovich has left strict instructions not to take letters with such pleas from anyone." "But this is an exception!" I said. "We're talking about the families of many writers, composers, and painters. Perhaps Aleksei Maksimovich will agree to help in some way." The secretary shrugged his shoulders and allowed me to leave the letter, saying he would show it to Gorky. I asked if I could return the next morning, for I had only two days to accomplish my mission. The secretary agreed. When I returned the next day, I was surprised at how the secretary's behavior towards me had changed—he smiled in a friendly manner and gave every sign of being sympathetic. "Fortune has smiled on you," he said. "Your letter made a great impression on Aleksei Maksimovich, and he decided to write a letter to Vyshinsky in this matter."<sup>88</sup> He asks only one thing: can you swear that everything you have written in your letter is absolutely true and that nothing has been added or changed?" I replied that I could, and indeed swore to it. The secretary then stamped the envelope he was holding with several seals and handed it to me, saying: "Here you are. Take this letter straight to the prosecutor's building. Comrade Vyshinsky will receive you."

I went directly to the prosecutor's building, on Pokrovka Street. It was encircled by a cast-iron fence. At the entrance were sentries sitting in booths, and guards patrolled the perimeter. As I approached the gate, a woman came up to me and said, "I see you're going to the prosecutor's office. May I go with you? I've come from Ukraine. My husband has been unjustly arrested and I've come to see Vyshinsky on my husband's behalf."

I thought that it might be a good thing if this woman accompanied me—if I were arrested, she could inform my family. I went up to

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<sup>87</sup> Gorky's real name was Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov.—*Eds.*

<sup>88</sup> Andrei Vyshinsky (1883–1954) was the principal prosecutor in major Soviet show trials from 1928 on. He was appointed chief prosecutor of the Russian SFSR (1931), deputy chief prosecutor (1933) and chief prosecutor (1935) of the USSR, deputy commissar and later minister (1949) and deputy minister (1953) of foreign affairs, and was also a permanent Soviet representative at the United Nations.—*Eds.*

the guard and said, "I need to see Comrade Vyshinsky." The guard retorted, "He's not in today." Then I took out my letter: "I have a letter here for Comrade Vyshinsky from Maxim Gorky." The guard took the letter, turned it over in his hands, phoned someone, and finally handed it back to me, saying, "All right, you may enter."

Both of us walked in, for the guard thought that we had come together. We were stopped four times and questioned where we were going, and each time we were told that Vyshinsky was not in. And every time Gorky's letter magically opened doors. Finally we arrived at the office of the deputy chief prosecutor of the USSR. The secretary there greeted us very coldly, but she took the letter and asked us to wait. She quickly returned and pointed to another door. "Go in there. Comrade Vyshinsky will see you immediately." We found ourselves in a huge hall. A very long table, draped in red material and covered with telephones, stood on the right. This table was obviously used for meetings: it could seat a hundred people or more.

Vyshinsky was standing in front of another long table at the back of the room. As I walked toward him across the entire length of that enormous hall, I felt his heavy gaze upon me the whole time. As I drew closer, I could see he was holding my letter to Gorky in his hands. "Was it you who wrote this letter?" he inquired sternly. "Yes," I replied. "Can you swear that everything you say in it is true? That all the names and all the events are indeed true?" And again I had to swear to the truth of the statements I had made in that letter. How odd, when I think about it now, that both these Soviet dignitaries demanded an oath from me, and that both of them accepted my "word of honor" without any further questions. Certainly Vyshinsky seemed satisfied by my "oath," for he declared, "Then return to Kharkiv. Go to the police there, and they will return all of your passports. I will call them from here. After that you must leave Ukraine. You may settle wherever you wish—except in Moscow and Leningrad, of course." He said all this in a very proper, even cordial, manner. I thanked him and turned to leave, when suddenly I heard the voice of the woman who had come with me and about whom I had completely forgotten.

"Comrade Vyshinsky," she said, "I have a private matter to discuss with you." Vyshinsky immediately scowled: "A private matter?" In the Soviet Union only public or collective matters were considered worthy of attention—private matters were of no concern to anyone, and it was obvious that this woman's declaration had irritated Vyshinsky. "What matter do you have to discuss?" he demanded.

“There is a feud of long standing between my husband”—she gave his name—“and Comrade Krainii, the prosecutor of the Ukrainian republic. Now that he holds such a high position, Comrade Krainii wants to harm my husband and has had him arrested.” On hearing this, Vyshinsky turned pale with anger and, articulating every syllable as he simultaneously pounded the table with the side of his hand, he said: “I know that many lives have been ruined by my actions. But that does not give anyone the right to say that I did what I did in my own interest, and I can say the same for Prosecutor Krainii. Get out!”

As we left the hall, I was certain the woman with me had ruined everything by angering Vyshinsky. We were barely out the door when I turned and upbraided her: “How dare you say such things! Don’t you realize you’ve ruined everything for me? You got to see Vyshinsky thanks to me, and now look what you’ve done! Caused total disaster!” The woman apologized, saying she did what she did because that was the only way she could explain to Vyshinsky why her husband had been arrested. But I was livid and barely listening. Suddenly from behind the door we heard Vyshinsky’s booming voice. He was ordering the secretary to get Krainii on the phone. We froze and continued listening, giving no thought to the possibility that someone might catch us eavesdropping, even though that would have meant the end of us. Vyshinsky was shouting at Krainii over the phone: “What mess have you created!? Do you know that Pylypenko’s wife just came to see me? She wrote to Gorky, and I received a very stern letter from him. He’s demanding you reverse your orders immediately! It’s illegal! Give them back their passports immediately! Do you hear?!” At that point I stopped listening and ran down the corridor, down the stairs, and out into the street. Only then did I pause to catch my breath. Then I went to the central post office on Gorky Street to call my mother. By that time my fellow supplicant had disappeared.

I entered one of the booths for out-of-town calls and dialed our number in Kharkiv. When Mother answered, I told her that I had just given Gorky’s letter to Vyshinsky and that Vyshinsky had ordered Krainii to return all our passports. I asked Mother to tell the other women to go to the police for their passports at once, because tomorrow was the day we were all obliged to leave Kharkiv. I told her I was on my way to the railroad station and would be home very soon.

I hung up and left the booth. It had seemed to be soundproof, so I thought I could speak freely. But as I made my way through the post

office, I suddenly heard a voice: "Citizen! Was that you who called Kharkiv just now?" When I turned around to see who was speaking, I was facing a man in civilian clothes. "Who were you talking to?" he demanded, as if he had the right to question me. Sensing who I was dealing with and struggling to maintain my composure, I replied, "I was speaking with my mother." "Then why did you mention such important people as Comrades Gorky and Vyshinsky? What was that about?" he persisted. "You obviously heard everything I said," I retorted. "I went to see Comrade Gorky, and he gave me a letter to take to Comrade Vyshinsky. That's all." To my surprise the man said, "All right, you can go." As I walked away, my heart sank deeper and deeper with every step, for I was sure I was going to be seized at any moment. As I walked through the post office, as I made my way to the railway station, and even after I boarded the train for Kharkiv, I expected to be stopped and arrested. But nothing happened, and I arrived back in Ukraine.



## CHAPTER 31

As soon as I got home, Mother told me that there had been a number of calls for me from Prosecutor Krainii's office, instructing me to appear before him as soon as I arrived. But in the wake of all I had been through, I physically collapsed. My nerves were shattered, and I had developed a high fever. I was in no condition to go to the prosecutor's office even if I had wanted to. The next day a messenger came from Krainii's office. Mother told him I was ill and could not leave my bed, and he left. Mother started selling off whatever household items we still had, and I helped as much as I could. We sold everything for practically nothing—for example, a sofa that cost at least twenty-five rubles went for one ruble. There was nothing else we could do. Buyers descended on our home like vultures. An acquaintance dropped by and exclaimed, "They should be ashamed! They are giving you kopecks for these things." Then she turned to me and said, "Don't sell this sugar bowl to anyone else. Tell me the highest price you're offered and I'll meet it."

I was sick for two days. On the third day a military man came and said, "Since you are so sick that you can't walk, a car has been sent for you. You must come to see Prosecutor Krainii immediately." I had no choice but to heed the order, especially since Mother and I had already managed to sell off most of our belongings. I went to Krainii's office. It was furnished in much the same way as Vyshinsky's—a long hall, with a desk at the very end. I suppose the rooms of prosecutors were furnished that way intentionally, to force visitors to walk a long way before reaching the prosecutor, making them lose confidence with every step.

Krainii was sitting behind his desk. His pale, tubercular face was camouflaged by a sardonic smile: "Do you believe I am returning the passports because you went to see Comrades Gorky and Vyshinsky? I want you to know that had no significance at all. I am doing this of my own free will." I remained silent. After all, how could I admit I had overheard Vyshinsky yelling at him? I asked where I could get my passport, because when I had gone to the police they had refused to give it to me. "Yes, they refused, on my orders," replied Krainii. "I decided to return your passport personally," and with these words he handed me my passport. "You may go. But remember: when you find a place to live, you must write and give me your address so that

I can inform you about your husband's sentence." I took the passport and left.

We left Kharkiv the following day. Mother and the children went to Aliosha's in Kyiv, while I, on the advice of friends, went to Kalinin to look for a place for us to live. "Kalinin is a rather large industrial town," my friends had said. "The old Morozov textile factories, a train factory, and a good teacher's college—the best one in tsarist times—are located there. You'll easily find a factory job, and in time your daughters will be able to attend the college." But I had my own reasons for moving to Kalinin: the city was located between Moscow and Leningrad, and when my girls grew up they could attend the university of one city or the other. And, generally, the idea of being within easy reach of the Soviet capital was attractive.

When I arrived in Kalinin, I promptly found lodgings with a worker's family. I didn't really have a room, but a corner in one separated from the rest of the dwelling by a curtain. I went to the police to register my place of residence. A short time later I found other lodgings, this time not in the factory district but closer to the center, and again I registered with the police. Finally I moved yet again and registered a third time. These three moves took place in the course of two or three months. In April I decided not to wait until I found a permanent residence to write to Krainii, and I asked him to send me news of my husband's sentence to a post-office box. May and June went by, and finally in July I got a letter from Krainii's secretary. It informed me that I would have to report to the local prosecutor to find out what sentence Serhii had received. When I went to the Kalinin prosecutor's building, I was met by screams of "Why haven't you registered with the police?!" I became angry: "What do you mean? I moved three times, and each time I registered. You can check for yourself."

It turned out that someone in Krainii's office in Kharkiv had reprimanded the officials in Kalinin for failing to keep track of me and my place of residence and for not informing Krainii of my whereabouts. Naturally Kalinin's prosecutor and the police were angry with me for being the unwitting cause of this unpleasantness. I listened to all this without another word, and then I asked to be told my husband's sentence.

The prosecutor shuffled papers until he finally pulled out a sheet and started reading it aloud: "Sentenced to execution by firing squad. The sentence has been carried out." All I was able to say was,

“When?” He replied: “It doesn’t say.” Then I knew something was wrong. The authorities always gave the date when a sentence was carried out. It was clear to me that this was a lie and that it was Krainii’s doing.<sup>89</sup> I knew of several cases where relatives had been told that their loved one who had been arrested had been executed and the sentence had been carried out, but no date was specified: later it turned out this was not true, and the person had not been executed but sent to a concentration camp.

I decided to go to Moscow to appeal for help to a committee headed by Ekaterina Peshkova, Gorky’s wife, that provided aid to political prisoners. Its numerous lawyers worked on cases of people who had been arrested but about whom no other information was available. I gave the committee the information I had received from Krainii’s office about Serhii’s sentence, and it began investigating. After a time I was told the committee was unable to get any other information. “There’s something strange in your husband’s case,” I was told. “When we called Kharkiv, they confirmed your husband had been shot, but still it’s not entirely certain. It’s not the usual state of affairs.”

I returned to Kalinin. There, in the autumn when school started, I found a job as a typist at the teacher’s college and my mother brought my daughters to Kalinin. Long, difficult, and joyless days went by, one bleak day after another. My heart was desolate. At times I was at the point of committing suicide, and if it hadn’t been for the children, perhaps I would have. But the girls were totally dependent on me now, and I resolved to devote my life to them.

A year passed, and one day I unexpectedly received a letter from Serhii’s sister Liudmyla. She wrote very excitedly that there was word Serhii had not been executed and was still alive. During a train trip from Poltava to Kyiv, one of Serhii’s brothers, Yurii, had struck up a conversation with a fellow traveler when they were alone in their compartment and could speak freely. The other man turned out to be a member of the State Banduryst Kapelle. He told Yurii his ensemble was returning from an unusual tour—it had performed concerts beyond the Arctic Circle in special small camps holding twenty to thirty prisoners. The families of these prisoners had been told that they had been executed, but they were still alive and were living in

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<sup>89</sup> Krainii (1889–1943), who had worked for the Cheka from 1917 to 1921 and been a GPU and NKVD prosecutor since 1923, later fell into disfavor. He was arrested in August 1937 and imprisoned in a concentration camp in Kazakhstan.—*Eds.*

complete isolation. Yurii asked the banduryst if he had seen the writer Serhii Pylypenko. The man became excited. "*Papasha?* Of course I saw him. I remember him well from Kharkiv. When we used to come and sing at Ostap Vyshnia's place, Serhii Volodymyrovych would join in, singing in his pleasant baritone. Yes, I saw him there."

When I read Liudmyla's letter, I was beside myself—could it be true that Serhii was still alive? Again I got the wild idea of saving him somehow. I traveled to Moscow and turned to Peshkova's committee for help once again. But what could I tell them? I dared not repeat what the banduryst had said—no one would believe me, and besides, anything I said would put him in danger. Moreover, I was not completely sure the information was true. So I only asked the committee to inquire again if there was any news about Serhii. It checked again, called Kharkiv, and received the same reply—"Executed without a trial." After that, I was convinced there was nothing else I could do. As I returned to Kalinin, the words of a Russian song I had once heard kept ringing in my head:

It's so simple and so plain  
And it has been shown—  
You can't bring back again  
What is lost and gone.

## EPILOGUE

Serhii was posthumously rehabilitated in 1957. Soviet newspaper accounts said he had died in 1941 or 1943.<sup>90</sup> One even said he died in 1951. Are the official communiques to be believed? Whatever the answer, the name of the “unforgettable” Serhii Pylypenko was mentioned again in Soviet Ukrainian publications from time to time, and several commemorative events were held to honor his memory. Also, as I have already mentioned, a small collection of his fables and stories was published in 1963.<sup>91</sup>

Our daughter Mirtala, a sculptor and a poet, created a bronze bust of Serhii. In 1970, for an evening in Serhii’s honor held in Writers’ Union building in Kyiv, I had the sculpture brought there. It was put in a place of honor among likenesses of his old friends. I left the bust with the Writers’ Union as a gift, and it remained there for twenty years. Today it stands in the Museum of Literature<sup>92</sup> in Kyiv, in a room dedicated to Pluh and its members.<sup>93</sup>

In 1992, a year after Ukraine gained independence, a small but to me priceless book of reminiscences of Serhii by his relatives, friends, and colleagues was published in Kyiv.<sup>94</sup> My memoirs were published in Ukraine that same year.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Soviet encyclopedias and literary reference books published in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s state Pylypenko died on 3 March or 11 July 1943, but do not state where and do not mention his imprisonment.—*Eds.*

<sup>91</sup> We now know that after Pylypenko was arrested on 29 November 1933, Soviet state security (the OGPU) accused him of belonging to “a Ukrainian counterrevolutionary organization—the Ukrainian Military Organization national bloc, which aspired to overthrow Soviet rule in Ukraine by means of an armed uprising,” and of “personally head[ing] a terrorist triumvirate that organized an attempt to assassinate the head of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, Comrade [Vlas] Chubar.” On 11 December 1933, Pylypenko “admitted” his guilt to his interrogators, and on 3 March 1934 the OGPU Collegium in Ukraine ordered his execution. Nonetheless, researchers have been unable to find a document stating when Pylypenko died. See O. Mukomela and M. Savka, “Pylypenko, Serhii Volodymyrovych,” in *Ukrainska zhurnalistyka v imenakh: Materialy do entsyklopedychnoho slovnyka*, vol. [vypusk] 4, ed. M. M. Romaniuk (Lviv, 1997), 216. It may be assumed that the OGPU murdered Pylypenko on or soon after 3 March 1934.—*Eds.*

<sup>92</sup> The museum opened in 1986.—*Eds.*

<sup>93</sup> A small memorial museum dedicated to Pylypenko was opened in 1996 at the Kharkiv State Academy of Municipal Administration. It sponsors an annual program in Serhii’s honor and publishes the miscellany *Pylypenkivskiyi zoshyt* (The Pylypenko Notebook).—*Eds.*

<sup>94</sup> *Pro Serhiiia Pylypenka: Spohady suchasnykiv*, comp., with an afterword, by O. H. Mukomela, ed. O. H. Musiienko (Kyiv, 1992).

<sup>95</sup> *Nevidstupne mynule* (Kyiv and New York, 1992), the original, Ukrainian version of *The Ever-Present Past*.

*Bust of Serhii Pylypenko  
by his daughter Mirtala*



*Bust of Tatiana Kardinalowska  
by her daughter Mirtala*

One of Mirtala's earliest Ukrainian poems was dedicated to Serhii. It also speaks for me:

### For My Father

Let my voice pierce  
through time, land, and sea—  
I bring you my remembrance,  
my love, my anguish, my sorrow.

You left  
not having spoken  
to the end.  
You were cut off  
in mid-word.  
Your life  
was pushed  
down a steep precipice,  
as though  
it were not needed.

In the indifferent Siberian snow  
you came to rest, by fate forgotten.  
But I keep you alive  
in my sorrow,  
which tears have not washed away.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The Ukrainian version of this poem was published in Mirtala Kardynalovska [Bentov], *Raiduzhnyi mist* (New York, 1976), 25.

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# THE EVER-PRESENT PAST

## The Memoirs of Tatiana Kardinalowska

Tatiana Kardinalowska's *Ever-Present Past* is an exceptional and extremely readable testimony of the cataclysmic times she witnessed—the Ukrainian Revolution, the subsequent civil war and Ukrainian-Soviet War, and the first fifteen years of Bolshevik rule in Ukraine, including the periods of Ukrainization and then Stalinist terror. The daughter of a tsarist general, Kardinalowska (1899-1993) survived the terror of the 1930s and the Second World War and became a postwar refugee in the United States. Toward the end of her life she undertook to tell her story largely because of her contacts with major Ukrainian political and literary figures during the years she was the young wife of Vsevolod Holubovych, a prominent member of the Ukrainian Central Rada and the prime minister of the Ukrainian People's Republic from January to March 1918, and later of Serhii Pylypenko, the leader of the Pluh association of Ukrainian peasant writers and an influential cultural activist in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s. Like thousands of other members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, both Holubovych and Pylypenko were arrested and perished during the terror of the 1930s.

Kardinalowska's account is both authentic and moving. Her memoirs acquaint the reader with well-known Ukrainian politicians and writers. Holubovych, Pylypenko, Mykola Khvylovy, Volodymyr Sosiura, Valeriiian Polishchuk, Ostap Vyshnia, and Yurii Smolych come alive with all their individual faults and virtues. Kardinalowska's accounts of less noted persons—particularly her depiction of the NKVD interrogators and state prosecutors who persecuted Pylypenko and with whom she tried to intercede—provide some of the most revealing material in the volume. Her recollections of the Soviet Ukrainian famine-genocide of 1932-33 are among the most moving passages in the text.



Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press  
[www.utoronto.ca/cius](http://www.utoronto.ca/cius)

Design and typesetting: Creative Quotient Inc.

ISBN 1-895571-48-0

