

Mikhail Bulgakov
THE HEART OF A DOG
and other stories





Mikhail Bulgakov

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AND OTHER STORIES**

*Translated by Kathleen Cook-Horujy
and Avril Pyman*

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CONTENTS

Bulgakov's Fate: Vladimir Lakshin.

Translated by K.M. Cook-Horujy

Notes Off the Cuff. Translated by K.M.

Cook-Horujy

Diabloliad. Translated by K.M. Cook-

Horujy

The Fateful Eggs. Translated by K.M.

Cook-Horujy

The Heart of a Dog. Translated by Avril

Pyman

Commentary.

The writing of Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) is a fascinating and potent mixture of wit, fantasy and satire which cannot fail to engage the reader. This book contains some of his most important early prose. The novellas *Diaboliad*, *The Fateful Eggs* and *The Heart of a Dog* show a masterly blending of the real and the fantastic and contain in embryo many of the themes developed in his later work.

The famous scientist Professor Persikov in *The Fateful Eggs* accidentally discovers a ray of life which rapidly increases the proliferation rate, size (and viciousness) of organisms exposed to it. His discovery falls into the wrong hands, however, and soon the ray of life turns into its opposite, sowing death and destruction.

In *The Heart of a Dog* we find similar elements of science fiction combined with satire of everyday life. Here too Bulgakov raises important questions concerning the misuse of scientific discoveries and the dangers of tampering with nature. The plot centres round an experiment which turns a dog into a man.

The collection opens with *Notes Off the Cuff* which contains many fascinating details taken from Bulgakov's own life, the period immediately preceding and following his arrival in Moscow in the autumn of 1921. *Diaboliad*, a comic story with a tragic ending, based on the misunderstandings caused by two sets of doubles, also contains much that is autobiographical and evokes the flavour of Moscow in the early twenties.

Mikhail Bulgakov died fifty years ago without seeing most of his works appear in print or on the stage. Today, however, he is known and read throughout the world and his writings are translated into many languages. The epigraph which he chose for his play about Moliere is equally applicable to him: "*Rien ne manque a sa gloire, Il manquait a la noire.*"

VLADIMIR LAKSHIN

BULGAKOV'S FATE: FACT AND FICTION

Translated by K.M. Cook-Horujy
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Moscow

Twenty-five years after his death Bulgakov's face has gradually emerged from the shadows, growing more and more distinct.

From the end of the 1920s up to 1961 his prose was not published in the USSR at all. His major works mouldered in manuscript. Between 1941 and 1954 only *The Last Days (Pushkin)* and his dramatisation of *Dead Souls* were performed on the stage.

I remember clearly my student days in the early fifties, when Bulgakov was firmly considered to be a "forgotten writer" and you could not mention his name, even

among lovers of literature, without having to explain at length that apart from *The Days of the Turbins* ("Ah, yes, the Turbins..." and faces lit up with a vague glimmer of recollection) he was the author of a fair number of dramas and comedies and also wrote prose. Then suddenly within the space of about seven years the "Bulgakov phenomenon" was with us.

In 1962 his biography of Moliere written in the thirties was published.

In 1963 — the *Notes of a Young Doctor*.

In 1965 — the collection *Dramas and Comedies* and *Theatrical Novel*.

In 1966 — a volume of *Selected Prose*, including *The White Guard*.

And finally in 1966-1967 — *The Master and Margarita*.

His fame began to gain force like a hurricane, sweeping over literary circles to the general reading public and flooding across the borders of his native land to surge in a mighty wave over other countries and continents.

"Manuscripts don't burn." Bulgakov's posthumous fate confirms this unexpected aphorism, which has caught the imagination of many readers today, just as

the young Marina Tsvetayeva's prophetic insight once did —

*And for my verse, like
precious wine,
The day shall come.*

And like Pushkin's earlier still:

*For word of me shall spread
throughout great Russia...*

Writers with a great destiny know something about themselves that we do not know or dare not say about them until later. At this juncture interest arises in the figure of the creator himself, in his biography, his personality. Why do we know so little about him? Why does he grow more interesting each year?

Bulgakov's destiny has its own dramatic pattern. As is always the case from a distance and after the passage of many years, it appears to contain little that is accidental and shows a clear sense of direction, as Blok called it. The boy born on 3 (15) May, 1891 in Kiev into the family of a teacher at the Theological Academy seems to have been destined to pass

through the bitter tribulations of an age of wars and revolutions, to be hungry and poor, to become a playwright for the country's finest theatre, to know the taste of fame and persecution, thunderous applause and times of numb muteness and to die before the age of fifty, only to return to us in his books a quarter of a century later. One of the legends associated with Bulgakov's name is that although he began to write late, he immediately showed a remarkable originality and maturity. *Notes Off the Cuff* (1921-1922) created the impression of a polished writer who had somehow managed to do without a period of humble apprenticeship. Reminiscences about Bulgakov's early years enable us to make certain amendments to this view, previously shared by the author of these lines, and at the same time to examine the roots of this literary miracle. The first half of Bulgakov's life, formerly immersed in vague obscurity, can now be reconstructed more fully thanks to the published memoirs of his sister Nadezhda Afanasievna Zemskaya and his first wife Tatiana Nikolayevna Kiselgof (nee Lappa).

In the style of Bulgakov the narrator people have pointed to the vivid poetic colours of a native of the Ukrainian south, which link him with the young Gogol. Ukrainian musicality of language and Ukrainian culture undoubtedly left their mark on the work of the author of *The White Guard*. No less important for the formation of Bulgakov's style, however, are the traditions of educated Russian speech, which, as N. A. Zemsкая points out, the young Bulgakov absorbed at home, in the family circle.

Afanasy Ivanovich Bulgakov, the writer's father, was born in Orel and graduated from the Theological Academy there, following in the footsteps of his father, a village priest. His mother, Varvara Mikhailovna Pokrovskaya, was a schoolteacher from Karachev, also in Orel province, and the daughter of a cathedral archpriest. As we know, by no means the least of the talents required by a priest was the gift of fluent public speaking, of impressing his flock with well-improvised and original sermons. Nor should we ignore the fact that the traditions of this eloquent and sensitive speech grew up on the fringe of the steppes, in Orel country,

which had already given Russia the prose of such writers as Turgenev, Leskov and Bunin.

Thanks to new biographical material, including reminiscences of Bulgakov's early life, we are now discarding the illusion that the writer appeared in literature "ready-made", as Athene emerged from the head of Zeus, and gaining a fuller understanding of the traditions and influences that shaped his talent and the difficulties that its growth encountered.

We know that Bulgakov major dramas, beginning with *The Days of the Turbins*, were preceded by five fairly mediocre plays written in Vladikavkaz in 1920-1921 (*Self-Defence*, *The Turbin Brothers*, *Clay Bridegrooms*, *The Sons of the Mullah* and *The Paris Communards*) which the author destroyed (the text of one of them accidentally survived) and which he wanted to commit to oblivion. The modern scholar will hazard a guess that the importance of this "pre-drama" of Bulgakov's lies not so much in the fact that it was a means of testing and developing the devices of his future writing for the stage, as that it showed

him how one should not write. One should not write out of vanity or in a hurry, nor should one write "to order" and "on a given subject". A sense of "aesthetic shame", as Lev Tolstoy called it, for one's immature attempts is a good stimulus to achieve artistic perfection.

Something similar occurred with his early sketches and feuilletons written in 1922-1925. In relation to the stories and novels of the mature Bulgakov, they constitute a kind of "pre-prose". But to deny the importance of this early prose, even bearing in mind the author's own critical remarks, would be quite wrong.

After a short period of working in the Moscow LITO (Literary section of the People's Commissariat of Education) Bulgakov began to write for the newspaper *Nakanune* (On the Eve) which was published in Berlin, and for the Moscow *Gudok* (Whistle). He was noticeably older than the people who remember him from those years, both in terms of age and experience of life, and tended to keep aloof, so he could be observed only from a certain distance. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, which contained so many world-shaking

events and transformations, most people in the literary world had a fair share of varied and generally speaking bitter experience. In this respect also, however, Bulgakov stood out from his younger colleagues. He had been a doctor in hospitals at the front, was familiar with the remote Russian provinces, had witnessed the bloodshed of the Civil War in Kiev, taken part in skirmishes against the mountainous tribes in the Caucasus, received patients as a specialist in venereal diseases, and also managed to be an actor, compere, lecturer, dictionary compiler and engineer on a scientific and technical committee! All this, together with his reporting and other newspaper work, was deposited in his sensitive memory.

Bulgakov used to complain that his tedious newspaper work prevented him from concentrating on writing, but it cannot be said that this work did not stand him in good stead and was only harmful to his talent. Konstantin Paustovsky compared the experience of the young Bulgakov, with his feuilletons and "minor prose", to Chekhov's early days. No comparison is perfect, of course, but there

was something similar in the attitudes of these two writers to their early works.

Like Chekhov, Bulgakov wrote about his hatred of literary hackwork, but also like Chekhov he was not absolutely fair to himself and these early works. And it is not simply that Bulgakov found his literary feet, so to say, during this period, and set his literary machine in motion, which is so important for a budding writer. Nor even that this material and some of the devices for treating it were to be used later in his novels.

In Bulgakov's novels one can see a rejection of "high" literary style, of the smooth narrative. Unfettered, frank lyricism exists side by side with lively "low" elements, the language of the street and the communal flat, creating the fascinating effect of speech which is both literary and also free and colloquial. It was this resonant language and colloquial syntax that made it so natural for Bulgakov to turn to the dramatic form. A narrator and lyricist in drama, he is at the same time a dramatist in prose.

Another aspect of Bulgakov's writing is his precision of detail, his reporter's attention to time and place, which include

real dates and city topography. This also derives from his newspaper work and from his medical education and experience as a doctor. Bulgakov boldly introduced into literature things which had been considered improper or forbidden and found refined forms for doing so.

His wife, Yelena Sergejevna Bulgakova, recalled that in 1921-1925 Bulgakov kept a diary, which was later confiscated and then burnt by the author himself after the notebooks were returned to him. In this diary he painstakingly recorded, inter alia, the minutiae of everyday life: the weather, the prices in the shops, including details of what his contemporaries, the people he knew, ate, drank and wore and what form of transport they used. Later, as we know, Bulgakov stopped keeping a diary, but encouraged his wife to make at least a few simple notes every day, which he sometimes dictated himself, standing by the window and looking out into the street, while she typed them down.

He regarded himself as a partial chronicler of his age and his own fate. And knowing that the first things to be forgotten are the small details of everyday life, he tried to record these with

photographic accuracy. Does this not explain why in Bulgakov's prose, which gives full play to bold fantasy and inspired invention, we find such a palpable flavour of the period?

People who met Bulgakov in Moscow editorial offices in the twenties remember him primarily as a man of few words who seemed to be guarding something in himself, in spite of flashes of sparkling wit, and stood aloof in the company of young enthusiastic newspaper men.

In the thirties Bulgakov took refuge in the theatre as in a kind of ecological niche. There were years when he felt extremely lonely. In the absence of a response from the reading public, a writer needs at least a minimum of approval if he is not to give up writing. Of course he was warmed by the absolute faith in his talent and the support of those close to him, in particular his wife Yelena, his ardent admirer, and self-appointed biographer P. S. Popov, and a few others. Contempt and indifference dogged him in the literary world. And he himself avoided salons and clubs, referring peevishly to big literary

meetings as "flunkeys' balls". But Bulgakov was sociable by nature and, after recovering from a fit of melancholy, he would immediately go out in search of human contact.

The theatre attracted him as a concerted enterprise, a collective festival. It provided a way out of his loneliness. Among writers his slightest success aroused envy, and he felt trapped in a crossfire of spiteful glances. In spite of all the shortcomings of the acting world, the author of *Theatrical Novel* found a great deal that attracted him there.

A difficult, even dramatic relationship grew up between Bulgakov and the theatre that was dearest to him, the Moscow Art Theatre. This theatre put on a triumphant production of *The Days of the Turbins* which ran for about a thousand performances, but through no fault of its own could not stage *Flight*, and spent a long time hesitating about *Moliere*, which it interpreted quite differently from the author and which was excluded from the repertoire after six performances. The theatre tormented the playwright by endlessly finding fault with his dramatisation of *Dead Souls* when it was

being rehearsed, and Bulgakov did not live to see the first night of *Pushkin (The Last Days)*.

His conflict with the theatre's two stage-directors is well known, although Bulgakov admired Konstantin Stanislavsky's genius and on a purely personal level was eternally grateful to him for interceding on his behalf. For Stanislavsky announced that if the *Turbins* was banned, the theatre would have to be closed. (It was actually thanks to this that the play reached the stage in 1926.)

However, on the tenth anniversary of the *Turbins* Bulgakov wrote with the bitterness of a long-standing sense of injury to P. S. Popov: "Today is a special occasion for me... I sit by my ink-well and wait for the door to open and a delegation from Stanislavsky and Nemirovich to appear with a speech and a precious offering. The speech will mention all my crippled and ruined plays and list all the delights that they, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich, have given me over the last ten years in Art Theatre Passage. The precious offering will take the form of a pan of some precious metal (copper, for example) full of the very life blood which

they have drained out of me over the said ten years."

Bitter, sharp words, but it must be understood that this was a conflict between great men, people devoted to and obsessed by art, and not a matter of petty backbiting.

There is one point in Bulgakov's biography which deserves special mention, namely the role which Stalin played in his life. In Soviet literature of the thirties and forties there were few major writers in whose destiny Stalin did not play some part. Take, for example, Fadeyev and Sholokhov, Akhmatova and Mandelstam, Platonov and Pasternak. But Bulgakov's case was a special one.

From the very first performances of the *Turbins* in 1926, when Stalin applauded the actors loudly from his box, his shadow, his opinion, his word, accompanied Bulgakov invisibly, as it were, along the rest of his life path. And the paradox is that, as well as encouraging the political struggle in literature which was so harmful to Bulgakov's fate, Stalin played the part of his protector, his secret patron.

This duality is evident already in Stalin's letter of 2 February, 1929 to the

playwright Vladimir Bill-Belotserkovsky in which, while classifying Bulgakov's play as "unproletarian" beyond a shadow of doubt, Stalin defends it against the extreme criticism of RAPP (Russian Proletarian Writers' Association): "Of course, it is very easy to 'criticise' unproletarian literature and demand that it be banned. But what is easiest should not be seen as what is best... As for the play itself, *The Days of the Turbins* is not that bad, because it does more good than harm. Do not forget that the main impression which the audience retains from this play is favourable to the Bolsheviks..." Equally ambivalent were his remarks about *Flight*, which he appears to have read in the manuscript: on the one hand, it was an "anti-Soviet phenomenon", but on the other "...I would have nothing against a production of *Flight*, if Bulgakov were to add to his eight dreams one or two more in which he showed the inner mainsprings of the Civil War in the USSR..."

Bulgakov did not take this advice, and *Flight* did not reach the stage. At the same time, however, the *Turbins* found itself for a while protected by the most high against

attacks by the "frenzied zealots" of proletarian orthodoxy.

From records of Moscow Art Theatre productions we know that Stalin went to *The Days of the Turbins* no less than fifteen times. He also saw *Zoika's Flat* at the Vakhtangov Theatre eight times. He told the actor N. P. Khmelyov who played the older Turbin brother: "You play Alexei well. I even see your moustache in my dreams, can't forget it." And in another conversation he drew a comparison between the playwright Nikolai Erdman and Bulgakov in favour of the latter: "...He delves right down ... to the very core."

We can assume that what Stalin liked about Bulgakov was his forthrightness, his unreserved frankness. Ever suspicious and afraid of being stabbed in the back, Stalin appreciated Bulgakov's lack of evasiveness and his sense of his own dignity, which were apparent, inter alia, in his letters to the government. Bulgakov wrote to Stalin on several occasions. To his first letter of 3 September, 1929, which was delivered via the head of the Main Arts Board, A. I. Svidersky and requested permission for him and his wife to leave the country, he received no reply. Perhaps

the letter did not reach its destination. The second letter, "To the Government of the USSR", was written in a moment of despair, when all Bulgakov's plays had been banned and he had lost hope not only of being published, but of getting any work whatsoever. This letter, written in March 1930, read in part as follows:

"After all my works had been banned, among the many citizens to whom I am known as a writer, voices began to be raised all offering me the same advice:

"to write a 'communist' play ..., and in addition, to send the Government of the USSR a letter of repentance, containing a renunciation of the views which I have expressed earlier in my literary works and assurances that from now onwards I will work as a fellow-travelling writer devoted to the idea of communism.

"The aim: to save myself from persecution, poverty and inevitable ruin.

"I have not taken this advice. It is unlikely that I could have presented myself to the Government of the USSR in a favourable light by writing a false letter which was both an unprincipled and naive political stratagem. I have not even attempted to write a communist play,

knowing full well that I would not be able to do so.

"The growing desire to put an end to my sufferings as a writer compels me to address an honest letter to the Government of the USSR."

Quoting numerous examples of unfair and destructive criticism of his plays in the press, Bulgakov continues:

"I have not whispered my views surreptitiously in corners. I expressed them in a dramatic pamphlet and produced that pamphlet on the stage. The Soviet press, in defence of the Repertory Committee, has written that *The Crimson Island* is a vicious satire on the Revolution. That is unfair rubbish. There is no satire on the Revolution in the play for many reasons, of which for lack of space I shall mention only one: by virtue of the extremely grandiose nature of the Revolution it is IMPOSSIBLE to write a satire of it. The pamphlet is not a satire, and the Repertory Committee is not the Revolution... It is my duty as a writer to fight against censorship, whatever form it may take and under whatever regime, just as it is to urge the freedom of the press. I am an ardent admirer of this freedom and

believe that any writer who tries to argue that he does not need it is like a fish announcing publicly that it has no need of water.

"This is one of the features of my writing... But this first feature is linked with all the others which appear in my satirical tales: the black and mystical colours (I AM A MYSTICAL WRITER), in which the countless deformities of our daily life are portrayed, the poison in which my language is steeped, the profound scepticism concerning the revolutionary process taking place in my backward country, and the cherished Great Evolution with which I contrast it, but, most important, the depiction of my people's terrible features, those features which long before the Revolution aroused the deepest suffering in my teacher, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin.

"It goes without saying that the press of the USSR has never thought of paying serious attention to all this, for it is far too busy branding M. Bulgakov's satire as "SLANDER" without rhyme or reason...

"And, finally, my last features in the ruined plays *The Days of the Turbins* and *Flight* and the novel *The White Guard*:

resolute portrayal of the Russian intelligentsia as the finest stratum in our country. In particular, the portrayal of the family from the intelligentsia-nobility, whose inevitable historical fate was to be cast into the camp of the White Guard during the Civil War, in the traditions of *War and Peace*. Such a portrayal is perfectly natural for a writer who was born into the intelligentsia.

"But portrayals of this kind mean in the USSR that their author, together with his characters, is labelled — in spite of his great efforts TO STAND IMPARTIALLY ABOVE REDS AND WHITES — as a White Guard and an enemy, and after this, as anyone will appreciate, can regard himself as finished in the USSR.

"...Not only my past works have perished, but my present and future ones. I personally, with my own hands, threw into the stove the draft of a novel about the devil, the draft of a comedy and the beginning of my second novel, *The Theatre*.

"All my things are hopeless.

"I request the Soviet Government to take into account that I am not a political activist, but a writer, that I have given all

the fruits of my labours to the Soviet stage...

"I ask it to be taken into account that for me not being allowed to write is tantamount to being buried alive.

"I appeal to the humanity of Soviet power and request that I, a writer who cannot be of use in his native land, be magnanimously permitted to leave.

"If what I have written is not convincing and I am condemned to a lifetime of silence in the USSR, I request the Soviet Government to give me work in my special field and find me a permanent post as a stage-director in a theatre...

"I offer the USSR in complete honesty, without the slightest intention to commit sabotage, a specialist director and actor, who undertakes to put on any play to the best of his ability, from Shakespeare right up to the plays of the present day...

"If I am not appointed a director, I ask to be given a permanent post as an extra. If I can't be an extra, I ask for a job as a stage-hand.

"If this is impossible I request the Soviet Government to do with me what it finds fit, but to do something, because I, a dramatist who has written five plays and is

known in the USSR and abroad, am at the PRESENT MOMENT faced with poverty, the street and ruin." (Archives of M. A. Bulgakov.)

On 28 March, 1930 this letter was sent to seven different people, and the copy intended for Stalin was handed to him personally by Ya. L. Leontiev, then deputy director of the Bolshoi Theatre. A reply, one only, was received after some delay. It took the form of a telephone call from Stalin on 18 April, 1930, the content of which was recorded by Bulgakov's wife Yelena from his own account.

"We have received your letter. And read it with the comrades. You will have a favourable answer to it. But perhaps we should let you go abroad, eh? Are you really so sick of us?"

"I have thought a great deal recently about whether a Russian writer can live outside his country, and it seems to me that he can't."

"You are right. That's what I think too. Where do you want to work? In the Art Theatre?"

"Yes, I would like to. But I asked about it, and I was refused."

"Well, you send an application there. I think they will agree."

This conversation prompted Bulgakov to make his final choice, to work in his own land and for his own country, putting an end to his doubts and hesitation.

If one is not going to gloss over the complexities in Bulgakov's biography and views, and one should not do this if only out of respect for his own lack of subterfuge, it must be said that the temptation to emigrate arose several times along the tortuous path of his dramatic life. In 1921 in Vladikavkaz Bulgakov was almost on the point of leaving for Tiflis with his distant relative N. N. Pokrovsky, in order to go on from there across the open frontier to Istanbul, in which case he would have followed in the footsteps of the characters in his play *Flight*. And in 1929, at the height of the newspaper campaign against him, he was still wondering whether to leave the country, forced by circumstances as Evgeny Zamyatin was in 1932. (Bulgakov was friendly with Zamyatin and saw him off on his long journey from the platform of Byelorussia Station.)

But in 1930, after this famous telephone call, he seems to have decided his fate once and for all, and Stalin could not fail to appreciate this. In 1932, talking in the interval of the play *The Hot Heart* to the directors of the Art Theatre, Stalin enquired why the *Turbins* was not on, and the play was hastily put back in the repertoire.

Gradually in the minds of Bulgakov and those around him, people close to him, the legend grew up of Stalin's special patronage. His wife Yelena, who in many respects reflected very closely the opinions and beliefs of her husband, insisted that Stalin "was well disposed to Misha" and she tried to see him as Bulgakov's secret well-wisher.

The creator of Woland in *The Master and Margarita* reflected a great deal on the fact that a force which "perpetually wants evil" could also perform "good". And in his book and play about Moliere Bulgakov was inclined, while detesting the "cabal of hypocrites", to make an exception for Louis XIV, Moliere's patron (naturally this was a question not of direct allegories or allusions, but of the author's mood and train of thought).

It is important to bear all this in mind, because biographers are not agreed on the question of Bulgakov's last work, the play *Batum* (1939): was it written in response to a direct commission and under pressure from the theatre, as S. A. Yermolinsky believes, or did the author himself conceive the idea of writing it, and the Art Theatre merely encouraged him (this viewpoint is developed by V. Ya. Vilenkin) ?

Yelena Bulgakova's notes show beyond all doubt that Bulgakov conceived the idea of writing a play about the young Stalin at the beginning of February 1936, when *Moliere* was about to be staged. The events of the following weeks with a devastating article in *Pravda*, the removal of *Moliere* from the poster and the stopping of rehearsals for *Ivan Vasilievich* at the Satire Theatre again drew Bulgakov away from the stage and directed his thoughts elsewhere.

Stalin's sixtieth birthday was due to be celebrated in great style during December 1939, however, and the theatre planned to put on the play for this event. It was written by the summer of 1939 and was warmly received both by the theatre's

directors and by Bulgakov's own close circle. Reading it through now, one can see clearly that, in spite of a number of brilliantly written scenes, even Bulgakov's talent was unable to cope with this false task.

Rehearsals of the play were suddenly stopped. It became known that Stalin, who was highly sensitive to all nuances in the treatment of his biography, disapproved of the play. "All children and all young people are alike. There is no need to put on a play about the young Stalin." His words were conveyed to Stanislavsky in this form. What was regarded as a sign of modesty, may have been reluctance to attract attention to his youth spent in a theological seminary. But be that as it may, for Bulgakov this was the final blow before his fatal illness.

On 8 February, 1940 the Moscow Art Theatre artistes, Vasily Kachalov, Nikolai Khmelyov and Alia Tarasova sent a letter to Stalin's secretary, A. N. Poskrebyshev, requesting him to inform Stalin that Bulgakov was gravely ill and hinting that a mark of attention, a telephone call from Stalin, would raise his spirits. It is easy to detect in this the hand of Bulgakov's wife,

who remembered how important the famous phone call of 1930 had been for Bulgakov. But, as Yermolinsky writes in his notes, the call from Stalin's secretariat did not arrive until the morning after the writer's death.

The legend about Stalin's special, exceptional concern for the persecuted writer was a kind of self-hypnosis and at the same time a means of self-defence. It is interesting, however, that Bulgakov, whom Stalin never met in person and with whom he spoke only once on the telephone, really did come within the orbit of his attention. Having watched *The Days of the Turbins* on the stage nearly twenty times, he must have remembered each phrase, each intonation in the play. So it is hardly surprising that in his famous radio broadcast to the Soviet people on 3 July, 1941, Stalin, searching for words which would go straight to the heart of each and everyone, consciously or unconsciously used the phraseology and intonation of Alexei Turbin's monologue on the staircase at the gymnasium: "To you I turn, my friends..."

"They must know... They must know," anxious about the fate of his unpublished

books, Bulgakov whispered on his death-bed to his wife Yelena as she bent over him.

One of the main ideas of the novel *The Master and Margarita* is that of justice, which inevitably triumphs in the life of the spirit, although sometimes belatedly and beyond the bourn of the creator's physical death.

Over the years that have passed since the day when a small crowd of literary and theatre people accompanied the urn with Bulgakov's ashes to Novodevichy Cemetery, he has been advancing swiftly towards us. His former loneliness has turned into widespread interest in him from large numbers of people in our country and throughout the world. The devastating articles and slanderous reviews of years long past have been replaced, as if in recompense, by admiring monographs and enthusiastic studies. The growing popularity of his books, which are very "personal" and seem to talk to the reader directly, has attracted attention to the author himself, his biography and his fate. It is now quite clear that this is not merely a passing fad, a short-lived sensation.

Both coal and metal shine brightly when heated. But coal burns out and turns into grey ashes, whereas metal hardens slowly until it takes on permanent form. Likewise before the eyes of our generation the fame of Mikhail Bulgakov has hardened and taken root in time everlasting. He is dear to people as a writer and interesting as a man who retained throughout the vicissitudes of fate, the dignity and courage of a truly creative personality.

NOTES OFF THE CUFF

*To the long-suffering writers of Russia
who rove o'er land and sea*

PART ONE

1

An editor of the deceased *Russkoye Slovo*, in gaiters and with a cigar, snatched the telegram off the desk and read it through swiftly from beginning to end with a practised professional eye.

One hand automatically jotted down "two columns", while the lips unexpectedly rounded and whistled "Phew-ew!"

He paused for a moment. Then abruptly tore off a sheet of notepaper and scribbled:

*Tiflis is forty miles away,
Who can sell me a car today?*

"Short feuilleton" at the top, "Long primer" at the side and "Rook" at the bottom.

Suddenly he muttered like Dickens's Jingle:

"Uh-huh! Uh-huh! I guessed as much. Might have to beat it. Never mind! I've got six thousand lire in Rome. *Credito Italiano*. What? Six... And actually I'm an Italian officer! Yes, sir! *Finita la comedia!*"

And with another whistle he pushed back his cap and hurried out of the door — telegram and feuilleton in hand.

"Stop!" I yelled, coming to my senses. "Stop! What *Credito? Finita? What? Catastrophe?*"

But he had vanished.

I was about to run after him... but then shrugged my shoulders, frowned limply and sank onto the divan. What was bothering me? The *Credito*, whatever it was? The commotion? No, it wasn't that... Ah, yes. My head! It was aching like billyho. The second day running. First a strange chill ran down my spine. Then just the opposite: my body felt all hot and dry, and my forehead unpleasantly clammy. My temples were throbbing. I'd caught cold.

That wretched February fog! But I mustn't get ill! I just mustn't get ill!

*

Everything's unfamiliar, but I must have got used to it over the last six weeks. How good it feels after the fog. At home. The cliff and the sea in the golden frame. The books in the bookcase. The carpet on the sofa is too rough for comfort and the cushion's terribly hard. But I wouldn't get up for anything. I feel so lazy! Can't be bothered to lift a hand. I've spent half an hour thinking I must stretch it out to get the aspirin powder on the chair, but even that's too much trouble.

"Pop the thermometer in, Misha!"

"Oh, I couldn't bear to! I haven't got a temperature anyway!"

*

Oh, my goodness, my goodness, my goodness! Thirty-eight point nine ... could it be typhus? No, of course not. Where from? But what if it *is* typhus! Anything you like, only not now! That would be awful. It's nothing. Hypochondria. I've just got a

cold. Influenza. I'll take an aspirin tonight and be as right as rain tomorrow!

*

Thirty-nine point five!

"It isn't typhus, is it, Doctor? Not typhus? I think it's just influenza? Eh? The fog..."

"Yes, yes... The fog. Breathe in, please. Deeper... That's it!"

"I've got to attend to some very important business, Doctor. It won't take long. Can I?"

"Are you crazy!"

*

The cliff, the sea, and the sofa are blazing hot. The pillow's already hot, as soon as I turn it over and put my head on it. Never mind. I'll stick it out one more night, and leave tomorrow. Leave for good if necessary! For good! Mustn't let this get me down! It's only influenza. Nice to be ill and have a temperature. Forget about everything. Lie in bed and rest. Only not now, for Heaven's sake! There's no time for reading in this diabolical chaos... How

I long for... What do I long for? Yes. Forests and mountains. Only not these damned Caucasian ones. But ours, far away... Melnikov-Pechersky ⁽¹⁾. A hermitage in the snow. A light in the window and a nice hot steam bath. Yes, forests and mountains. I'd give half my kingdom to be sweating in a steam bath. That would do the trick—Then dive into the snow with nothing on... Forests! Dense pine forests. Good for making ships. Peter in a green caftan ⁽²⁾ chopping down trees. What a fine-sounding stately word — inasmuch! In-as-much! Forests, ravines, carpets of pine-needles, a snow-covered hermitage. And a choir of nuns singing in sweet harmony:

Victorious leader of triumphant hosts!

Hang on! What nuns! You won't find any nuns there. Where are they now, nuns? Black, white, slender Vasnetsovian ⁽³⁾ nuns?

"Larissa Leontievna, where are the nuns?"

"He's delirious, poor thing!"

"I certainly am not. Not in the slightest. Nuns! What's the matter, don't you

understand? Give me that book. Over there, on the third shelf. Melnikov-Pechersky..."

"You mustn't read, Misha, dear!"

"What's that? Why not? I'll be up tomorrow! And go to see Petrov. You don't understand. They'll leave me behind! Leave me behind!"

"Oh, alright then. Get up if you must! Here's the book."

"Lovely book. With that old, familiar smell. But the lines are hopping about all over the place. I remember. They were forging banknotes at the hermitage, Romanov banknotes. What an awful memory I've got. It was notes, not nuns.

Sasha basher, tra-la-la!

"Larissa Leontievna... Larochka! Do you like forests and mountains? I'll get me to a monastery. Yes, I will! Some remote hermitage. With forest all round and birds twittering, and not a living soul... I'm sick of this idiotic war! I'll go to Paris and write a novel first, then get me to a monastery. Only tell Anna to wake me up at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. I was supposed

to see him yesterday. Can't you understand?"

"Yes, yes, I understand. Only you must keep quiet."

*

Fog. Hot reddish fog. Forests, more forests ... and water trickling slowly from a crevice in a green rock. A taut crystal thread. Must crawl up and have a good drink. That'll do the trick. It's hard crawling over pine-needles, they're all sticky and prickly. I open my eyes, and there's just a sheet, no pine-needles.

"For heaven's sake! What's the matter with this sheet. Have they sprinkled sand on it? I'm thirsty!"

"Yes, yes, I won't be a moment."

"Ugh, it's so warm, what horrid water."

"...Forty point five again! How dreadful!"

"...an ice-bag..."

"Doctor! I insist on being sent to Paris rightaway! I don't want to stay in Russia any longer... If you won't send me, kindly hand me my Brow... Browning! Larochk-a-a! Go and fetch it!"

"Yes, yes, we'll fetch it. Only don't get excited!"

*

Darkness. A ray of light. Darkness ... a ray of light. I can't remember for the life of me...

My head! My head! There are no nuns or triumphant hosts, just demons trumpeting and tearing at my skull with their red-hot hooks. My he-ad!

*

A ray of light... darkness. A ray ... no, it's gone. Nothing awful, just couldn't care less. Head not aching. Darkness and forty-one point one...

2. WHAT WE GONNA DO?

The novelist Yuri Slyozkin ⁽⁴⁾ sat in a posh armchair. Everything in the room was posh, so Yuri looked excruciatingly out of place there. His head shaven by typhus was just like that boy's head described by Mark Twain (a pepper-

sprinkled egg). A moth-eaten army jacket with a hole under the arm. Grey puttees, one longer than the other, on his legs. A two-kopeck pipe in his mouth. And fear leap-frogging with anguish in his eyes.

"What's going to become of us?" I asked, hardly recognising my own voice. After the second bout it was weak, reedy and cracked.

"What's that?"

I turned round in bed and looked wretchedly out of the window, where still naked branches were waving slowly. The exquisite sky touched faintly by the fading sunset gave no reply, of course. Slyozkin was silent too, nodding his shorn head. In the next room a dress rustled and a woman's voice whispered:

"The Ingushes will raid the town tonight..."

Slyozkin twitched in his chair and corrected her:

"The Ossetians, not the Ingushes. And tomorrow morning, not tonight."

The flasks behind the wall responded nervously.

"The Ossetians! Oh, my God! That's terrible!"

"What difference does it make?"

"What difference? Ah, you don't know the local customs. When the Ingushes raid, they raid. But when the Ossetians raid, they kill too."

"Will they kill everyone?" Slyozkin asked in a matter-of-fact voice, puffing on his foul-smelling pipe.

"Goodness me! What a strange person you are! Not everyone... Just those who... Oh, dear, what's the matter with me! I forgot. We're disturbing the patient."

A dress rustled. The lady of the house bent over me.

"I am not dis-turb-ed..."

"Nonsense," Slyozkin retorted sharply. "Nonsense!"

"What's nonsense?"

"All that about Ossetians and the rest of it. Rubbish." He puffed out a cloud of smoke.

My exhausted brain suddenly sang out:
Mamma! Mamma! What we gonna do?

"And what precisely are we going to do?"

Slyozkin grinned with his right cheek only, thought for a moment and had a burst of inspiration.

"We'll open an ASS, an Arts Sub-Section!"

"What on earth is that?"

"What?"

"A sob-sexy on?"

"No, a sub-section!"

"Sub?"

"That's right."

"Why sub?"

"Er ... well, you see," he shifted around, "there's a Sec. of Ed. or Ed. Sec. Sec. Get it? And this is a sub-section. Sub. Get it?"

"Sec. of Ed. Pin-head. Barbousse. Screw loose."

The lady of the house let fly.

"Don't talk to him, for goodness sake! He'll get delirious again..."

"Nonsense!" said Yuri sternly. "Nonsense! And all those Mingrelians and Imere... What are they called? Circassians. They're plain stupid!"

"Why?"

"They just rush about. Shooting. At the moon. They won't rob anyone."

"But what'll happen? To us?"

"Nothing. We'll open up..."

"The Arts?"

"That's right. The whole lot. Fine Arts. Photo. Lit. and Dram."

"I don't get it."

"Please don't talk, Misha dear! The doctor..."

"Tell you later! It'll be alright. I've been in charge before. What do we care? We're a-political. We're Art!"

"And how shall we live?"

"We'll hide our money behind the carpet."

"What carpet?"

"In the town where I was in charge, we had a carpet on the wall. And when we got paid, my wife and I used to hide it behind the carpet. They were anxious times. But we ate. Ate well. Special rations."

"What about me?"

"You'll be ASS Lit. head. Yes."

"What head?"

"Please, Misha. I beg you!"

3.

THE ICON-LAMP

The night swims. Pitch black. Can't sleep. The icon-lamp flickers anxiously. Shots in the distance. My brain's on fire.

Everything's misty.

Mamma! Mamma! What we gonna do?

Slyozkin's building something. Piling something up. Fine Arts. Photo. Lit. Dram. Scram. Sam. It's photographic boxes. Why? ASS Lit. for the writers. Poor blighters. Dram. Ham. Ingushes gallop about on horseback, eyes flashing. Pinching the boxes. Dreadful racket. Shooting at the moon. Nurse injects my thigh with camphor. A third bout!

"Help! What'll happen? Let me go! I must get out..."

"Be quiet, Misha dear. Be quiet!"

After the morphine the Ingushes disappear. The velvety night sways. The icon-lamp casts its divine light and sings in a crystal voice:

Ma-amma! Ma-amma!

4.

AND HERE IT IS—THE SUB-SECTION

Sun. Clouds of dust behind carriage wheels. People walking in and out of an

echoing building. A room on the fourth floor. Two cupboards with broken doors, some rickety tables. Three young ladies with violet lips bang away loudly at typewriters, stopping now and then to have a smoke.

In the very centre a writer snatched from death's jaws fashions a sub-section out of the chaos. Fine. Dram. Actors' bluish faces keep pestering him. Asking for money.

After the typhus a rocking swell. Dizziness and nausea. But I'm in charge. ASS Lit. head. Getting to know the ropes.

"ASS head. Sec. of Ed. Lit. Coll."

A man walks between the tables. In a grey army jacket and monstrous riding-breeches. He plunges into groups that fall apart. Like a torpedo boat ploughing the waves. Everyone quails under his glance. Except the young ladies. They're not afraid of anything.

He comes up. Eyes boring into me, he plucks out my heart, places it in his palm and scrutinises it carefully. But it is as clear as crystal.

He puts it back and smiles graciously.

"ASS Lit. head?"

"That's it."

He goes on his way. Seems a good chap.
Only what's he doing here? Doesn't look
like Dram. And certainly not like Lit.

A poetess arrives. Black beret. Skirt
buttoned down the side and stockings
falling down. She's brought a poem.

*Dee, dee, deep down,
In my heart
Beats a dynamo-machine.
Dee, dee, deep down.*

Not a bad poem. We'll have it ... you
know ... what do they call it ... recited at a
concert.

The poetess looks pleased. Not a bad
young lassy. But why doesn't she hitch up
her stockings?

GENTLEMAN-OF-THE-BEDCHAMBER
PUSHKIN

Everything was fine. Everything was dandy.

And then I got the push all because of Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich, God rest his soul!

It was like this.

A workshop of local poets nested in the office, under the spiral staircase. A young man in blue student trousers with a dynamo-machine in his heart, a dodderly old man who started writing poems at the age of fifty-nine, and a few others.

In sidled a dare-devil with an aquiline nose and a big revolver in his belt. He was the first to thrust his ink-intoxicated pen into the hearts of those who had escaped the knife and turned up for old time's sake at the track—the former Summer Theatre. To the incessant booming of the muddy Terek, he cursed lilac and thundered:

*You've had enough songs about
moonlight and*

sweet things.
Now I'll sing you one about
emergency meetings.

It was most impressive!

Then another one read a paper on Gogol and Dostoyevsky wiping them both off the face of the earth. He spoke disapprovingly of Pushkin, but in passing. Promising to devote a special report to him. One night in June he tore Pushkin off a strip. For his white trousers, his "*I face the future without fear...*" ⁽⁵⁾, his Gentleman-of-the-Bedchamberism, ⁽⁶⁾ his elementary rebel, and in general for his "pseudo-revolutionism and hypocrisy", obscene poetry and gadding around after women...

Bathed in sweat I sat in the front row of the stuffy hall and heard the speaker rip Pushkin's white trousers to shreds. When, after refreshing his dry gullet with a glass of water, he finally suggested throwing Pushkin into the stove, I smiled. I must confess. It was an enigmatic smile, blast it! A smile's not a bird in a bush, is it?

"Then you defend him."

"I don't want to!"

"You haven't any civic courage."

"Is that so? Alright, I'll defend him."

And so I did, damn it! I spent three days and three nights preparing. Sitting at an open window by a lamp with a red shade. On my lap lay a book written by the man with eyes of fire.

*False wisdom pales at the first tiny
glimmer
Of true wisdom's ne'er-fading
light... (7)*

It was He who said:

*Indifferent alike to praise or
blame... (8)*

No, not indifferent! No. I'll show them! I'll show them alright. I shook my fist at the inky night.

And show them I did! There was commotion in the workshop. The speaker was out for the count. In the eyes of the audience I read a silent, jubilant:

"Finish him off!"

.....

.....

*

.....

But afterwards! Afterwards...

I was a "wolf in sheep's clothing". A "toff". A "bourgeois yes-man".

.....

So now I'm not head of ASS Lit. Or Dram. I'm a stray dog in an attic. Hunched up. Shuddering when the bell rings at night

Oh, dusty days! Oh, stuffy nights!

*

And in the summer of 1920 A. D. there did appear a vision from Tiflis. A young man, all broken and disjointed, with an aged wrinkled face, arrived and offered his services as a brawler poet. He brought with him a slim volume like a wine price-list. The book contained his poems.

Lily-of-the-valley is rhymed with don't shilly-shally.

It's enough to drive you bonkers!

The young man took an instant dislike to me. He brawled in the newspaper (page 4, column 4). About me. And about Pushkin. Not about anything else. He hates Pushkin more than me. It's alright

for Pushkin! He's passed into the great beyond...

But I'll be squashed like a worm.

6.

THE BRONZE COLLAR

What a bloody awful town Tiflis is! A second one's arrived. In a bronze collar. Yes, bronze. And he spoke in a live magazine like that. I'm not joking! In a bronze collar, see!.....

The novelist Slyozkin has been sent packing, regardless of his nation-wide reputation and his pregnant wife. That one's taken his place. So much for Lit. and Dram. And money behind the carpet.....

....

THE BOYS IN THE BOX

The moon's in a corona. Yuri and I sit on the balcony and look at the canopy of stars. But it doesn't help. In a few hours' time the stars will fade and a ball of fire will flame up overhead. And we'll squirm again like beetles on pins...

A high unbroken squeal can be heard through the balcony door. Somewhere at the back of beyond, by the foot of a mountain, in a strange town, a son has been born to starving Slyozkin in an absurdly, bestially cramped room. They have put him on the window-sill in a box with the words:

"M-me Marie. Modes et Robes."

And he whimpers in the box.

Poor child!

Poor us, not the child.

The mountains have hemmed us in. Table Mountain sleeps under the moon. Far, far away in the north lie the endless plains... In the south ravines, precipices, swirling rivers. Somewhere in the west is the sea. Above it shines the Golden Horn...

...Have you seen the flies on Tangle-foot?

When the crying stops, we go into the cage.

Tomatoes. A little black bread. And *araki*. What filthy vodka! Disgusting! Still it does the trick.

And when all around is fast asleep, the writer reads me his new novel. There's no one else to hear it. The night swims. He finishes, wraps up the manuscript carefully and puts it under the pillow. There is no writing-desk.

We whisper until the pale dawn.

What names are on our dry tongues! What names! How Pushkin's verse can soften spiteful souls. Beware of spite, writers of Russia!

.....

..

Truth comes only through suffering. That's right, rest assured! But no one pays you or gives you food parcels for knowing the truth. Sad, but so.

A THROUGH WIND

Yevreinov ⁽⁹⁾ arrived. In an ordinary white collar. From the Black Sea on his way to Petersburg.

There used to be such a city in the north.

Does it still exist? The writer laughs and assures us that it does. But it takes a long time to get there. Three years in a goods van. My tired eyes feasted for a whole evening on his white collar. And for a whole evening I listened to tales of adventure.

Brother writers, your vocation... (10)

He hadn't got a penny. His luggage had been stolen...

...On another evening at Slyozkin's, the last, Nikolai Nikolayevich sat at the piano in the smoke-filled drawing-room provided by the landlady. He endured the torment of inspection with iron stamina. Four poets, a poetess and a painter (workshop) devoured him decorously with their eyes.

Yevreinov is an ingenious fellow.

"And now 'Musical Grimaces'..."

Turning his face to the keys, he began to play. At first... At first he gave us a visiting elephant playing the piano, then a lovesick piano-tuner, a dialogue between steel and gold and, finally, a polka.

Within ten minutes the workshop was totally incapacitated. It no longer sat decorously, but rolled about hysterically with much waving of hands and groaning...

...The man with the lively eyes went away. No more grimaces!

*

A sudden gust of wind blew through, and they were swept away like leaves. One from Kerch to Vologda, another from Vologda to Kerch. A rumped Osip appears with a suitcase, complaining angrily:

"We'll never get there, and that's that!" Of course you won't get there, if you don't know where you're going!

*

Yesterday Riurik Ivnev ⁽¹¹⁾ appeared. On his way from Tiflis to Moscow.

"It's better in Moscow."

He travelled so much that one day he just lay down in a ditch.

"I refuse to get up. Something must happen."

And so it did. A friend chanced to see him there, took him home and gave him a meal.

Another poet went from Moscow to Tiflis.

It's better in Tiflis.

The third was Osip Mandelstam. ⁽¹²⁾ He arrived one cloudy day, holding his head high like a prince. His laconic remarks devastated us.

"From the Crimea. Ghastly. Do they buy manuscripts here?"

"Yes, but they don't pay..." Before I could finish he had gone. I know not where...

The novelist Pilnyak ⁽¹³⁾ went to Rostov in a flour train, wearing a woman's cardigan.

"Is it better in Rostov?"

"No, I just want a rest!"

Eccentric — wears gold-rimmed spectacles.

*

Serafimovich arrived from up north. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Tired eyes. Hollow voice. Gave a talk in the workshop.

"Remember Tolstoy's kerchief on a stick. It keeps catching, then fluttering again. As if it were alive... I once wrote an anti-drink label for a vodka bottle. Jotted down a phrase. Crossed one word out and put another over it. Thought a bit, then crossed that one out too. And so on several times. But the phrase came out pat. Now they write... They write in a funny way! You pick it up. Read it through. No! Can't understand it. You have another try — still no luck. So you put it to one side..."

The local workshop sits by the wall *in cor pore*. Judging from their eyes they don't understand it. That's their business!

Serafimovich's left town... Entr'acte.

9.

THE INCIDENT WITH THE GREAT WRITERS

The Sub-Section's decorator painted Anton Pavlovich Chekhov with a crooked nose and such a monstrous pince-nez that from a distance he seemed to be wearing racing goggles.

We put him on a big easel. A gingery-coloured pavilion, a small table with a carafe and a lamp.

I read an introductory article "On Chekhovian Humour". But perhaps because I hadn't eaten for three days or for some other reason, my thoughts were rather sombre. The theatre was packed. Now and then I lost the thread. I saw hundreds of blurred faces rising up to the dome. And not a ghost of a smile on any of them. Mind you, there was some hearty applause. But I realised to my dismay that this was because I had finished, and fled backstage in relief. That was two thousand in my pocket. Now let someone else sweat it out. Going into the smoking-room, I heard a Red Army man complain miserably: "To blazes with them and their humour! We come to the Caucasus and they won't leave us alone here either!"

He was quite right, that soldier from Tula. I hid away in my favourite place, a dark corner behind the props room. A roar

came from the hall. Hurrah! They were laughing. Good for the actors! "Surgery" saved the day and the story about the civil servant who sneezed.

Success! Success! Sloyozkin rushed into my rat corner and hissed, rubbing his hands:

"Write the second programme!"

It was decided to hold a Pushkin Evening after the Evening of Chekhovian Humour.

Yuri and I planned the programme lovingly.

"That blockhead can't draw," Slyozkin fumed. "We'll ask Maria Ivanovna!"

I immediately feared the worst. In my opinion Maria Ivanovna draws about as well as I play the fiddle... I concluded this when she first appeared in the Sub-Section saying she had studied under the great N. himself. (She was immediately made Head of Fine Arts.) But since I know nothing about painting, I kept quiet.

*

Exactly half an hour before the beginning I went into the scenery room and stopped dead: there, staring at me

from a gold frame, was Nozdryov. ⁽¹⁵⁾ He was perfect. Crafty, goggling eyes, even one side-board thinner than the other. The illusion was so complete, that I expected him to give a loud guffaw and say:

"Just got back from a fair, my friend. Congratulate me: gambled all my money away!"

I don't know what my expression was like, but the painter was mortally offended. She blushed a deep red under the thick layer of powder and screwed up her eyes.

"You obviously ... er ... don't like it, eh?"

"Oh, but I do! Ha-ha! It's very ... nice. Very nice. Only the side-whiskers..."

"What? The side-whiskers? You mean to say you've never seen Pushkin? Fancy that! And you call yourself a writer! Tee-hee! Perhaps you think he should be clean-shaven?"

"Sorry, it's not so much the side-whiskers, but Pushkin never played cards, and if he had, he would never have cheated!"

"What have cards got to do with it? I don't understand! You're making a mockery of me, I see!"

"Pardon me, but it is you who are making a mockery. Your Pushkin has the eyes of a scoundrel!" "Ah, so that's it!"

She threw down her brush. And called from the door: "I'll complain to the Sub-Section about you!"

And then what happened! As soon as the curtain went up and Nozdryov appeared before the darkened hall with his sly grin, the first ripple of laughter broke out. Oh, my God! The audience had decided that after Chekhov's humour they were going to get Pushkin's humour! I began to talk in a cold sweat of "the Aurora Borealis in the snow-bound wastes of Russian belles-lettres". There were sniggers in the audience at the side-whiskers. Nozdryov skulked behind me, grunting:

"If I were your boss, I'd string you up on the nearest tree!"

So I couldn't stop myself and let out a snigger too. The success was overwhelming, phenomenal. Neither before nor after have I ever been the recipient of such thunderous applause.

And then it began to crescendo. When Salieri poisoned Mozart in the dramatised excerpt the audience expressed its delight with approving guffaws and thunderous cries of "Encore!"

Scampering rat-like out of the theatre I saw from the corner of my eye the poetry brawler scurry into the editorial office with his notebook...

*

I knew as much! On the very front page, fourth column:

MORE PUSHKIN!

Writers from the capital who are skulking in the local Arts Sub-Section have made a new objective attempt to corrupt the, public by stuffing their idol Pushkin down its throat.

They even took the liberty of portraying this idol as a landlord and serfowner (which he was) with side-whiskers... And so on.

Dear God. Please let that brawler die! Everyone's catching typhus these days.

Why can't he get it too? That cretin will get me arrested!

And that infernal old hag from Fine Arts!

Ruined. Everything's ruined. They've banned the evenings...

...Ghastly autumn. Rain lashing down. Can't think what we're going to eat. What on earth are we going to eat?

10.

A FOOT-BINDING AND A BLACK MOUSE

.....
.....

Late one hungry evening, I wade through puddles in the dark. Everything's boarded up. My feet are in tattered socks and battered shoes. There is no sky. In its place hangs a huge foot-binding. Drunk with despair, I mutter:

"Alexander Pushkin. *Lumen coelum. Sancta rosa.* ⁽¹⁶⁾ And his threats ring out like thunder."

Am I going mad? A shadow runs from the street lamp.

It's my shadow, I know. But why is it wearing a top hat, when I've got a cap on? Had to take my top hat to market to buy some food. Some good folk bought it to use as a chamberpot. But I won't sell my heart and brains, even if I'm starving. Despair. A foot-binding overhead and a black mouse in my heart...

11.

NO WORSE THAN KNUT HAMSUN

I'm starving
.....
.....
.....

12.

MUST RUN. MUST RUN!

"A hundred thousand... I've got a hundred thousand!, I earned it!

A barrister's clerk, one of the natives, taught me how. He arrived one day when I was sitting silently, head in hands, and said:

"I'm broke too. There's only one solution — we must write a play. A revolutionary play. About the life of the natives. And sell it..."

I stared at him vacantly and replied: "I can't write anything about the life of the natives, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. I know nothing about their life. In fact I can't write anything at all. I'm tired, and I don't think I'm any good at writing anyway."

"You're talking nonsense," he answered. "It's because you're hungry. Be a man. The life of the natives is a cinch. I know it inside out. We'll write the play together. And split the money fifty-fifty."

So we started to write. There was a round hot stove at his place. His wife would hang up the washing on a line in the room, then give us some beetroot salad with vegetable oil and tea with saccharine. He told me some common names and customs, and I made up the plot. So did he. And his wife sat down and advised us too. I realised at once they

were much better at it than me. But I didn't feel envious, because I had already decided this was the last play I would ever write...

And so we wrote it. He basked by the stove saying: "I love creating!" I scratched away with my pen...

A week later the three-act play was ready. When I read it through to myself in my unheated room at night, I'm not ashamed to admit that it brought tears to my eyes! In terms of crassness it was unique, remarkable! Something obtuse and insolent stared out of every line of this collective creation. I couldn't believe my eyes. What could I hope for, imbecile, if I wrote like that? Shame stared at me from the damp green walls and the terrible black windows. I began to tear up the manuscript. But then I stopped. Because suddenly with remarkable, unusual clarity I realised the truth of the saying: once written, never destroyed. A work can be torn up, burnt, concealed from others. But never from oneself! It was the end of me! It could never be erased. This astounding thing had been written by me. It was the end!..

*

The play caused a sensation in the native Sub-Section. They bought it at once for two hundred thousand. And a fortnight later it was performed on the stage.

Eyes, daggers and cartridge pockets flashed in the mist of a thousand bated breaths. After heroic horsemen rushed in and grabbed the chief of police and guards in the third act the Chechens, Kabardians and Ingushes yelled:

"Zere! Serves him right, ze cur!"

And following the Sub-Section ladies they shouted: "Author!"

There was a lot of handshaking backstage.

"Vairy gut play!"

And invitations to visit their mountain villages.

*

Must run! Must run!

Quickly. A hundred thousand is enough to get out of here. Forward. To the sea. Over one sea and another to France and dry land — to Paris!

A driving rain lashed my face as, hunched up in my greatcoat, I ran along the alleys for the last time — home...

You — prosewriters and playwrights in Paris and Berlin — just you try. Try, for the fun of it, to write something worse. If you are as talented as Kuprin, Bunin or Gorky you will not succeed. It is I who hold the record! For collective creativity. The three of us wrote it: me, the barrister's clerk and hunger. At the beginning of nineteen twenty one...

13.

The town at the foot of the mountains has vanished. Curse it... Tsikhidziri. Makhindzhauri. Green Cape! Magnolias in bloom. White flowers the size of plates. Bananas. Palm trees! I saw them myself, I swear it, palm trees growing out of the ground. And the sea singing endlessly by granite cliffs. The books were right. The sun sinks into the water. The beauty of the sea. The high vault of the heavens. The steep cliff, with creeping plants on it. Chakva. Tsikhidziri. Green Cape.

Where am I going? Where? I'm wearing my last shirt. With crooked letters on my cuffs. And heavy hieroglyphs in my heart. I have deciphered only one of these mysterious signs. It says: woe is me! Who will interpret the others for me?

*

I lie like a corpse on pebbles washed by salt water. I am weak with hunger. My head aches from morning to midnight. Now it is night. I cannot see the sea, only hear it rolling. Surging to and fro. A tardy wave hisses. Suddenly three tiers of lights emerge from behind a dark promontory.

The *Polatsky* is sailing to the Golden Horn.

.....

.....

Tears salty as sea water.

Saw a poet, one of the unknown. He was walking round Nuri *Bazaar* trying to sell his hat. The peasants laughed at him.

He smiled shamefacedly and explained he wasn't joking. He was selling his hat because his money had been stolen. That was a lie. He'd been broke for ages. Hadn't eaten for three days. He confessed later, when we were sharing a pound of cheese. Told me he was on his way from Penza to Yalta. I nearly burst out laughing. But then I remembered: what about me?

*

My cup is full to overflowing. The "new head" arrived at twelve o'clock.

He walked in and said:

"Ve vill take a different path! No more of ziss pornographia: *Vit Vorks Voe* and *The Government Inspector* by Goggle. Boggle. Ve vill write our own plays."

Then he got into his car and drove off.

His face imprinted itself on my memory forever.

*

An hour later I sold my overcoat at the bazaar. There was an evening boat. But he wouldn't let me go. Understand? Wouldn't let me go!..

*

I've had enough! Let the Golden Horn shine. I'll never reach it. There's a limit to a man's strength. Mine's finished. I'm starving, broken! There's no blood in my brain. I'm weak and scared. But I won't stay here any longer. So ... that means ... that means ...

14.

GOING HOME

Going home. By sea. Then by goods van. And if the money runs out — on foot. But I'm going home. My life is ruined. I'm going home!

To Moscow! To Moscow!

.....

Farewell, Tsikhidziri. Farewell,
Makhindzhauri. Green Cape, farewell!

Moscow, 1923

PART TWO

THE MOSCOW ABYSS. TWANVLAM

Pitch dark. Clanging. Rumbling. Wheels still turning, but slower and slower. Now they've stopped. That's it. The end to end all ends. Nowhere else to go. This is Moscow. M-O-S-C-O-W.

A moment's attention to a long powerful sound swelling up in the darkness. Mind-splitting reverberations in my brain:

*C'est la lu-u-tte fina-a-le!
...L'Internationa-a-a-le!!*

Here too. Just as hoarse and terrifying:

The Internationale!

A row of goods vans in the dark. The students' carriage had gone quiet...

I took the plunge at last and jumped down. A soft body slipped away from under me with a groan. Then I got caught on a rail and fell even deeper down.

Heavens, was there really an abyss below me?

Grey bodies heaved monstrous loads onto their shoulders and flowed off.

A woman's voice:

"Oh, dear, I can't..."

In the misty darkness I made out a medical student. She had travelled with me, hunched up, for three days.

"Allow me to carry that."

For a moment the black abyss seemed to shudder and turn green. How much had she got in there?

"A hundredweight of flour... They trod it down."

Staggered along, zigzagging, spots before the eyes, towards the lights.

They broke into beams. The weird grey snake crawled towards them. A glass dome. A long roaring sound. Blinding light. A ticket. A gate. Exploding voices. Curses falling heavily. More darkness. More light. Darkness. Moscow! Moscow.

The cart was loaded up to the church domes, to the stars in velvet. It clattered along, while the demonic voices of grey bodies cursed it and the man urging on the horse. A flock followed behind. The medical student's long whitish coat

appeared now to one side, now to the other. But in the end we emerged from the tangle of wheels, and left the bearded faces behind. We rattled on over the potholed pavement. Pitch black. Where were we? What place was this? Never mind. What did it matter? Moscow was all black, black, black. Silent buildings stared tightly and coldly. A church loomed, looking confused and worried. It was swallowed up in the dark.

Two in the morning. Where can I spend the night? All those houses! What could be easier... Just knock at any door. Could you put me up for the night? I can just imagine it!

Voice of the medical student:

"Where're you going?"

"Don't know."

"What do you mean?"

There are some good souls in this world. "The person who rents the next room is still away in the country, see. You could stay there for one night..."

"Oh, how kind of you. I'll find my friends tomorrow." Cheered up a bit after that. And it's funny, but as soon as I'd found somewhere to stay, I began to feel the effects of losing three nights' sleep.

*

Two bulbs fracture the shadows on a bridge. We plunge into darkness again. A street-lamp. A grey fence with a poster. Huge garish letters. Goodness, what's that word? Twanvlam. What on earth does it mean?

Twelfth Anniversary of Vladimir Mayakovsky.

The cart stopped. They took off some luggage. I stared at the word, entranced. A good word! And I, provincial wretch that I am, had sniggered in the mountains at the ASS head! What the blazes! But Moscow is not as black as its papooses. Sudden urge to imagine Vlam. Never seen him, but I know ... I know. He's about forty, very short and bald, wears glasses and is always dashing about. Short trousers turned up. Works in an office. Doesn't smoke. Has a large flat with portieres, now compulsorily shared with a lawyer, who is a lawyer no longer, but the commandant of a government building. Lives in a study with an unheated fireplace. Likes butter, comic verse and a tidy room. Favourite writer — Conan

Doyle. Favourite opera — *Eugene One-gin*. Cooks himself rissoles on a primus-stove. Can't stand the lawyer-commandant, and dreams of getting him out some day, marrying and living happily ever after in five rooms.

The cart creaked, shuddered, moved on for a bit, then stopped again. Neither storm nor tempest could daunt the immortal citizen Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov. By a building, which seemed in the darkness and fear to have about fifteen storeys, the cartload grew perceptibly thinner. In the inky blackness a figure rushed from it into an entrance and whispered: "What about the butter, Dad? And the lard, Dad? And the flour, Dad?"

Dad stood in the darkness, muttering: "That's the lard, and the butter, and the wheat, and the rye..."

Then out of the pitch dark flashed Dad's thumb, which peeled off twenty banknotes for the drayman.

There will be other tempests. Raging tempests! And everyone may perish. But not Dad.

The cart turned into a huge platform which engulfed the medical student's sack and my travelling-bag. And we sat down,

legs dangling, and rode off into the darkness.

HOUSE NO. 4, ENTRANCE 6, 2ND FLOOR, FLAT
50, ROOM 7

To tell the truth I've no idea why I crossed the whole of Moscow to get to this huge building. The document I had carefully brought with me from the mountain kingdom was valid for all six-storey buildings, or rather, for none.

The cage of the dead lift in entrance six. Got my breath back here. A door with two notices. One says "Flat 50". The other an enigmatic "F. Arts". Must get my breath back again. My fate is about to be decided.

I pushed open the unlocked door. In the semi-dark hall was a huge box full of papers and a grand-piano top. A room flashed past, full of women and wreathed in smoke. There was a short burst of typing. Silence. Then a deep voice said: "Meyerhold."

"Where's ASS Lit.?" I asked, leaning on the wooden barrier.

The woman by the barrier shrugged her shoulders irritably. She didn't know. The other one didn't know either. A long dark corridor. I groped my way along by guesswork. Opened one door — a

bathroom. The next door had a scrap of paper nailed to it. Askew, one corner turned up. AS. Thank the Lord. Yes, ASS Lit. My pulse started racing again. Voices inside: mumble-mumble-mumble...

I closed my eyes and imagined the inside. This is what I saw. In the first room — a carpet, an enormous writing desk and a bookcase. Awesome silence. At the desk a secretary — probably one of the names I know from magazines. Then other doors. The section head's office. Even more awesome silence. Bookcases. Who's that sitting in an armchair? ASS Lit.? In Moscow? Yes, Maxim Gorky. The *Lower Depths*. *Mother*. Who else? Mumble-mumble-mumble. They're having a talk. Or perhaps it's Bryusov and Bely? ⁽¹⁷⁾

I knock lightly on the door. The mumble-mumble stops to be followed by a hollow "Come in!" Then more mumble-mumble. I turn the knob and it comes off in my hand. I'm petrified. A fine start to my career! Breaking the door knob! I knock again. "Come in!"

"I can't!" I shout.

A voice comes through the keyhole:

"Turn the knob right, then left. You've locked us in..."

Right, left, the door gives slightly, and...

I'M TOP MAN AFTER GORKY

I was in the wrong place! This couldn't be ASS Lit! A summer-cottage wicker chair, an empty wooden desk, an open cupboard, a small table upside down in the corner. And two men. One was tall and very young in a pince-nez. His puttees stood out. They were white, and he was holding a battered briefcase and a sack. The other man, greying and elderly with bright, almost smiling eyes, wore a Caucasian fur cap and an army greatcoat. The coat was covered with holes and the pockets were hanging in tatters. He wore grey puttees and patent leather dancing shoes with little bows.

My lack-lustre gaze passed over the faces, then the walls, looking for another door. But there was none. The room with the broken wires had no windows. *Tout*. In a rather thick voice:

"Is this ASS Lit.?"

"Yes."

"Could I see the head, please?"

"That's me," the old man replied affectionately.

He picked up a large page of a Moscow newspaper from the desk, tore a piece off, sprinkled some tobacco on it, rolled himself a cigarette and asked me:

"Got a match?"

I struck a match automatically, and then under the old man's affectionately enquiring gaze took the precious paper out of my pocket.

The old man bent over it, and I racked my brains wondering who he could be. Most of all he looked like Emile Zola without a beard.

The young man also read the paper over the old man's shoulder. They finished and looked at me with a kind of puzzled respect.

Old man:

"So you?.."

"I'd like a job in ASS Lit.," I replied.

"Splendid! Well, I never!" the young man exclaimed in delight.

He took the old man aside and started whispering. Mumble-mumble-mumble.

The old man spun round on his heels and grabbed a pen off the desk. The young man said quickly:

"Write an application."

I had an application in my breast pocket. I handed it over.

The old man flourished the pen. It made a scratching sound and jerked, tearing the paper. He dipped it in a small bottle. But the bottle was dry.

"Got a pencil?"

I handed him a pencil, and the head scrawled:

"Please appoint as Secretary of ASS Lit. Signed..."

I stared open-mouthed at the dashing squiggle.

The young man plucked my sleeve.

"Hurry upstairs, before he goes. Quick."

I shot upstairs. Barged through the door, tore across the room with the women and went into the office. The man sitting in the office took my paper and scribbled: "Appt. seer." Letter. Squiggle. He yawned and said: "Downstairs."

I raced downstairs again in a tizzy. Past the typewriter. Then instead of a bass, a silvery soprano said: "Meyerhold. October in the Theatre..."

The young man was storming round the old man and chortling.

"Did they appoint you? Fine! We'll see to it. We'll see to everything!"

Then he clapped me on the shoulder:

"Don't worry! You'll get everything."

I have always detested familiarity and always been a victim of it. But now I was so overwhelmed by what had happened, that all I could do was say weakly:

"But we need desks ... chairs ... and at least some ink!"

The young man shouted excitedly:

"You'll get them! Good lad! You'll get everything!"

He turned to the old man, winked at me and said:

"He means business, that lad! Fancy asking for desks straightaway. He'll put things right for us."

*

Appt. Seer. Heavens! ASS Lit. In Moscow. Maxim Gorky. *The Lower Depths*. Sheherazade. *Mother*.

*

The young man untied the sack, spread a newspaper on the table and poured

about five pounds of lentils onto it. "That's for you. A quarter of the food ration."

I PLUG IN ASS LIT

Historians of literature, take note:

At the end of 1921 three people were engaged in literature in the Republic: the old man (dramas; he turned out not to be Emile Zola, of course, but someone I didn't know), the young man (the old man's assistant, whom I didn't know either — poetry) and myself (who hadn't written a thing).

Historians, also note: ASS Lit. had no chairs, desks, ink, light bulbs, books, writers or readers. In short, nothing.

And me. Yes, I rustled up from nowhere an antique mahogany writing-desk. Inside I found an old, yellowing, gold-edged card with the words: "...ladies in semi-decollete evening dress. Officers in frock-coats with epaulettes. Civilians in uniform tail-coats, with decorations. Students in uniform. Moscow. 1899."

It smelt soft and sweet. A bottle of expensive French perfume had once stood

in the drawer. After the desk a chair arrived. Then ink, paper, and finally a young lady, sad and pensive.

On my instructions she laid out everything that had been in the cupboard on the desk: some brochures about "saboteurs", 12 issues of a St. Petersburg newspaper and a pile of green and red invitations to a congress of provincial sections. It immediately began to look like an office. The old man and the young man were delighted. They clapped me on the shoulder affectionately and vanished.

The sad young lady and I sat there for hours. Me at the desk and she at the table. I read *The Three Musketeers* by the inimitable Dumas, which I had found on the floor in the bathroom. The young lady sat in silence, occasionally heaving a deep sigh.

"Why are you crying?" I asked.

In reply she started sobbing and wringing her hands. Then she said:

"I've found out that I married a bandit by mistake."

I don't know if anything could surprise me after these two years. But at this I just stared blankly at her...

"Don't cry. Things like that do happen."

And I asked her to tell me about it.

Wiping her eyes with a handkerchief, she told me she had married a student, enlarged a photograph of him and hung it in the drawing-room. Then a detective came, took one look at the photograph and said it was not Karasev at all, but Dolsky, alias Gluzman, alias Senka Moment.

"Mo-ment..." the poor girl said, shuddering and wiping her eyes.

"So he's gone, has he? Well, good riddance to him."

But this was the third day. And still nothing. Not a soul had come. Nothing at all. Just me and the young lady...

I suddenly realised today: ASS Lit. isn't plugged in. There's life overhead. People walking about. Next door too. Typewriters clattering away and people laughing. They get clean-shaven visitors too. Meyerhold's fantastically popular in this building, but he's not here in person.

We have nothing. No papers, nothing. I decided to plug ASS Lit. in.

A woman came upstairs with a pile of newspapers. The top one was marked in red pencil "For ASS Fine Arts".

"What about one for ASS Lit.?"

She looked at me in fright and did not answer. I went upstairs. To the young lady sitting under a notice that said "secretary". She listened to me, then looked nervously at her neighbour.

"That's right, ASS Lit..." said the first young lady. "There is a paper for them, Lidochka," said the second. "Then why didn't you deliver it?" I asked in an icy tone. They both looked worried. "We thought you weren't there."

*

ASS Lit. is plugged in. A second paper has arrived from the young ladies upstairs. A woman in a kerchief brought it. Asked me to sign for it in a book.

Wrote a memo to the Service Department: "Give me a car."

A man came two days later and shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you really need a car?"

"More than anyone else in this building, I should say."

I managed to find the old man. And the young one too. When the old man saw the car and I told him he had to sign the papers, he gave me a long look, ruminating.

"There's something about you. You should apply for an academician's food ration."

The bandit's wife and I started drafting an official claim for payment of salary. ASS Lit. was firmly plugged into the mainstream now.

N. B. My future biographer: all this was done by me.

THE FIRST SWALLOWS

At 11 a. m. a young poet, obviously frozen to death, came in and said quietly: "Storn."

"What can I do for you?"

"I'd like a job in ASS Lit."

I unrolled a sheet of paper headed "Staff". ASS Lit. was allowed eighteen members of staff. I was vaguely hoping to allocate these posts as follows:

Poetry instructors: Bryusov, Bely, etc.

Prose writers: Gorky, Veresayev, Shmelyov, Zaitsev, Serafimovich, etc.

But none of the afore-mentioned showed up.

So with a bold hand I scribbled on Storn's application: "Pise, appt." instr. pp. head." Letter. Squiggle.

"Go upstairs while he's still here."

Then the curly-headed, rosy-cheeked poet Skartsev arrived, full of joie de vivre.

"Go upstairs while he's still here."

A gloomy fellow in glasses, about twenty-five, so thick-set he seemed to be made of bronze, arrived from Siberia.

"Go upstairs..."

But he replied:

"I'm not going anywhere."

He sat down in a corner on a rickety, broken chair, pulled out a scrap of paper and started writing some short lines. Obviously a very experienced fellow.

The door opened and in came a man wearing a nice warm coat and a sealskin hat. It was a poet. Sasha.

The old man wrote the magic words. Sasha looked round the room carefully, fingered the dangling piece of broken wire thoughtfully, and for some reason looked into the cupboard. He sighed.

Sitting down beside me, he asked confidentially:

"Will they pay cash?"

WE WORK UP STEAM

There was no room at the desks. We were all writing slogans, with a new fellow, very active and noisy, in gold glasses, who called himself the king of reporters. The king appeared the morning after we got an advance, at 8.45 a. m. with the words:

"Is it true they paid out cash here?"

And joined the staff on the spot.

The episode of the slogans was like this.

A memo arrived from upstairs.

"ASS Lit. urgently requested to produce a set of slogans by 12 noon."

Theoretically this is what was supposed to happen: the old man with my assistance would issue an order or summons to all places where there were supposed to be writers. We would then receive thousands of slogans from all over the country, by telegraph, letter and word of mouth. Then a commission would select the best and

present them by 12 noon on a certain date. After that my secretarial staff (i. e., the bandit's sad wife) and I would draw up a claim for payment, receive the monies concerned and pay the most deserving for the best slogans.

But that was in theory.

In practice, however:

1) It was impossible to issue a summons, because there was no one to summon. All the writers within the field of vision were: the above-mentioned, plus the king.

2) Excluded by one: we could not possibly be flooded with slogans.

3) The slogans could not be submitted by 12 noon on such-and-such a date, because the memo arrived at 1.26 p. m. on the date in question.

4) We needn't have written a claim for payment, because there was no "slogan" allocation. But — the old man did have a small, precious amount for travel allowances.

Therefore: a) The slogans shall be written as a matter of urgency by all those present;

b) a commission to consider the slogans shall be set up consisting of all those

present to ensure complete impartiality;
and

c) the best slogans shall be selected and the sum of fifteen thousand roubles paid for each of them.

We sat down at 1.50 p. m. and the slogans were ready by 3 o'clock. Each of us managed to squeeze out five or six, with the exception of the king who wrote nineteen in verse and prose.

The commission was fair and strict.

I, the writer of slogans, had nothing in common with the other me who accepted and criticised them.

As a result the following were accepted:
three slogans from the old man,
three slogans from the young man,
three slogans from me,
and so on and so forth.

In short, forty-five thousand each.

Brrr. What a wind! And it's starting to drizzle. The meat pie in the Truba ⁽¹⁸⁾ is wet from the rain, but delicious enough to drive you crazy. A tube of saccharine and two pounds of white bread.

Caught up Storn. He was chewing something too.

AN UNEXPECTED NIGHTMARE

"It's all a dream, I swear. Can it be black magic?"

I was two hours late for work today.

I turned the knob, opened the door, walked in and saw the room was empty. Well and truly empty! Not only had the desks, the sad woman and the typewriter gone, but even the electric wires. Everything.

"So it was all a dream... I see ... I see..."

For some time everything round me has seemed like a mirage. A vaporous mirage. There, where yesterday... But why yesterday, for goodnees sake? A hundred years ago ... an eternity ... perhaps it never existed at all... perhaps it doesn't now. Kanatchikov dacha! ⁽¹⁹⁾

So the kind old man ... the young man ... the sad Storn ... the typewriter ... and the slogans ... didn't exist at all?

But they did. I'm not mad. They did, dammit!

Then where on earth had they got to?

Walking unsteadily, trying to hide my expression under my eyelids (so they didn't grab me and take me away) I set off down the dark corridor. And realised that

something funny really was happening to me. In the darkness over the door leading into a room which was lit, glowed letters of fire, as if on a cinema screen:

1836

ON THE 25TH OF MARCH AN
UNUSUALLY STRANGE EVENT
TOOK PLACE IN ST.
PETERSBURG THE BARBER
IVAN YAKOVLEVICH...

I read no further, recoiling in horror. Stopping by the barrier, I hooded my eyes even more and asked in a hollow voice:

"Excuse me, did you happen to see where ASS Lit. has gone?"

An irritable, gloomy woman with a crimson ribbon in her black hair snapped:

"What ASS Lit... I don't know."

I closed my eyes. Another female voice said sympathetically:

"Actually it's not here at all. You've come to the wrong place. It's in Volkhonka."

I went cold all over, walked onto the landing and wiped the sweat off my

forehead. Then I decided to go back on foot across the whole of Moscow to Razumikhin's and forget all about it. If I was quiet and said nothing, no one would ever know. I could live on the floor at Razumikhin's place. He wouldn't drive me, a poor madman, away.

*

But a last faint hope still lingered in my breast. And I set off. I started walking. This six-storey building was positively terrifying. It was riddled with passages, like an ant-hill, so you could walk right through it from one end to the other without going outside. I hurried along the dark twists and turns, occasionally wandering into niches behind wooden partitions. The light bulbs were reddish and uneconomical. Worried people scurried past me. There were lots of women sitting at desks. Typewriters clattered. Notices flashed past. Fin. Dept. Nat. Mins. I reached well-lit landings, only to plunge back into darkness again. At last I came to a landing and looked round dully. The further I went, the less chance there was of finding that bewitched ASS

Lit. It was hopeless. I went down the stairs and into the street. When I looked round, it was entrance!...

A bitter gust of wind. Heavy cold rain began to pour. I pulled down my summer cap even further and put up my greatcoat collar. A few minutes later my boots were full of water, thanks to the cracks in the soles. This was a relief. Now I needn't kid myself that I would manage to get home dry. Instead of slowing down my journey by hopping from stone to stone, I just waded straight through the puddles.

ENTRANCE 2, GROUND FLOOR, FLAT 23, ROOM 40

In letters of fire:

QUITE RIDICULOUS THINGS ARE HAPPENING IN THE WORLD. SOMETIMES THEY ARE TOTALLY IMPROBABLE: SUDDENLY THAT SELFSAME NOSE WHICH HAD BEEN PARADING AROUND IN THE RANK OF STATE COUNCILLOR AND CAUSED SUCH A COMMOTION IN THE TOWN, FOUND ITSELF BACK IN ITS PLACE AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED... (20)

*

Morning is wiser than eventide. That's true alright. When I woke up the next morning from the cold and sat on the divan, ruffling my hair, my head seemed a bit clearer!

Logically, had it existed or not? Of course it had. I could remember my name and the date. It 'had just moved somewhere... So I would have to find it. But what had those women next door said? In Volkhonka... That was nonsense! You could pinch anything from under their very noses. I don't know why they keep them on at all, those women. Egyptian plague!

I got dressed, drank the water I had saved in a glass from yesterday, ate a piece of bread and one potato, and drew up a plan.

6 entrances times 6 floors = 36, 36 times 2 apartments — 72, 72 times 6 rooms = 432 rooms. Was it feasible? Yes, it was. Yesterday I had walked at random along two or three horizontals. Today I would search the whole building systematically vertically and horizontally. And find ASS Lit. Provided it hadn't

vanished into a fourth dimension. If it had,
that really was the end.

By the second entrance I came nose to nose with Storn!

Thank the Lord! A kindred spirit at last- It transpired that yesterday an hour before I arrived the head of admin, turned up with two workmen and moved ASS Lit. to entrance 2, ground floor, flat 23, room 40.

Our place was to be taken by the music section, ASS Mus.

"Why?"

"I don't know. But why didn't you come yesterday? The old man got very worried."

"For goodness' sake! How was I to know where you'd gone? You should have left a note on the door."

"We thought they'd tell you..."

I gnashed my teeth.

"Have you seen those women? Next door..."

"That's true," said Storn.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Getting a room of my own gave me a new lease of life. They screwed a light bulb in ASS Lit. I found a ribbon for the typewriter. Then a second young lady appeared. "Pise. appt. clerk."

Manuscripts began to arrive from the provinces. Then came another splendid young lady. A journalist. Very amusing, a good sport. "Pise. appt. as sec. of lit. feuilletons."

Finally, a young man turned up from the south. A journalist. And we wrote him our last "Pise." There were no more vacancies. ASS Lit. was full up. And a real hive of industry.

CASH! CASH!

Twelve tablets of saccharine and that's all...

"The sheet or the jacket?"

Not a word about cash.

Went upstairs today. The young ladies were very snappy with me. For some reason they can't stand ASS Lit.

"Can I check our pay-roll?"

"What for?"

"I want to make sure everyone's on it."

"Ask Madame Kritskaya."

Madame Kritskaya got up, shook her bun of grey hair and announced turning pale:

"It's got lost."

Pause.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Madame Kritskaya, tearfully:

"My head's going round. You can't imagine what's been going on here. Seven times I wrote out that pay-roll and they sent it back. Said there was something wrong with it. And you won't get your pay anyway. There's someone on your list who hasn't been officially authorised."

*

To hell with the lot of them! Nekrasov and the resurrected alcoholics. I hurried off. More corridors. Dark. Light. Light. Dark. Meyerhold. Personnel. Light bulbs on in the daytime. A grey army-coat. A woman in wet felt boots. Desks.

"Which of us hasn't been officially authorised?"

Answer:

"None of you have."

But the best of it was that the founder of ASS Lit., the old man himself, had not been authorised. What? And I haven't either? What's going on here?

"You probably didn't write an application?"

"I didn't what? I wrote four applications in your office. And handed them over to you personally. Together with the one I wrote before that makes 113 applications in all."

"Well, they must have got lost. Write another one."

This went on for three days. After that we were all reinstated. And new authorisations were written.

I am against the death penalty. But if Madame Kritskaya is ever taken to face the firing squad, I'll go and watch. The same applies to the young lady in the sealskin hat. And Lidochka, the clerical assistant.

Get rid of the lot of them!

Madame Kritskaya stood there with the authorisations in her hands, and I solemnly declare that she will not pass them on. I could not understand what this diabolical woman with the bun was doing

here. Who would entrust her with work?
This was Fate and no mistake!

A week passed. I went to the fifth floor, in entrance 4. They put a stamp on them there. I need another stamp, but for two days I've been trying vainly to catch the Chairman of the Tariff-Valuation Committee.

Sold the sheet.

*

We won't get any cash for at least a fortnight.

*

There's a rumour that everyone in the building will get an advance of 500.

*

The rumour's true. They've spent four days writing out authorisations.

*

I took the authorisations to receive the advance. Had everything. All the stamps

were in order. But I got so worked up rushing from the second floor to the fifth that I bent an iron bolt sticking out of the corridor wall.

Handed over the authorisations. They'll be sent for endorsement to another building at the other end of Moscow. Then returned. And then the cash...

Got paid today. Cash!

Ten minutes before it was time to go to the pay desk, the woman on the ground floor, who was supposed to put on the last stamp, said:

"It's not set out according to form. You'll have to write another one."

I don't remember exactly what happened then. Everything went hazy.

I seem to remember yelping something painfully. Like:

"What the hell's going on?"

The woman opened her mouth:

"How dare you..."

Then I calmed down. I calmed down. Explained that I'd been het up. Apologised. Took back what I'd said. She

agreed to correct it in red ink. Scribbled: "Pay cash." Squiggle.

I rushed to the cash desk. Magic words: cash desk! Didn't believe it, even when the cashier took out the notes.

Then it suddenly hit me. Money!

From the drafting of the authorisation up to the moment of receipt from the cash desk passed twenty-two days and three hours.

There was nothing left at home. No jacket. No sheet. No books.

ON HOW TO EAT

Got ill. Through being careless. Had beetroot soup with meat today. Tiny golden discs (fat) floating on top. Three platefuls. Three pounds of white bread in one day. And some pickled cucumbers. When I was full up, made some tea. Drank four glassfuls with sugar. Felt sleepy. Lay down on the divan and dropped off.

Dreamed I was Lev Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana. Married to Sofia Andreyevna. Sitting upstairs in the study. Had to write. But didn't know what. People kept coming up and saying:

"Dinner is served."

But I was afraid to go down. I felt stupid, realised there was a big misunderstanding. It wasn't me who wrote *War and Peace*. Yet I was sitting there. Sofia Andreyevna herself came up the wooden staircase and said:

"Come along. It's a vegetarian dinner."

Suddenly I lost my temper.

"What? Vegetarianism? Get some meat at once! I want a steak. And a glass of vodka."

She burst into tears. Then a *dukhobor* with a bushy ginger beard rushed up and said to me reproachfully:

"Vodka? Tut-tut-tut! What are you thinking of, Lev Ivanovich?"

"Not Ivanovich! Nikolayevich! Get out of my house! Scram! Away with all those *dukhobors!*"

There was a great commotion.

I woke up a sick and broken man. It was dusk. An accordion was playing in the next room.

I went to the mirror. What a face. Ginger beard, white cheekbones, red eyelids. But that was nothing compared to the eyes. Glittering again. That was bad.

*

Advice: beware of that glitter. as soon as it appears, borrow some money (not returnable), from a bourgeois, buy some food and have a meal. Only don't eat too much to begin with. Just clear soup and a little white bread on the first day. Take it easy.

I didn't like my dream either. It was a horrid dream.

Drank tea again. Remembered last week. On Monday I ate some potatoes with vegetable oil and quarter of a pound of bread. Drank two glasses of tea with saccharine. On Tuesday I had nothing to eat and drank five glasses of tea. On Wednesday I borrowed two pounds of bread from a plumber. Drank tea, but ran out of saccharine. Had a splendid lunch on Thursday. Went round to see some friends at

2 p. m. The door was opened by a maid in a white apron. Strange sensation. As if it were ten years ago. At

3 p. m. heard the maid begin to set the table. We sat and talked (I had shaved that morning). They cursed the Bolsheviks and told me they were exhausted. I could see they were waiting for me to go. But I sat tight.

Eventually the lady of the house said:

"Would you care to stay for lunch perhaps?"

"Thank you. I should love to."

We had: soup with macaroni and white bread, meatballs and cucumbers for the main course, then rice pudding with jam and tea also with jam.

Must confess something horrid. As I was leaving, I imagined the place being searched. They would come and ransack everything. Find gold coins under the longjohns in the chest of drawers. Flour and ham in the larder. Take the host away...

It was foul to think like that, but I did.

He who sits hungry in an attic over a feuilleton, let him not follow the example of the fastidious Knut Hamsun. Let him visit those who live in seven rooms and

lunch with them. On Friday had lunch at the canteen, soup and a potato cake, and today, Saturday, got paid and ate myself sick.

STORM. SNOW

There's *a* hint of menace in the air. I've already developed a sixth sense. Something is giving way beneath our ASS Lit.

The old man appeared today, pointed a finger at the ceiling beyond which the young ladies lurk, and said:

"There's a plot against me..."

Hearing this I hurriedly counted how many saccharine tablets I had left. Enough for five or six days.

The old man came in noisily, beaming all over.

"I've foiled their plot," he said. No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than a woman's head in a scarf popped round the door and snapped:

"You there. Sign this."

I signed it.

The paper said:

"As from such-and-such a date ASS Lit. is disbanded."

Like the captain on the sinking ship, I was the last to leave. Our business — Nekrasov, the Resurrected Alcoholic, Hunger miscellanies, ⁽²¹⁾ poetry, instructions to provincial ASS Lits, I ordered to be filed and handed in. Then I turned out the light with my own hands and left. And just as I did it began to snow. Then rain. Then something in between the two lashed my face from all sides.

Moscow's terrible in periods of staff reductions and weather like that. Yes sir, that was a reduction alright. People were being sacked in other parts of that awful building too.

But not Madame Kritskaya, Lidochka or the sealskin hat.

COMMENTARIES TO NOTES OFF THE CUFF:

1. Melnikov P. I. (the pseudonym of Andrei Pechersky, 1818-1883), a Russian writer and the author of *In the Forests* and *In the Hills*, novels about Old Believers.

2. "Peter in a green caftan..." A reference to the Russian tsar Peter the Great who founded the Russian navy and used to build ships with his own hands.

3. "Black, white, slender, Vasnetsovian..." Victor Vasnetsov (1848-1926), a Russian artist who painted legendary subjects and also decorated the Cathedral of St. Vladimir in Kiev.

4. "The novelist Yuri Slyozkin..." The writer Yu. L. Slyozkin (1885-1947), author of the novels *Table Mountain*

(The Girl from the Mountain), *Abdication* and others, which portray the events of the pre-revolutionary period and the years just after the Revolution.

5. "I face the future without fear..." A quotation from Alexander Pushkin's poem "Stanzas", which prompted certain circles of Russian society to talk about the poet's abandonment of his ideals. These accusations, which were disproved by

Pushkin's life and writings, were repeated by primitive critics in the early Soviet period.

6. "...his Gentleman-of-the-Bedchamberism..." In 1834 Pushkin was appointed a Gentleman-of-the-Bedchamber (the lowest court rank in Imperial Russia). The poet was insulted and deeply angered by this unexpected "favour" from the Tsar.

7. A quotation from Pushkin's poem "A Bacchanal Song".

8. "*Indifferent alike to praise or blame...*" A quotation from "A monument I've raised not built with hands..."

9. Yevreinov N. N. (1879-1953), a director and playwright.

10. "*Brother writers, your vocation...*" A line from Nekrasov's poem "In the Hospital" which continues as follows: "*holds the threat of doom...*"

11. "Yesterday Riurik Ivnev appeared..." The pseudonym of Mikhail Alexandrovich Kovalyov (1891-1981), a poet who belonged to the group of Imagists during the period in question.

12. "The third was Osip Mandelstam." Osip Emilievich Mandelstam (1891-1938), an Acmeist poet.

13. "The novelist Pilnyak..." The pseudonym of Boris Andreyevich Vogau (1894-1941), the author of the novels *The Naked Year*, *The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea* and *Okay*, as well as several collections of short stories.

14. "Serafimovich arrived from up north." Alexander Serafimovich Serafimovich (Popov) (1863-1949), the author of the well-known novel *The Iron Flood* about the Civil War.

15. Nozdryov — a satirical character from Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*.

16. A quotation from Pushkin's poem *The Poor Knight*.

17. "Or perhaps it's Bryusov and Bely?" Valery Yakovlevich Bryusov (1873-1924), poet, novelist and critic, the founder of Russian Symbolism. Andrei Bely (the pseudonym of Boris Nikolayevich Bugayev) (1880-1934), poet and novelist, a leading representative of Russian Symbolism.

18. "The meat pie in the Truba..." Trubnaya Square in Moscow, where there was a market.

19. "Kanatchikov dacha!" A clinic for the mentally ill.

20. A quotation from Gogol's story *The Nose*.

21. "...Nekrasov, the Resurrected Alcoholic, the Hunger miscellanies..." A reference to a book of verse by Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878), which was about to be published, a play called *The Resurrected Alcoholic* by an amateur playwright, and also various collections by Russian and Soviet writers, the proceeds from which had been donated to famine relief.

DIABOLIAD

The Tale of the Twins Who Finished off the Chief Clerk

I

THE EVENT ON THE TWENTIETH

At a time when everyone else was hopping from one job to the next, Comrade Korotkov was firmly ensconced at MACBAMM (the Main Central Base for Matchstick Materials) in the permanent post of Chief Clerk, which he had now held for no less than eleven months.

Happy in his MACBAMM haven, the quiet and sensitive fair-haired Korotkov had banished from his mind completely the idea that fortunes can change, replacing it by the conviction that he, Korotkov, would go on working at the Base as long as there was life on earth. But, alas, this was not to be...

On 20 September, 1921 the MACBAMM cashier donned his revolting fur cap with

the big ear flaps, put a striped cheque in his briefcase and drove off. That was at 11.00 a. m.

At 4.30 p. m. the cashier returned, drenched to the skin. He came in, shook the water off his cap, placed the cap on the desk and the briefcase on top of it, and said:

"Don't all rush, ladies and gents."

Then he rummaged about in the desk, left the room and came back a quarter of an hour later carrying a large dead chicken with its neck wrung. Placing the chicken on the briefcase and his right hand on the chicken, he announced:

"There's no cash."

"Tomorrow?" the women shouted in chorus.

"No," the cashier shook his head. "Not tomorrow either, or the day after. Keep calm, ladies and gents, or you'll knock the desk over, comrades."

"What?" yelled everyone, the naive Korotkov included.

"Citizens!" the cashier cried tearfully, elbowing Korotkov out of the way. "I beg you!"

"But there must be!" everybody shouted, that comic Korotkov loudest of all.

"Alright, look at this," the cashier muttered hoarsely, pulling the cheque out of his pocket and showing it to Korotkov.

Above the spot where the cashier dug his grimy nail in were some words scrawled in red ink.

"Pay cash. Senat, p. p. Comrade Subbotnikov."

Further down were some more words in purple ink.

"No cash left. Smirnov, p. p. Comrade Ivanov."

"What?" shouted Korotkov on his own, while the others, puffing and panting, descended upon the cashier.

"Oh, my goodness!" the latter howled wretchedly. "Why blame me? Oh, my godfathers!"

Stuffing the cheque hurriedly into his briefcase, he pulled on his cap, thrust the briefcase under his arm, brandished the chicken, shouting, "Stand aside!" and, breaching his way through the human wall, disappeared through the door.

The squealing white-faced registrar tottered after him on her high heels. The

left heel snapped off by the door, and the registrar staggered, lifted her foot and took the shoe off.

And there she stood in the room, one foot shoeless, with the rest of them, Korotkov included.

II

PRODUCTION PRODUCE

Three days after the event described, the door of the office where Comrade Korotkov was working opened slightly, and a woman's head said spitefully:

"Go and get your pay, Comrade Korotkov."

"What?" Korotkov exclaimed delightedly and, whistling the overture to *Carmen*, trotted along to a room with a notice saying "Cashier". By the cashier's desk he stopped open-mouthed. Two thick piles of yellow packets rose up to the ceiling. To avoid answering questions, the agitated and perspiring cashier had pinned up the cheque, which now bore yet another scrawl, this time in green ink.

"Pay in production produce.

"Preobrazhensky, p. p. Comrade Bogoyavlensky."

"I agree — Kshesinsky."

Korotkov left the cashier's office with a broad, stupid grin on his face. He was carrying four large yellow packets and five small green ones in his hands, plus thirteen blue boxes of matches in his pockets. Back in his room, listening to the hubbub of amazed voices in the General Office, he wrapped up the matches in two large sheets from that morning's newspaper and slipped out without a word to anyone. By the main entrance he was nearly run over by a car in which someone had just arrived, exactly who Korotkov could not see.

Back home he unwrapped the matches on the table and stood back to admire them. The stupid grin did not leave his face. After that Korotkov ruffled up his hair and said to himself:

"Come on, it's no good moping about all day. We must try to sell them."

He knocked on the door of his neighbour, Alexandra Fyodorovna, who worked at the Provincial Wine Depot.

"Come in," said a hollow voice.

Korotkov went in and stared in amazement. Alexandra Fyodorovna, also back early from work, was squatting on the floor in her coat and hat. In front of her stretched a long line of bottles containing a deep red liquid, stoppered with little balls of newspaper. Alexandra Fyodorovna's face was smudged with tears.

"Forty-six," she said, turning to Korotkov.

"Good afternoon, Alexandra Fyodorovna. Is that ink?" asked the astonished Korotkov.

"Communion wine," his neighbour replied, with a sob.

"You've got some too?" Korotkov gasped.

"Have you been given communion wine as well then?" Alexandra Fyodorovna asked in amazement.

"No, we got matches," Korotkov replied weakly, twisting a button on his jacket.

"But they don't light!" exclaimed Alexandra Fyodorovna, getting up and brushing her skirt.

"What do you mean, they don't light?" Korotkov exclaimed in alarm and hurried

off to his room. There, without wasting a moment, he snatched up a box, tore it open and struck a match. It hissed and flared up with a green flame, broke in two and went out. Choking from the acrid smell of sulphur, Korotkov coughed painfully and struck a second one. This one exploded, emitting two fiery sparks. The first spark landed on the window-pane, and the second in Comrade Korotkov's left eye.

"Ouch!" cried Korotkov, dropping the box.

For a few moments he clattered about like a spirited stallion claspng his hand to his eye. Then he looked with trepidation into his shaving mirror, convinced that he had lost the eye. But it was still there. A bit red, though, and tearful.

"Oh, my goodness!" Korotkov said agitatedly. He took an American first-aid packet out of the chest of drawers, opened it and bandaged the left half of his head, until he looked like someone wounded in battle.

Korotkov did not turn the light out all night and lay in bed striking matches. He got through three boxes, out of which he managed to light sixty-three matches.

"The silly woman's wrong," muttered Korotkov. "They're fine matches."

By morning the room reeked suffocatingly of sulphur. At daybreak Korotkov fell asleep and had a weird, frightening dream. In front of him in a green meadow was an enormous live billiard ball on legs. It was so loathsome that Korotkov cried out and woke up. For a few seconds Korotkov thought he saw the ball there in the dim misty light, by his bed, smelling strongly of sulphur. But then it vanished. Korotkov turned over and fell fast asleep.

III

ENTER THE BALD MAN

Next morning Korotkov moved aside the bandage and saw that his eye had almost recovered. Nevertheless, an excessively cautious Korotkov decided not to take the bandage off for the time being.

Arriving at work extremely late, a crafty Korotkov went straight to his office, so as not to give rise to any false speculation among the lower ranks, and found on his

desk a memo from the head of the Supplies Sub-Section to the head of the Base asking whether the typists were to receive any special clothing. After reading the memo with his right eye, Korotkov picked it up and set off down the corridor to the office of the Base head, Comrade Chekushin.

Right outside the door of the office Korotkov collided with a most peculiar-looking stranger.

The stranger was so short that he only came up to the tall Korotkov's waist. This lack of height was compensated for by the extraordinary breadth of the stranger's shoulders. The squarish torso sat on bandy legs, of which the left one limped. But the most remarkable thing was the head. It was like a huge model of an egg placed horizontally on the neck with the pointed end facing you. It was also bald, like an egg, and so shiny that electric light bulbs shone all the time on the crown. The small face was shaven blue, and the green eyes, small as pin-heads, sat in deep sockets. The stranger's body was enveloped in an unbuttoned army jacket made from a grey blanket, with an embroidered Ukrainian shirt peeping out. The legs were clad in

trousers of the same material and the feet in shortish boots with slits like those worn by hussars in the reign of Alexander I.

"Funny-looking chap," thought Korotkov, making for the door of Chekushin's office and trying to get past the bald man. But suddenly and quite unexpectedly the latter blocked his way.

"What do you want?" the bald man asked Korotkov in a voice that made the sensitive Chief Clerk shudder. It was like the voice of a copper pan and had a timbre that sent prickles down the spine of all who heard it. What's more, the stranger's words seemed to smell of matches. In spite of all this, a short-sighted Korotkov did something one should never do under any circumstances — he took offence.

"Ahem. This is very odd. Here am I trying to deliver a memo. Would you mind telling me who you are..."

"Can't you see what's written on the door?"

Korotkov looked at the door and saw the familiar notice: "Admittance by notification only."

"Well, this is my notification," Korotkov joked weakly, pointing at the memo.

The bald square man suddenly got angry. His little eyes flashed with yellowish sparks.

"You, Comrade," he said, deafening Korotkov with his clatter-pan sounds, "are so immature that you do not understand the meaning of a simple office notice. I'm most surprised that you have stayed here so long. And in general there are lots of funny things going on here. Take all those bandaged eyes, for example. Never mind, we'll put all that in order. ("He-elp!" Korotkov groaned to himself.) Give me that!"

With these words the stranger snatched the memo out of Korotkov's hands, read it through, pulled a chewed indelible pencil out of his trouser pocket, put the memo on the wall and scribbled a few words on it.

"There you are!" he barked, thrusting the memo at Korotkov so hard that he almost put out his other eye. The office door howled and swallowed up the stranger, while Korotkov stood there dumbfounded. Chekushin's office was empty.

A few seconds later the disconcerted Korotkov came to when he collided with

Lidochka de Runi, Comrade Chekushin's private secretary.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Comrade Korotkov. One of Lidochka's eyes was covered with a bandage just like his, except that the ends were tied in a coquettish bow.

"What's the matter with your eye?"

"Matches!" Lidochka replied angrily. "Wretched things."

"Who's that in there?" the devastated Korotkov asked in a whisper.

"Don't you know?" Lidochka whispered back. "The new boss."

"What?" Korotkov squealed. "Where's Chekushin?"

"Got the sack yesterday," Lidochka said angrily, and added, pointing a finger in the direction of the office: "He's a real old buffer. A right terror. Never seen anyone so revolting in all my life. Shouts the place down. 'You'll get the sack!' Bald pants!" she added so unexpectedly that Korotkov goggled at her.

"What's his na..."

Before Korotkov had time to finish his question, a terrible voice boomed "Messenger!" from the office. The Chief Clerk and the secretary fled in opposite directions. Diving into his office, Korotkov

sat down at his desk and delivered the following speech to himself:

"Watch out, Korotkov, old boy. You've landed in a bit of a mess. We'll have to put things right. 'Immature' indeed. Cheeky devil! You'll see how immature Korotkov is!"

With his one good eye the Chief Clerk read the bald man's missive. Scrawled across the paper were the words: "All typists and women staff in general will be issued in good time with military uniform longjohns."

"Oo, that'll be the day!" Korotkov exclaimed with delight, shuddering voluptuously at the thought of Lidochka wearing longjohns. Without further ado, he took a clean sheet of paper and composed the following.

"Telephonogram.

"To the head of Supplies Sub-Section stop. In reply to your memorandum No. 0.15015 (b) of the 19th comma MACBAMM hereby informs you that all typists and women staff in general will be issued in good time with soldiers' uniform longjohns stop Base head signed Chief Clerk dash Varfolomei Korotkov stop."

He buzzed for the messenger Panteleimon and told him:

"Take this to the boss for signature."

Panteleimon ruminated for a moment, took the paper and went out.

For the next four hours Korotkov listened hard, without leaving his room, so that if the new boss decided to take a look round he would be sure to find him with his nose to the grindstone. But not a sound came from the terrible office. Only once did he hear in the distance an iron voice which seemed to be threatening to give someone the sack, but precisely whom Korotkov could not make out, although he put his ear to the keyhole. At 3.30 p. m. Panteleimon's voice was heard from the General Office.

"He's gone off in the car."

The General Office immediately came to life and slipped off home. The last to leave, all on his own, was Comrade Korotkov.

IV

*PARAGRAPH ONE — KOROTKOV GETS
THE SACK*

Next morning Korotkov found to his delight that his eye no longer needed to be bandaged, so he took the bandage off with relief and immediately looked more handsome and different. Gulping down some tea, he put out the primus-stove and hurried off to work, trying not to be late, and arrived fifty minutes late because instead of taking the number six route, the tram followed the number seven to some remote streets with small wooden houses and broke down there. Korotkov had to walk about two miles and trotted panting into the General Office, just as the Alpine Rose's kitchen clock was striking eleven. In the General Office he was greeted by a most unusual spectacle for that time of day. Lidochka de Runi, Milochka Litovtseva, Anna Yevgrafovna, the chief accountant Drozd, the instructor Gitis, Nomeratsky, Ivanov, Mushka, the registrar and the cashier, in other words, all the General Office staff, instead of sitting in their places at the kitchen tables of the former Alpine Rose Restaurant, were standing in a tight cluster by the wall to which a sheet of quarto paper was nailed. There was a sudden hush as Korotkov came in, and everyone looked away.

"Good morning, all, what's the matter?" Korotkov asked in surprise.

The crowd parted in silence, and Korotkov walked up to the sheet of paper. The first few lines looked at him boldly and clearly, the closing ones through a tearful stupefying haze.

"ORDER No. 1

§ 1. "For an inexcusably negligent attitude to his duties giving rise to gross confusion in important official documents, as well as coming to the office with a disgraceful face obviously damaged in a brawl, Comrade Korotkov is hereby dismissed as from today, the 26th inst. and will receive tram money up to and including the 25th inst."

The first paragraph also happened to be the last, and under it in large letters was the flourishing signature:

"Base Head: Longjohn"

For twenty seconds perfect silence reigned in the dusty mirrored hall of the Alpine Rose that was. And the best, deepest and most deathly silence of all came from a greenish Korotkov. At the

twenty-first second the silence was broken.

"What's that? What's that?" Korotkov cracked twice, like an Alpine glass being smashed on someone's heel. "That's his surname — Longjohn?"

At the terrible word the General Office splashed off in different directions and in no time at all were sitting at their tables, like crows on a telegraph wire. Korotkov's face turned from a mouldy putrid green to a spotted purple.

"Deary me, deary me," Skvoretz intoned from a distance, peeping out of his ledger. "How could you have dropped a clanger like that? Eh?"

"B-but I th-thought..." the fragments of Korotkov's voice grated. "I read 'longjohns' instead of 'Longjohn'. He writes his name with a small T and does a twiddle at the end!"

"I won't wear underpants, he needn't worry!" Lidochka tinkled.

"Shush!" hissed Skvoretz snake-like. "What a thing to say!" He dived down and took refuge in his ledger, hiding behind a page.

"And it's not true, what he says about my face!" Korotkov cried quietly, turning

white as ermine instead of purple. "I burnt my eye on those foul matches of ours, like Comrade de Runi!"

"Be quiet!" squealed Gitis, turning pale. "What are you saying? He tested them yesterday and said they were excellent."

Rrrr. The electric bell over the door rang suddenly. Panteleimon's heavy body slid off the stool and trundled along the corridor.

"I'll tell him. I'll tell him!" chanted Korotkov in a high, reedy voice. He dashed to the left, then to the right, ran about ten paces on the spot, his reflection distorted in the dusty Alpine mirrors, dived into the corridor and ran towards the light of the dim bulb hanging over a notice saying "Private Rooms". Panting hard, he stopped in front of the terrible door to find himself in the arms of Panteleimon.

"Comrade Panteleimon," Korotkov began anxiously. "Let me in, please. I must see the boss straightaway..."

"You can't, he says not to let anyone in," Panteleimon croaked, drowning Korotkov's determination in a terrible smell of onion. "You can't. Go away, Mr. Korotkov, or you'll get me into trouble..."

"But I must, Panteleimon," Korotkov asked weakly. "You see, my dear Panteleimon, there's been an order-Please let me pass, be a good chap."

"Oh, my goodness..." muttered Panteleimon, glancing at the door in fright. "You can't, I say. You can't, Comrade!"

Inside the office the telephone rang loudly and a copper-heavy voice barked:

"I'm leaving now! This very moment!"

Panteleimon and Korotkov moved aside. The door flew open and out into the corridor rushed Longjohn in an army cap with a briefcase under his arm. Panteleimon trotted along behind him, and after a moment's hesitation Korotkov raced off behind Panteleimon. At a bend in the corridor Korotkov, pale and agitated, darted under Panteleimon's arm, overtook Longjohn and ran along backwards in front of him.

"Comrade Longjohn," he mumbled with a catch in his throat. "Just let me say something, please. About the order..."

"Comrade!" the preoccupied and hurrying Longjohn roared furiously, trying to race past Korotkov. "Can't you see, I'm busy. I'm on my way."

"It's about the ord..."

"Can't you see I'm busy? Go to the Chief Clerk."

Longjohn raced into the vestibule, where the huge unwanted organ of the Alpine Rose was standing on the floor.

"But *I* am the Chief Clerk!" squealed Korotkov in horror, breaking into a cold sweat. "Please listen to me, Comrade Longjohn."

"Comrade!" Longjohn honked like a siren, not taking the slightest notice. Still running he turned to Panteleimon and shouted: "Take measures to stop me being detained!"

"Comrade!" Panteleimon croaked with fright. "Stop detaining."

And not knowing what measures to take, he took the following one. Putting his arms round Korotkov's torso, he drew him close as if it were the woman of his heart. The measure was most effective. Longjohn whizzed past, raced downstairs as if on roller skates, and shot out of the front door.

"Brrm! Brrm!" shouted a motor-cycle outside the windows, fired five shots and disappeared, veiling the panes with smoke. Only then did Panteleimon let go of

Korotkov, wipe the sweat off his face and howl:

"God help us!"

"Panteleimon..." asked Korotkov in a shaky voice. "Where's he gone? Tell me quickly, or he'll get someone else..."

"I think it's CENTROSUPP."

Korotkov raced downstairs like the wind, sped into the cloakroom, snatched up his coat and hat and ran into the street.

V

A DIABOLICAL TRICK

Korotkov was in luck. At that very moment a tram drew up by the Alpine Rose. Korotkov managed to jump on, then worked his way quickly to the front, bumping against the braking wheel and sacks on people's backs. His heart burned with hope. The motor-cycle had been held up for some reason. It was now rattling away in front of the tram, and the square back in the cloud of blue smoke kept vanishing and coming into view again. For five minutes or so Korotkov was bumped and shaken about on the platform. At last

the motor-cycle stopped by the grey building of CENT-ROSUPP. The square body was obscured by passers-by and disappeared. Korotkov fought his way off the tram while it was still going, spun round in a semi-circle, fell down, banged his knee and, under the very nose of an automobile, raced into the vestibule.

Covering the floors with wet patches, crowds of people were either walking towards Korotkov or overtaking him. He caught a glimpse of the square back on the second flight of stairs and hurried after it, panting hard. Longjohn was climbing up with a strange, unnatural speed, and Korotkov's heart sank at the thought that he might lose him. Which is precisely what happened. On the fifth landing, when the Chief Clerk was completely exhausted, the back melted into the crowd of faces, caps and briefcases. Korotkov flew up to the landing like lightning and hesitated for a moment before a door with two notices on it. One in gold lettering on green said "Pepinieres' Dortoir", while the other in black on white said "HQ. Supp. Sec. Bd." Korotkov hurried through these doors at random and saw huge glass cages and lots of fair-

haired women scurrying between them. He opened the first glass door and saw a man in a blue suit inside. He was sprawling across his desk, laughing gaily into the telephone. In the second compartment the desk was covered with the complete works of Sheller-Mikhailov, and next to them an elderly woman in a frock was weighing some foul-smelling dried fish on scales. In the third was a rhythmic endless clatter interspersed with little rings — there behind six typewriters, laughing and tapping away, sat six fair-headed, small-toothed women. Behind the last door was a vast expanse with plump columns. An excruciating clatter of typewriters filled the air, and lots of heads could be seen, male and female, but there was no sign of Longjohn's. Confused and exhausted, Korotkov stopped the first woman he met, who was running past, carrying a mirror. "You haven't seen Longjohn, have you?" His heart sank with joy, when the woman replied, opening her eyes wide:

"Yes, but he's just leaving. Hurry up and catch him." Korotkov galloped across the hall of columns in the direction in which the small white hand with shiny red nails

was pointing. On the other side he found himself on a narrow, darkish landing by the open jaws of a lift with the light on. Korotkov's heart sank into his shoes. He'd caught him up. The square blanketed back and shiny black briefcase were passing into the gaping jaws. "Comrade Longjohn!" Korotkov shouted and stiffened with horror. Green circles started hopping about on the landing. Bars slid over the glass door, the lift moved, and the square back turned round, changing into a powerful chest. Korotkov recognised everything: the grey jacket, the cap, the briefcase and the currant eyes. It was Longjohn alright, but Longjohn with a long Assyrian-goffered beard down to his chest. The thought immediately flashed through Korotkov's mind: "He must have grown a beard while he was riding the motor-cycle and running up the stairs — but that's impossible!" This was followed by a second thought: "It's a false beard — but that's ridiculous!"

Meanwhile Longjohn began to descend into the caged abyss. First his legs disappeared, then his stomach and beard, and last of all his eyes and mouth shouting some words in a pleasant tenor:

"Too late, Comrade, next Friday."

"The voice is false too." The thought shot through Korotkov's skull. For a second or two his head burned painfully, but then, remembering that no black magic should deter him and that to stop would mean disaster, Korotkov advanced towards the lift. Through the bars he saw a roof rising on a cable. A languid beauty with glittering stones in her hair came out from behind a pipe, touched Korotkov's arm gently and asked him:

"Have you got heart trouble, Comrade?"

"Oh, no, Comrade," gasped the stupefied Korotkov and strode towards the cage. "Don't detain me."

"Then go to Ivan Finogenovich, Comrade," the beauty said sadly, blocking his way to the lift.

"I don't want to!" exclaimed Korotkov tearfully. "Comrade, I'm in a hurry. Please don't."

But the woman remained sadly adamant.

"I can't do anything, you know that," she said, holding Korotkov's arm. The lift stopped, spat out a man with a briefcase, pulled the bars over its face and went down again.

"Let me go!" yelled Korotkov, wrenching his hand away with a curse and dashing down the stairs. After racing down six marble flights and nearly killing a tall elderly lady wearing a piece of lace on her head fastened with pins, who crossed herself fearfully, he found himself at the bottom by a huge new glass wall under a notice in silver lettering on blue that said "Duty class ladies" while another one underneath written in ink on paper read "Information". Korotkov was convulsed with dark horror. Longjohn had come into sight clearly through the glass wall. The former terrible blue-shaven Longjohn. He walked past almost next to Korotkov, separated from him only by a thin layer of glass. Trying not to think of anything, Korotkov made a dive for the copper door-handle and shook it, but it did not give.

Gnashing his teeth, he tugged at the shining copper again, and only then read in desperation a small notice that said "Entry through stairway six".

Longjohn flashed past and disappeared in a black niche behind the glass.

"Where's six? Where's six?" Korotkov cried faintly to someone. The passers-by

started back. A small side door opened, and out popped an old man in a glossy suit and blue glasses holding a long list. He peered at Korotkov over his glasses, smiled and ruminated.

"So you're still wandering around, are you?" he mumbled. "It's a waste of time, you know. Just listen to me, an old man, and give it up. I've already crossed you off anyway. Tee-hee!"

"Crossed me off what?" Korotkov exclaimed.

"Ha-ha. Off the lists, of course. With my pencil — whoosh, and that's that. Tee-hee!" The old man laughed lasciviously.

"Excuse me, but how do you know who I am?"

"Ha-ha. You're a real leg-puller, Vassily Pavlovich."

"I'm Varfolomei," said Korotkov, putting a hand on his cold, clammy forehead. "Varfolomei Petrovich."

For a moment the smile left the terrible old man's face. He stared at the list and ran a small dry finger with a long nail down it.

"Don't you try to confuse me! Here you are — Kolobkov V. P."

"But I'm Korotkov!" Korotkov shouted impatiently.

"That's what I said: Kolobkov," the old man retorted huffily. "And here's Longjohn. You've both been transferred together, and Chekushin's taken over from Longjohn."

"What?" cried Korotkov, beside himself with joy. "Longjohn's been fired?"

"That's right. He was only there for a day before they chucked him out."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Korotkov delightedly. "I'm saved! I'm saved!" And without realising what he was doing, he shook the old man's bony hand with its long nails. The old man smiled, and for a moment Korotkov's joy faded. There was something strange and sinister in the old man's blue eye-sockets. The smile baring greyish gums seemed strange too. But Korotkov immediately drove away this unpleasant feeling and got busy.

"So I should get over to MACBAMM now, should I?" "Yes, you should," the old man affirmed. "It says here — to MACBAMM. Only give me your work record book and I'll make a note in it in pencil."

Korotkov immediately felt in his pocket, turned pale, felt in the other one, turned even paler, clapped his trouser pockets, and with a stifled howl rushed upstairs again, looking underfoot. Bumping into people, a desperate Korotkov flew up to the very top and looked around for the beauty with the stones to ask her something, but saw that she had turned into an ugly snotty-nosed boy.

"Hey, sonny!" Korotkov hailed him. "My yellow wallet..." "It's not true," the boy snapped viciously. "I didn't take it. They're lying."

"Oh, no, lad. I didn't mean that. My documents..." The boy glowered at him and suddenly began howling in a deep bass.

"Oh, my goodness!" shouted Korotkov wildly and rushed downstairs to the old man.

But when he got there, the old man had, gone. Disappeared. Korotkov rushed to the little door and tugged at the handle. It was locked. There was a faint smell of sulphur in the semidarkness.

Thoughts whirled like a blizzard in Korotkov's head, then a new one popped up. "The tram." He suddenly remembered

clearly being pressed hard on the platform by two young people, one thin with a black moustache that looked false.

"Now I'm in real trouble alright," muttered Korotkov. "This is trouble to end all trouble."

He ran into the road, hurried to the end of it, turned down a side-street and found himself by the entrance to a smallish building of unprepossessing architecture. A cross-eyed, sullen fellow asked, looking not at Korotkov but somewhere off at an angle:

"Where d'you think you're going?"

"I'm Korotkov, Comrade, V. P. Korotkov, who has just had his papers stolen. The whole lot. I could get hauled in..."

"You could and all," the man on the porch confirmed.

"So kindly let me..."

"Tell Korotkov he must come in person."

"But I am Korotkov, Comrade."

"Show us your pass."

"It's just been stolen," groaned Korotkov. "Stolen, Comrade, by a young man with a moustache."

"With a moustache? I bet that's Kolobkov. Must be. He's specially working

in our area. Tea-houses are the place to look for him."

"But I can't, Comrade," Korotkov sobbed. "I must see Longjohn in MACBAMM. Please let me in."

"Show us a warrant that it was stolen."

"Who from?"

"Your house-manager."

Korotkov left the porch and ran down the street.

"MACBAMM or the house-manager?" he wondered. "The house-manager only sees people in the morning, so it's MACBAMM."

At that moment a far-away clock on a brown tower chimed four, and people with briefcases poured out of the doors. It was growing dark, and a light wet snow began to fall.

"Too late," thought Korotkov. "Better go home."

VI

THE FIRST NIGHT

There was a white note sticking out of the keyhole. Korotkov read it in the dark.

"Dear neighbour,

"Gone to see mother in Zvenigorod. Have left you the wine as a present. Drink as much as you like. No one wants to buy it. They're in the corner.

Yours, A. Paikova"

With a lopsided grin, Korotkov rattled the lock and in twenty trips moved into his room all the bottles standing in a corner of the corridor, then turned on the lamp and collapsed onto the bed just as he was, in his cap and coat. As if in a trance he stared for about half an hour at the portrait of Cromwell dissolving into the dark shadows, then jumped up and suddenly had a kind of violent fit. Pulling off his cap, he flung it into the corner, swept the packets of matches on to the floor with one fell swoop and began to stamp on them.

"Take that! Take that!" Korotkov howled as he crushed the diabolical boxes with a crunch, imagining vaguely that he was trampling on Longjohn's head.

The memory of the egg-shaped head suddenly made him think of the clean-

shaven and bearded face, and at this point Korotkov stopped short.

"But how on earth could it be?" he whispered, passing a hand over his eyes. "What's this? Why am I standing here busy with trifles, when it's all awful. After all he's not really a double, is he?"

Fear crept through the dark windows into the room, and Korotkov pulled the curtains so as not to look at them. But this did not help. The double face, now growing a beard, now suddenly shaving it off, kept looming out of the corners, its greenish eyes glittering. At last Korotkov could stand it no longer and, feeling as if his brain would burst from the tension, began sobbing quietly.

After a good cry, which made him feel better, he ate some of yesterday's slippery potatoes, then, returning to the cursed puzzle, cried a bit more.

"Wait a minute," he muttered suddenly. "What am I crying for, when I've got some wine?"

In a flash he knocked back half a tea-glass. The sweet liquid took effect five minutes later — his left temple began to ache painfully and he felt a burning, sickening thirst. After drinking three

glasses of water, Korotkov forgot all about Longjohn because of the pain in his temple, tore his top clothes off with a groan and collapsed onto the bed, rolling his eyes miserably. "Aspirin..." he whispered for a long time until a troubled sleep took pity on him.

VII

THE ORGAN AND THE CAT

At ten o'clock next morning Korotkov made some tea quickly, drank a quarter of a glass without relish and, sensing that a hard and troublesome day lay ahead, left his room and ran across the wet asphalted yard in the mist. On the door of the side-wing were the words "House-Manager". Korotkov stretched a hand towards the knob, when his eyes read: "No warrants issued due to death."

"Oh, my goodness," Korotkov exclaimed irritably. "Everything's going wrong." And added: "I'll see about the documents later then, and go to MACBAMM now. I must find out what's happening there. Maybe Chekushin's back already."

Walking all the way, because his money had been stolen, Korotkov eventually reached MACBAMM, crossed the vestibule and made straight for the General Office. On the threshold he stopped short and gaped with surprise. There was not a single familiar face in the whole crystal hall. No Drozd or Anna Yevgrafovna, no one. At the tables looking not at all like crows on a telegraph wire, but like the three falcons of Tsar Alexis, sat three completely identical fair-headed, clean-shaven men in light-grey checked suits and a young woman with dreamy eyes and diamond earrings. The young men paid no attention to Korotkov and went on scratching away at their ledgers, but the woman made eyes at Korotkov. When he responded to this with a vague smile, she smiled haughtily and turned away. "Strange," thought Korotkov and walked out of the General Office, stumbling on the threshold. By the door to his room he hesitated and sighed, looking at the familiar words "Chief Clerk", opened the door and went in. Everything suddenly blurred before Korotkov's eyes and the floor rocked gently under his feet. There at Korotkov's desk, elbows akimbo and

writing furiously with a pen, sat Longjohn himself in the flesh. Shining goffered locks covered his chest. Korotkov caught his breath as he looked at the lacquered bald pate over the green baize. Longjohn was the first to break the silence.

"What can I do for you, Comrade?" he cooed in a deferential falsetto.

Korotkov licked his lips convulsively, inhaled a large cube of air into his narrow chest and said in a barely audible voice:

"Ahem... I'm the Chief Clerk here, Comrade. I mean... Well, yes, if you remember the order..."

Surprise changed the upper half of Longjohn's face considerably. His fair eyebrows rose and his forehead turned into a concertina.

"I beg your pardon," he replied politely, "I am the Chief Clerk here."

Korotkov was struck by a temporary dumbness. When it passed, he uttered the following words:

"Oh, really? Yesterday, that is. Ah, yes. Please excuse me. I've got confused. So sorry."

He backed out of the room and croaked hoarsely to himself in the corridor:

"Try to remember, Korotkov, what's the date today?"

And then answered himself:

"It's Tuesday, I mean Friday. Nineteen hundred."

No sooner had he turned round than two corridor light bulbs flared up before him on a human sphere of ivory, and Longjohn's clean-shaven face obscured the whole world.

"Very good," the copper clanged, and Korotkov got the shakes. "I was waiting for you. Excellent. Pleased to meet you."

So saying he advanced towards Korotkov and gave his hand such a shake that he perched on one foot like a stork on a rooftop.

"I've allocated the staff," Longjohn began talking quickly, jerkily and authoritatively. Three in there," he pointed at the door of the General Office. "And Manechka, of course. You're my assistant. Longjohn's chief clerk. The old lot have all got the sack. That idiot Panteleimon too. I have information that he was a footman in the Alpine Rose. I'm just off to the Board, but you and Longjohn write a memo about that lot, particularly about that — what's his name? — Korotkov. Actually, you look a

bit like that scoundrel yourself. Only he had a black eye."

"Oh, no. Not me," said Korotkov, open-mouthed and swaying. "I'm not a scoundrel. I've had my documents stolen. Everything."

"Everything?" Longjohn shouted. "Nonsense. So much the better."

He dug his fingers into the panting Korotkov's hand, pulled him along the corridor to his precious office, threw him into a plump leather chair and sat down at his desk. Still feeling a strange quaking of the floor under his feet, Korotkov huddled up, closed his eyes and muttered: "The twentieth was Monday, so Tuesday is the twenty-first. No, what's the matter with me? It's the year twenty-one. Outgoing No. 0.15, space for signature dash Varfolomei Korotkov. That's me. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Tuesday and Thursday both begin with a T, and Wednesday ... Wednessss ... with an S, like Saturday..."

Longjohn scribbled noisily on a piece of paper, stamped it with a thump and thrust it at him. At that moment the phone rang furiously. Longjohn snatched up the receiver and yelled into it:

"Uhuh! Okay. Okay. I'm just leaving."

He raced over to the coat-rack, grabbed his cap, covered his bald patch with it and vanished through the door with the parting words:

"Wait for me at Longjohn's."

Everything really swam before Korotkov's eyes, when he read what was written on the paper with the stamp.

"The bearer of this is really my assistant Comrade Vassily Pavlovich Kolobkov, which is really true. Longjohn."

"Oooh!" groaned Korotkov, dropping the paper and his cap on the floor. "What is going on?"

At that moment the door sang shrilly, and Longjohn returned in his beard.

"Longjohn gone, has he?" he asked Korotkov in a high, affectionate voice.

Everything went dark.

"Aaah!" Korotkov howled, unable to endure the torture, and beside himself with fury, rushed at Longjohn, baring his teeth. Longjohn's face turned yellow with horror. Backing into the door, he opened it with a clatter, tumbled into the corridor, losing his balance, and squatted on his heels, then jumped up and ran off shouting:

"Messenger! Messenger! Help!"

"Stop! Stop! I beg of you, Comrade," cried Korotkov, coming to and rushing after him.

There was a bang in the General Office, and the falcons jumped up as if by order. The woman's dreamy eyes leapt up from the typewriter.

"They'll shoot! They'll shoot!" she shouted hysterically.

Longjohn ran into the vestibule first, onto the dias where the organ was, hesitated for a moment, wondering where to go, then rushed off, cutting a corner, and disappeared behind the organ. Korotkov raced after him, slipped and would probably had banged his head on the rail, if it hadn't been for a huge black crooked handle sticking out of the yellow side. It caught Korotkov's coat, the worn cloth tore with a quiet squeal, and Korotkov sat gently down on the cold floor. The side door behind the organ banged to after Longjohn.

"Goodness..." began Korotkov, but did not finish.

The impressive box with dusty copper pipes emitted a strange sound like a glass breaking, followed by a deep dusty growl,

a strange chromatic squeak and the stroke of a bell. Then came a resonant major chord, an ebullient full-blooded stream, and the whole three-tiered yellow box began to play, turning over deposits of stagnating sound.

*The fire of Moscow roared and
thundered...*

Panteleimon's pale face suddenly appeared in the black square of the door. In a trice he, too, underwent a metamorphosis. His tiny eyes shone triumphantly, he drew himself up, flung his right arm across his left, as if putting on an invisible napkin, leapt up and galloped downstairs sideways, obliquely, like a trace-horse, circling his arms as if he were holding a trayful of cups.

The smoke did o'er the river spread...

"What on earth have I done?" Korotkov gasped in horror. After rushing through the first stagnating waves, the machine settled down smoothly, filling the empty halls of MACBAMM with the roar of a thousand-headed lion.

And on the walls by the Kremlin Gate...-

Through the howling and thundering of bells came the sound of a car, and Longjohn returned through the main entrance, a clean-shaven, vindictive and menacing Longjohn. He began to mount the staircase smoothly in a sinister bluish light. Korotkov's hair stood on end. Jumping up, he ran through the side door down the crooked staircase behind the organ and across the gravel-covered yard into the street. As if pursued by the Furies he flew into the street with the Alpine Rose booming behind him.

A grey frock-coated figure stood...

On the corner a cabby brandishing a whip was trying furiously to get his old nag going.

"Oh, my God!" Korotkov sobbed frantically. "It's him again! What is going on?"

A bearded Longjohn loomed out of the pavement *bf* the cab, hopped in and began to whack the cabby on the back, chanting in his high voice:

"Get going, you rascal! Get going!"

The old nag gave a start, kicked up its heels and raced off under the stinging blows of the whip, clattering down the street. Through tempestuous tears Korotkov saw the cabby's patent-leather hat fly off and banknotes came fluttering out of it in all directions. Small boys chased after them, whistling. The cabby turned round and pulled in the reins wildly, but Longjohn thumped him on the back furiously and yelled:

"Keep going! Keep going! I'll pay you."

"Ee, your good health, it's rack and ruin, ain't it?" the cabby cried wildly, putting the nag into a full gallop, and they all disappeared round the corner.

Sobbing, Korotkov looked at the grey sky racing overhead, staggered and cried painfully:

"That's enough. I can't leave it like this! I must explain everything." He jumped on to a tram. It shook him along for five minutes or so then threw him down by a green nine-storey building. Rushing into the vestibule, Korotkov stuck his head through the quadrangular opening in a wooden partition and asked a big blue teapot:

"Where's the Complaints Bureau, Comrade?"

"Eighth floor, ninth corridor, flat 41, room 302," the teapot replied in a woman's voice.

"Eighth, ninth, 41, three hundred ... three hundred and what was that ... 302," muttered Korotkov, running up the broad staircase. "Eighth, ninth, eighth, no, forty ... no, 42 ... no, 302," he mumbled. "Oh, goodness, I've forgotten ... 40, that's it."

On the eighth floor he walked past three doors, saw the black number "40" on the fourth and went into an enormous hall with columns and two rows of windows. In the corners lay rolls of paper on spools, and the floor was strewn with scraps of paper covered with writing. In the distance at a small table with a typewriter sat a goldenish woman, cheek in hand, purring a song quietly. Looking round in confusion Korotkov saw the massive figure of a man in a long white coat walk down heavily from the platform behind the columns. The marble face sported a grey drooping moustache. With an unusually polite, lifeless smile, the man came up to

Korotkov, shook his hand warmly and announced, clicking his heels:

"Jan Sobieski."

"You can't be!" replied Korotkov, taken aback.

The man gave a pleasant smile.

"That surprises a lot of people, you know," he said, getting the word stresses wrong. "But don't think I have anything to do with that rascal, Comrade. Oh, no. It's an unfortunate coincidence, nothing more. I've already applied to change my name to Socvossky. That's much nicer, and not so dangerous. But if you don't like it," the man twisted his mouth sensitively, "I don't insist. We always find people. They come looking for us."

"Oh, but, of course," Korotkov yelped painfully, sensing that something strange was beginning here too, like everywhere else. He looked round with a hunted expression, afraid that a clean-shaven countenance and bald eggshell might suddenly pop up out of thin air, and then added clumsily: "I'm very glad, very..."

A faint blush appeared on the marble man; taking Korotkov's arm gently, he led him to a table, talking all the time.

"And I'm very glad too. But the trouble is, you know, that I haven't anywhere to put you. They keep us in the background, in spite of all our importance." (The man waved a hand at the spools of paper.) "Intrigues. But we'll get going, don't you worry."

"Hm. And what have you got for us this time?" he asked the pale Korotkov affectionately. "Oh, I'm so sorry, I really must apologise, allow me to introduce," he waved a white hand elegantly in the direction of the typewriter. "Henrietta Potapovna Persymphens."

The woman immediately offered Korotkov a cold hand and a languid look.

"Now then," the boss continued sweetly. "What have you got for us today? A feuilleton? Some essays?" Rolling his white eyes, he drawled: "You can't imagine how much we need them."

"Good heavens, what's all this about?" thought Korotkov dimly, then he drew a deep convulsive breath and began talking.

"Something, er, terrible has happened. He... I don't understand. Please don't think it's a hallucination... Hmm. Ha-ha." (Korotkov tried to give an artificial laugh, but it didn't work.) "He's alive. I assure

you ... only I can't make it out, sometimes he has a beard and a moment later it disappears. I just don't understand... He changes his voice too... What's more, I've had all my documents stolen, and to make matters worse the house-manager's gone and died. That Longjohn..."

"I knew as much," exclaimed the boss. "Is it them?"

"Oh, my goodness, of course," the woman replied. "Those dreadful Longjohns."

"You know," the boss interrupted excitedly, "it's because of him that I'm sitting on the floor. Take a look at that, old chap. And what does he know about journalism?" he caught hold of Korotkov's button. "Kindly tell me that, what does he know? He spent two days here and nearly tormented me to death. But imagine what luck. I went to see Fyodor Vassilievich and he got rid of him at last. I didn't mince my words: it's either him or me, I said. They transferred him to some MACBAMM or something, devil knows what. Let him stink the place out with those matches! But he managed to move the furniture to that damned office. The whole damn lot, if you please. And what, may I ask, am I

going to write on? What are you going to write on? For I have no doubt at all that you will be one of us, dear chap." (Korotkov's host embraced him.) "In a most irresponsible fashion that scoundrel moved all our lovely Louis Quatorze satin furniture to that stupid bureau, which they'll shut down tomorrow in any case, the devil take it."

"What bureau?" Korotkov asked in a hollow voice.

"Oh, those complaints or whatever they are," the boss said irritably.

"What?" cried Korotkov. "What? Where is it?"

"There," the boss replied in surprise, prodding the floor.

Korotkov took one last crazed look at the white coat and raced into the corridor. Pausing for a moment, he turned left looking for steps going down and ran along for about five minutes, following the whimsical bends in the corridor. Five minutes later he was back where he had started. At door No. 40.

"Oh, hell!" he exclaimed, hesitating for a moment, then turned right and ran along for another five minutes until he arrived at No. 40 again. Pulling the door open, he

ran into the hall to find it now empty. Only the typewriter's white teeth smiled silently on the desk. Korotkov ran up to the colonnade and saw the boss there. He was standing on a pedestal, unsmiling, with an affronted expression.

"Forgive me for not saying goodbye..." Korotkov began, then stopped. The boss's left arm was broken off and his nose and one ear were missing. Recoiling in horror, Korotkov ran into the corridor again. A secret door opposite, which he had not noticed, opened suddenly and out came a wrinkled brown old woman with empty buckets on a yoke.

"Granny! Granny!" cried Korotkov anxiously. "Where's the bureau?"

"I don't know, sir, I don't know, your honour," the old woman replied. "Only don't you go runnin' around like that, duck, 'cos you won't find it any ways. Ten floors is no joke."

"Ugh, silly old thing," hissed Korotkov and rushed through the door. It banged shut behind him and Korotkov found himself in a dark space with no way out. He flung himself at the walls, scratching like someone trapped in a mine, until at last he found a white spot which let him

out to a kind of staircase. He ran down it with a staccato clatter, and heard steps coming up towards him. A dreadful unease gripped his heart, and he slowed down to a halt. A moment later a shiny cap appeared, followed by a grey blanket and a long beard. Korotkov swayed and clutched the rail. At that moment their eyes met, and they both howled shrilly with fear and pain. Korotkov backed away upstairs, while Long-John retreated, horror-stricken, in the opposite direction.

"Wait a minute," croaked Korotkov. "You just explain..."

"Help!" howled Longjohn, changing his shrill voice for the old copper bass. He stumbled and fell down, striking the back of his head. It was a blow that cost him dear. Turning into a black cat with phosphorous eyes, he flew upstairs, streaking like velvet lightning across the landing, tensed into a ball, then sprang onto the window-sill and vanished in the broken glass and spider's webs. A white fog befuddled Korotkov's brain for an instant, then lifted, giving way to an extraordinary clarity.

"Now I see it all," Korotkov whispered, laughing quietly. "Yes, I see. That's what it is. Cats! Now I get it. Cats!"

He began to laugh louder and louder, until the whole staircase rang with peeling echoes.

VIII

THE SECOND NIGHT

In the twilight Korotkov sat in his flannelette bed and drank three bottles of wine to forget everything and calm down. Now his whole head was aching: the right and left temples, the back of his head and even his eyelids. Waves of light nausea kept rising from deep down in his stomach, and Korotkov vomited twice in a basin.

"This is what I'll do," he whispered weakly, his head hanging down. "Tomorrow I'll try not to run into him. But since he seems to be all over the place, I'll just wait. In a side-street or a blind alley. He'll walk straight past me. But if he tries to catch me, I'll run away. He'll give up. 'You just carry on,' I'll say. I don't want to

go back to MACBAMM anymore. Good luck to you. Be head of department and Chief Clerk, if you like. I don't want tram money either. I can do without it. Only leave me alone, please. Whether you're a cat or not, with a beard or without, you go your way and I'll go mine. I'll find another job and get on with it in peace and quiet. I don't bother anyone, and no one bothers me. And I won't make any complaints about you. I'll just get myself some documents tomorrow— and to hell with it."

A clock began to chime in the distance. Ding, dong. "That's at the Pestruxhins'," thought Korotkov and began to count: "Ten, eleven, midnight, thirteen, fourteen ... forty." "The clock chimed forty times," Korotkov smiled bitterly and started weeping again. Once more the communion wine made him vomit convulsively and painfully.

"It's strong alright, this wine," Korotkov muttered, falling back onto his pillow with a groan. Some two hours passed. The unextinguished lamp lit up the pale face on the pillow and the tousled hair.

MACHINE HORRORS

The autumn day greeted Comrade Korotkov in a vague, strange fashion. Looking round fearfully on the staircase, he climbed up to the eighth floor, turned right without thinking and shuddered with delight. The drawing of a hand was pointing to "Rooms 302-349". Following the finger of the beckoning hand, he came to a door which said "302, Complaints Bureau". After a cautious peep inside, to avoid meeting any undesirable characters, Korotkov went in and found himself facing seven women seated at typewriters. After a moment's hesitation, he went up to the nearest one, who was matt and dark-skinned, bowed and was about to say something when the brunette suddenly interrupted him. All the women stared hard at Korotkov.

"Let's go into the corridor," the matt woman said abruptly and patted her hair convulsively.

"Oh, my goodness, what now?" thought Korotkov miserably. He obeyed, with a

deep sigh. The six remaining ones whispered excitedly behind their backs.

Leading Korotkov into the semi-darkness of the empty corridor, the brunette said:

"You are awful. I didn't sleep all night because of you and I've made up my mind. You can have your way. Take me, body and soul!"

Korotkov took one look at the huge eyes in the swarthy face that smelt of lilies-of-the-valley, uttered a guttural cry and said nothing. The brunette threw back her head, bared her teeth with a martyr-like air, seized Korotkov's arm and pulled him to her, whispering:

"Why don't you say something, my seducer? You have conquered me with your courage, my serpent. Kiss me quick, while there's no one from the control commission around."

Another strange sound emerged from Korotkov's mouth. He reeled, felt something sweet and soft on his lips and saw two large pupils right next to his eyes.

"Take me, body and soul." The words were whispered right by Korotkov's mouth.

"I can't," he replied hoarsely. "My documents have been stolen."

"Now then," came from behind.

Korotkov looked round and saw the glossy old man. "Ah!" cried the brunette, covering her face with her hands, and ran off through the door.

"Hee," said the old man. "Hello there. You keep turning up everywhere, Comrade Kolobkov. Real ladies' man, you are. You can kiss as much as you like, but it won't get you an expenses-paid business trip. This old man has been given one though, and I'm off. So there." So saying he cocked a snook at Korotkov. "But I'll tell on you alright," he went on spitefully. "That I will. You've had three of 'em down in the main section, and now you've started on the sub-sections. You don't give a damn if those little angels are crying their eyes out, do you? They're sorry now, poor lasses, but it's too late. You can't bring back a maiden's honour. That you can't. You can't."

The old man pulled out a large handkerchief with orange flowers, started to cry and blew his nose.

"So you want to deprive an old man of his tiny travelling allowance, eh, Mr.

Kolobkov? Alright then." The old man started shaking and sobbing and dropped his briefcase.

"Take it. Let a non-Party, fellow-travelling old man starve to death. Go on. That's all he's good for, the old cur. Only remember this, Mr. Kolobkov." The old man's voice grew prophetically ominous and rang out like a bell. "They will do you no good, those satanic shekels. They'll stick in your throat." And the old man burst into heavy sobs.

Korotkov was gripped by hysteria. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly for himself, he began stamping his feet.

"To hell with you!" he shouted shrilly and his sick voice echoed round the vaults. "I'm not Kolobkov. Leave me alone! I'm not Kolobkov. And I'm not going anywhere!"

He tore at his collar.

The old man dried up at once and began quaking with fear.

"Next one!" someone barked behind the door. Korotkov paused and rushed inside. He turned left, past some typewriters, and found himself in front of a well-built elegant blond-haired man in a blue suit. Blondy nodded to Korotkov and said:

"Make it snappy, Comrade. No beating about the bush. What's it to be? Poltava or Irkutsk?"

"My documents have been stolen," the confused Korotkov replied, looking round wildly. "Then a cat turned up. It's not fair. I've never been in a fight in my life. It was the matches. I shouldn't be victimised. I don't care if he's Longjohn. My documents have..."

"That's rubbish," replied Blondy. "We'll provide the uniform, shirts and sheets. Even a second-hand sheepskin jacket, if it's Irkutsk. Make it snappy."

He turned a key musically in *a* lock, pulled out a drawer, looked inside it and said:

"Alright, Sergei Nikolayevich."

Out of the ash-wood drawer peeped a well-combed flaxen-haired head with darting blue eyes. After it curved a snake-like neck in a crackling starched collar, then a jacket, arms and trousers, and a second later a whole secretary crawled onto the red baize squeaking "Good morning." Shaking himself like a dog after a swim, he jumped down, turned back his cuffs, pulled a fountain pen out of his pocket and began scribbling.

Korotkov recoiled, stretched out a hand and said plaintively to Blondy:

"Look, look, he climbed out of the desk. What's going on?"

"Of course, he did," Blondy replied. "He can't stay in there all day, can he? It's time. Tempus. Time-keeping."

"But how? How?" rang Korotkov.

"For heaven's sake," Blondy snapped. "Don't waste my time, Comrade."

The brunette's head looked round the door and shouted excitedly and joyfully:

"I've already sent his documents to Poltava. And I'm going with him. I've got an aunt in Poltava at 43 degrees latitude and five longitude."

"That's splendid," Blondy replied. "I'm sick of all this shilly-shallying."

"I refuse!" shouted Korotkov, with a wandering expression. "I'll have to take her, body and soul, and I couldn't stand that. I refuse! Give me back my documents. My precious surname. Reinstate me!"

"That's a matter for the matrimonial department, Comrade," squeaked the secretary. "We can't do anything about that."

"Silly boy!" exclaimed the brunette, peeping in again. "Say yes! Say yes!" she hissed in a prompter's whisper. Her head kept darting in and out.

"Comrade!" Korotkov sobbed, rubbing his tear-stained face. "Comrade! Give me my documents, I beseech you. Be a friend. Please, I beg you with all the fibres of my soul, and I'll go into a monastery."

"Cut out the hysterics, Comrade! Kindly inform me concretely and abstractly, in writing and by word of mouth, urgently and confidentially — Poltava or Irkutsk? Don't waste a busy person's time! No walking along the corridors! No spitting! No smoking! No asking for small change!" Blondy thundered, losing his temper.

"All handshaking abolished!" the secretary cuckooed.

"Long live clinches!" the brunette whispered passionately and rushed round the room like a gust of wind, wafting lilies-of-the-valley over Korotkov's neck.

"The thirteenth commandment says: thou shalt not go in to thy neighbour without notification," muttered the glossy old man and fluttered around in the air, flapping the edges of his cloak. "I'm not going in. No, sir. But I'll palm a memo off

on you all the same. Here you are, plop! You'd sign anything. And land up in the dock too." He tossed sheets of paper out of his wide black sleeve, and they floated about, settling on the desks like gulls on seashore cliffs.

The room turned dark and the windows rocked.

"Comrade Blondy," the exhausted Korotkov wept. "You can shoot me on the spot, but please issue me some kind of document. And I'll kiss your hand."

In the darkness Blondy began to swell and grow, frantically signing the old man's sheets of paper and tossing them to the secretary, who caught them with a happy gurgle.

"To hell with him!" Blondy thundered. "To hell with him! Typists, hey!"

He waved an enormous hand, the wall disintegrated before Korotkov's eyes, and the thirty typewriters on the desks rang their bells and began to play a foxtrot. Swaying their hips, shaking their shoulders sensuously and kicking up a white foam with their cream legs, thirty women did a conga round the desks.

White snakes of paper slithered into the typewriters' jaws and were joined, cut out

and sewn into a pair of white trousers with violet side-stripes which said "The bearer of this really is the bearer, and not just a worthless scallywag."

"Put them on!" Blondy roared in the mist.

"Aaah," whimpered Korotkov and began banging his head against the corner of Blondy's desk. His head felt better for a moment, and Korotkov caught a glimpse of a tear-stained face.

"Valerian drops!" cried someone on the ceiling.

The cloak obscured the light, like a black bird, and the old man whispered in alarm:

"Our only hope now is Dyrkin in section five. Hurry up! Hurry up!"

There was a smell of ether, and Korotkov was carried gently into the semi-dark corridor. The cloak enveloped him and swept him along, whispering and giggling: "I've done them a good turn alright. That stuff I threw on their desks will get each of them at least five years with loss of civil rights on the field of battle. Hurry up! Hurry up!"

The cloak fluttered to one side, and a damp gust of air wafted from the lift shaft plunging into the abyss.

X

DYRKIN THE DREAD

The mirrored cabin began to sink down, and two Korotkovs sank with it. The second Korotkov was forgotten in the mirror of the lift by the first and main one, who walked out alone into the cool vestibule. A very fat and pink gent in a top hat greeted Korotkov with the words:

"That's wonderful. I'm going to arrest you."

"You can't do that," Korotkov replied with a satanic laugh, "because nobody knows who I am. Of course not. You can't arrest me or marry me. And I'm not going to Poltava either."

The fat man quaked with terror, looked into Korotkov's eyes and began to sink backwards.

"Arrest me," Korotkov squealed and stuck out a pale quivering tongue smelling of Valerian drops at the fat man. "How can

you arrest me if instead of documents I've got sweet fanny adams? Perhaps I'm a Hohenzollern."

"Jesus Christ," said the fat man, crossing himself with a trembling hand and turning from pink to yellow.

"Longjohn turned up?" Korotkov asked abruptly, looking round. "Answer me, Fatty."

"Oh, no," the fat man replied, his pink complexion changing to grey.

"Well, what shall I do now then? Eh?"

"Go and see Dyrkin himself," the fat man babbled. "That's the best thing. Only he's a real terror! Don't get too close. He sent two people flying. And today he broke a phone."

"Alright then," Korotkov replied with a devil-may-care spit. "We've nothing to lose now. Lift me up!"

"Don't hurt your leg, Comrade Delegate," said the fat man tenderly, helping Korotkov into the lift.

On the top landing was a little fellow of about sixteen who shouted menacingly:

"Where d'ya think you're going? Stop!"

"Don't hit us, old chap," said the fat man, hunching up and covering his head with his hands. "To Dyrkin himself."

"Go on then," the little fellow shouted.

"You go, Your Excellency," the fat man whispered. "I'll wait for you here on the bench. It's awfully scary..."

Korotkov went into a dark vestibule and from there into an empty hall with a threadbare blue carpet.

In front of a door with a notice saying "Dyrkin" Korotkov hesitated for a moment, then went in and found himself in a comfortably furnished room with a huge crimson table and a wall clock. A chubby little Dyrkin bounced out on a spring from behind the desk, bristled his moustache and barked:

"Be quiet!" although Korotkov had not said a word.

At that very moment a pallid youth with a briefcase appeared in the room. Dyrkin's face was instantly wreathed in smiling wrinkles.

"Ah!" he exclaimed ingratiatingly. "Artur Arturovich. Greetings, dear friend."

"Now listen, Dyrkin," the youth said in a metallic voice. "You wrote to Puzyryov that I'd set up my personal dictatorship in an old-age insurance office and pocketed the May benefits, didn't you? Eh? Answer me, you rotten bastard."

"Me?" muttered Dyrkin, magically changing from Dyrkin the Dread into Dyrkin the Good Chap. "Me, Arthur Dictaturich... Of course, I... It's a lie..."

"You blackguard," the youth said clearly. Shaking his head and brandishing his briefcase, he slapped the latter onto Dyrkin's pate, like a pancake on a plate.

Korotkov instinctively gasped and froze.

"It'll be the same for you, and any other smart alec who sticks his nose into my business," the youth said menacingly and went out, shaking a red fist at Korotkov in parting.

For a moment or two there was silence in the room, broken only by the tinkling of the chandelier as a lorry rumbled by.

"There, young man," said a nice and humiliated Dyrkin, with a bitter smile. "That's what you get for your pains. You deprive yourself of sleep, food and drink, and the result's always the same — a slap round the chops. Perhaps you've brought one too. Go on then. Give old Dyrkin a bashing. He's got a public property face. Perhaps your hand hurts, eh? Then use the chandelier, old chap."

And Dyrkin proffered his chubby cheeks temptingly. In a daze, Korotkov gave a shy

crooked smile, took the chandelier by the base and crunched the candles down on Dyrkin's head. Blood spurted onto the baize from the latter's nose and he rushed through an inner door shouting for help.

"Cuck-oo!" piped a forest cuckoo happily, hopping out of a little painted Nuremberg house on the wall.

"Ku-klux-klan!" it cried, turning into a bald head. "We'll tell them how you beat up public servants!"

Korotkov was seized by fury. He swung the chandelier and brought it down on the clock. It replied with thunder and showers of golden arrows. Longjohn hopped out of the clock, turned into a white cockerel with a notice saying "outgoing" and darted through the door. From behind the inner door Dyrkin howled: "Catch him, the rascal," and heavy footsteps sounded on all sides. Korotkov turned and took to his heels.

XI

PAR FORCE MOVIE AND THE ABYSS

The fat man hopped off the landing into the lift, slid behind the bars and plunged down. Down the huge gnawed-out staircase ran first the fat man's black top hat, followed by the white outgoing cockerel, behind which the chandelier whizzed past about two inches above the cockerel's pointed white head, then came Korotkov, the sixteen-year-old with a revolver in his hand, and some other people, clattering with their studded boots. The staircase resounded with ringing bronze, and doors slammed agitatedly on the landings.

Someone leaned over on the top floor and shouted through a megaphone:

"Which section is moving? You've forgotten the safe!"

A woman's voice below replied:

"Bandits!"

Overtaking the top hat and chandelier, Korotkov was the first to dash through the large front door and, gulping down a huge portion of red-hot air, raced into the street. The white cockerel vanished into thin air, leaving a whiff of sulphur behind it, the black cloak materialised out of nowhere and trailed along beside Korotkov, drawling in a high voice:

"Co-op lads get beaten up, Comrades!"

In Korotkov's path pedestrians were scattering and crawling under gates. Short whistles flared up and went out. Someone careered off, wildly hallooing, and anxious hoarse cries of "Catch him!" lit up. Iron shutters were closed with a clatter, and a lame man sitting on the tram-line squealed:

"It's begun!"

Shots were now flying after Korotkov, frequent and jolly like Christmas crackers, the bullets whining at either side and overhead. Growling like a blacksmith's bellows, Korotkov sped towards a gigantic eleven-storey building at right angles to the street, its main facade in a narrow side alley. Right on the corner a glass sign with the words *Restaurant und Bier* cracked starlike, and an elderly cabby with a languid expression on his face moved from the coach-box to sit on the pavement, saying:

"Hey there. Taking pot-shots just for kicks, eh, lads?"

A man ran out of a side-street, tried to catch Korotkov by his jacket and was left holding the lapel. Korotkov turned the corner, raced a few yards and ran into the

mirrored expanse of the vestibule. A boy with braid and gold buttons jumped out of the lift and started crying.

"Get in, mister. Get in!" he bawled. "Only don't hit an orphan."

Korotkov darted into the lift cabin, sat down on a green sofa opposite another Korotkov and started gulping like a fish on the sand. The boy got in after him, sobbing, closed the door, pulled a cord and the lift went up. At that moment shots rang out in the vestibule below, and the revolving glass doors spun wildly.

Up went the lift, gently and nauseatingly. The boy grew calmer and wiped his nose with one hand, while the other twiddled the cord.

"Stolen some money, mister?" he asked avidly, staring at the lacerated Korotkov.

"We're ... attacking ... Longjohn," panted Korotkov in reply. "But he's taken the offensive..."

"You'd better go right to the top, mister, where the billiard tables are," the boy advised him. "You can sit it out on the roof, if you've got a Mauser."

"Let's go up there," Korotkov agreed.

A moment later the lift stopped, the boy flung open the doors, sniffed hard and said:

"Get out, mister, and nip on the roof."

Korotkov jumped out, looked round and did as he was told. From below came a growling, mounting noise, from the side the knocking of ivory balls through a glass partition with agitated faces flashing behind it. The boy darted back into the lift, closed the door and plunged down.

Surveying his position with an eagle eye, Korotkov hesitated for a moment, then ran into the billiard room with the battle-cry "Charge!" Green rectangles flashed past with shiny white balls and pale faces. From below, much nearer now, a shot echoed deafeningly and there was a sound of breaking glass. As if in response to a signal, the players flung down their cues and scrambled hurriedly through the side door with a clatter. Korotkov rushed over and shut the door behind them on the latch, slammed the main glass door from the staircase to the billiard room, and armed himself with some billiard balls. A few seconds later behind the glass the first head loomed up beside the lift. A ball flew out of Korotkov's hands, whistled

through the glass and the head disappeared. In its place a pale light flashed, and a second head loomed up, then a third. The balls flew one after the other, breaking the panes of glass in the partitions. The smashes echoed down the staircase and in reply a machine-gun howled like a deafening Singer sewing machine, and shook the whole building. Glass and frames were sliced out of the upper part, as if with a knife, and a powdery cloud of plaster swept round the room.

Korotkov realised he could not hold his position. Covering his head with his hands, he took a run and kicked the third glass partition, behind which lay the flat asphalt of the roof. The glass splintered and scattered. Under heavy fire he managed to toss five pyramids onto the roof, and they rolled about on the asphalt like severed heads. Korotkov leapt out after them, and just in time too, because the machine-gun lowered its fire and blew out the whole bottom section of the frame.

"Surrender!" he heard faintly.

Suddenly Korotkov saw a pale sun overhead, a bleached sky, a breeze and frozen asphalt. From below and outside a

muffled anxious roar spoke of the town. After hopping up and down on the asphalt and looking round, Korotkov picked up three balls, ran over to the parapet, climbed onto it and looked down. His heart missed a beat. Below lay the roofs of buildings that looked flattened and small, a square with trams crawling over it, beetle-people, and at once Korotkov saw tiny grey figures dancing up to the entrance along the crack of the side-street, followed by a heavy toy dotted with shining gold heads.

"Firemen!" Korotkov gasped. "I'm surrounded."

Leaning over the parapet, he took aim and threw the three balls, one after the other. They rose up, described an arc, then plunged down. Korotkov picked up another three, crawled over again, swung his arm and let them fly too. The balls flashed like silver, turning black as they fell, then flashed again and disappeared. Korotkov thought he saw the beetles begin to scurry about in alarm in the sun-lit square. He bent down to get another batch of missiles, but did not have time. With a crunching and smashing of glass people appeared in the billiard room. They

spilled out like peas, jumping onto the roof. Grey caps and greatcoats poured out, and the glossy old man came flying through an upper pane, without touching the ground. Then the wall collapsed completely, and a terrible clean-shaven Longjohn swept out menacingly on roller-skates with an old blunderbuss in his hands.

"Surrender!" came the howls from all sides and overhead, submerged by an unbearable deafening saucepan bass.

"This is the end," Korotkov gasped faintly. "The end. Battle's lost. Ta-ta-ta," he trumpeted the retreat with his lips.

The courage of death took possession of him. By hanging on and balancing, Korotkov made his way to a post on the parapet, clutched it swaying, drew himself up to his full height and shouted:

"Better death than dishonour!"

His persecutors were close on his heels now. Korotkov saw the outstretched hands, the flame leaping out of Longjohn's mouth. The lure of the sunny abyss was so strong that it took his breath away. He jumped with a piercing triumphant cry and soared upwards. For a second he stopped breathing. Indistinctly, very

indistinctly, he saw something grey fly up past him with black holes as if from an explosion. Then he saw very clearly that the grey thing had fallen down. He himself was rising up to the narrow crack of the side-street which lay above him. Then the blood-red sun burst resoundingly in his head, and he saw nothing more.

THE FATEFUL EGGS

CONTENTS

- About the Author
Chapter I Professor Persikov's
Curriculum Vitae Chapter II A Coloured
Tendril Chapter
III Persikov Catches It Chapter
IV Drozdova, the Priest's Widow
Chapter V The Tale of the Chickens
Chapter VI Moscow. June 1928
Chapter VII Feight
Chapter VIII The Incident at the State
Farm
Chapter IX A Writhing Mass
Chapter X Catastrophe
Chapter XI Bloodshed and Death
Chapter XII A Frosty God Ex Machina

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) was born in Kiev into the family of a teacher at a religious academy, endured the hardships of wars and revolutions, starved, became a playwright for the country's finest theatre, knew fame, persecution, public ovations

and forced muteness. His best works, including the famous *The Master and Margarita*, were not published until after his death. His dramas were struck off the repertoire—*The Days of the Turbins* at the Moscow Arts Theatre and his plays about Moliere and Pushkin. During his lifetime, not a single major anthology of his short stories was ever published.

Bulgakov's works have since been recognised as classics; his books have been published in all the languages of the civilised world, studies of him have reached the four-figure mark and the number is still rising; editions of his books in the USSR have run into millions. He has won the highest praise from Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Columbia and Kendzaburo Oe of Japan. Kirghiz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov looks on Bulgakov as his teacher. Mikhail Bulgakov's books have at last come into their own with their wild fantasy and their prophetic ideas about man and humanity. Our collection includes one of his most vivid stories, "The Fateful Eggs".

CHAPTER I

PROFESSOR PERSIKOV'S CURRICULUM VITAE

On the evening of 16 April, 1928, the Zoology Professor of the Fourth State University and Director of the Moscow Zoological Institute, Persikov, went into his laboratory at the Zoological Institute in Herzen Street. The Professor switched on the frosted ceiling light and looked around him.

This ill-fated evening must be regarded as marking the beginning of the appalling catastrophe, just as Professor Vladimir Ipatievich Persikov must be seen as the prime cause of the said catastrophe.

He was fifty-eight years old. With a splendid bald head, like a pestle, and tufts of yellowish hair sticking out at the sides. His face was clean-shaven, with a slightly protruding lower lip which gave it a slightly cantankerous expression. Tall and round-shouldered, he had small bright eyes and tiny old-fashioned spectacles in silver frames on a red nose. He spoke in a

grating, high, croaking voice and one of his many idiosyncrasies was to crook the index finger of his right hand and screw up his eyes, whenever he was saying something weighty and authoritative. And since he always spoke authoritatively, because his knowledge in his field was quite phenomenal, the crooked finger was frequently pointed at those with whom the Professor was conversing. Outside his field, that is, zoology, embriology, anatomy, botany and geography, however, Professor Persikov said almost nothing at all.

Professor Persikov did not read the newspapers or go to the theatre. His wife had run away with a tenor from the Zimin opera in 1913, leaving him a note which read as follows:

"Your frogs make me shudder with intolerable loathing. I shall be unhappy all my life because of them."

The Professor did not marry again and had no children. He was short-tempered, but did not bear grudges, liked cloudberry tea and lived in Prechistenka Street in a flat with five rooms, one of which was occupied by the old housekeeper, Maria Stepanovna, who looked after the Professor like a nanny.

In 1919 three of the Professor's five rooms were taken away. Whereupon he announced to Maria Stepanovna:

"If they don't stop this outrageous behaviour, I shall leave the country, Maria Stepanovna."

Had the Professor carried out this plan, he would have experienced no difficulty in obtaining a place in the zoology department of any university in the world, for he was a really first-class scholar, and in the particular field which deals with amphibians had no equal, with the exception of professors William Weckle in Cambridge and Giacomo Bartolomeo Beccari in Rome. The Professor could read four languages, as Mvell as Russian, and spoke French and German like a native. Persikov did not carry out his intention of going abroad, and 1920 was even worse than 1919. All sorts of things happened, one after the other. Bolshaya Nikitskaya was renamed Herzen Street. Then the clock on the wall of the corner building in Herzen Street and Mokhovaya stopped at a quarter past eleven and, finally, unable to endure the perturbations of this remarkable year, eight magnificent specimens of tree-frogs died in the

Institute's terrariums, followed by fifteen ordinary toads and an exceptional specimen of the Surinam toad.

Immediately after the demise of the toads which devastated that first order of amphibians rightly called tailless, old Vlas, the Institute's caretaker of many years' standing, who did not belong to any order of amphibians, also passed on to a better world. The cause of his death, incidentally, was the same as that of the unfortunate amphibians, and Persikov diagnosed it at once:

"Undernourishment!"

The scientist was perfectly right. Vlas should have been fed with flour and the toads with flour weevils, but the disappearance of the former determined that of the latter likewise, and Persikov tried to shift the twenty surviving specimens of tree-frogs onto a diet of cockroaches, but then the cockroaches disappeared too, thereby demonstrating their hostile attitude to war communism. Consequently, these last remaining specimens also had to be thrown into the rubbish pits in the Institute yard.

The effect of these deaths on Persikov, particularly that of the Surinam toad, is

quite indescribable. For some reason he blamed them entirely on the People's Commissar for Education.

Standing in his fur cap and galoshes in the corridor of the freezing Institute, Persikov said to his assistant Ivanov, an elegant gentleman with a fair pointed beard:

"Hanging's too good for him, Pyotr Stepanovich! What do they think they're doing! They'll ruin the whole Institute! Eh? An exceptionally rare male specimen of *Pipa americana*, thirteen centimetres long..."

Things went from bad to worse. When Vlas died the Institute windows froze so hard that there were icy scrolls on the inside of the panes. The rabbits, foxes, wolves and fish died, as well as every single grass-snake. Persikov brooded silently for days on end, then caught pneumonia, but did not die. When he recovered, he started coming to the Institute twice a week and in the round hall, where for some reason it was always five degrees below freezing point irrespective of the temperature outside, he delivered a cycle of lectures on "The Reptiles of the Torrid Zone" in galoshes, a

fur cap with ear-flaps and a scarf, breathing out white steam, to an audience of eight. The rest of the time he lay under a rug on the divan in Prechistenka, in a room with books piled up to the ceiling, coughing, gazing into the jaws of the fiery stove which Maria Stepanov-na stoked with gilt chairs, and remembering the Surinam toad.

But all things come to an end. So it was with 'twenty and 'twenty-one, and in 'twenty-two a kind of reverse process began. Firstly, in place of the dear departed Vlas there appeared Pankrat, a young, but most promising zoological caretaker, and the Institute began to be heated again a little. Then in the summer with Pankrat's help Persikov caught fourteen common toads. The terrariums came to life again... In 'twenty-three Persikov gave eight lectures a week, three at the Institute and five at the University, in 'twenty-four thirteen a week, not including the ones at workers' schools, and in the spring of 'twenty-five distinguished himself by failing no less than seventy-six students, all on amphibians.

"What, you don't know the difference

between amphibians and reptilia?" Persikov asked. "That's quite ridiculous, young man. Amphibia have no kidneys. None at all. So there. You should be ashamed of yourself. I expect you're a Marxist, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied the devastated student, faintly.

"Well, kindly retake the exam in the autumn," Persikov said politely and shouted cheerfully to Pankrat: "Send in the next one!"

Just as amphibians come to life after a long drought, with the first heavy shower of rain, so Professor Persikov revived in 1926 when a joint Americano-Russian company built fifteen fifteen-storey apartment blocks in the centre of Moscow, beginning at the corner of Gazetny Lane and Tverskaya, and 300 workers' cottages on the outskirts, each with eight apartments, thereby putting an end once and for all to the terrible and ridiculous accommodation shortage which made life such a misery for Muscovites from 1919 to 1925.

In fact, it was a marvellous summer in Persikov's life, and occasionally he would rub his hands with' a quiet, satisfied

giggle, remembering how he and Maria Stepanovna had been cooped up in two rooms. Now the Professor had received all five back, spread himself, arranged his two-and-a-half thousand books, stuffed animals, diagrams and specimens, and lit the green lamp on the desk in his study.

You would not have recognised the Institute either. They painted it cream, equipped the amphibian room with a special water supply system, replaced all the plate glass with mirrors and donated five new microscopes, glass laboratory tables, some 2,000-amp. arc lights, reflectors and museum cases.

Persikov came to life again, and the whole world suddenly learnt of this when a brochure appeared in December 1926 entitled "More About the Reproduction of Polyplacophora or Chitons", 126 pp, Proceedings of the Fourth University.

And in the autumn of 1927 he published a definitive work of 350 pages, subsequently translated into six languages, including Japanese. It was entitled "The Embryology of Pipae, Spadefoots and Frogs", price 3 roubles. State Publishing House.

But in the summer of 1928 something

quite appalling happened...

CHAPTER II

A Coloured Tendril

So, the Professor switched on the light and looked around. Then he turned on the reflector on the long experimental table, donned his white coat, and fingered some instruments on the table...

Of the thirty thousand mechanical carriages that raced" around Moscow in 'twenty-eight many whizzed down Herzen Street, swishing over the smooth paving-stones, and every few minutes a 16,22, 48 or 53 tram would career round the corner from Herzen Street to Mokhovaya with much grinding and clanging. A pale and misty crescent moon cast reflections of coloured lights through the laboratory windows and was visible far away and high up beside the dark and heavy dome of the Church of Christ the Saviour.

But neither the moon nor the Moscow spring bustle were of the slightest concern to the Professor. He sat on his three-legged revolving stool turning with tobacco-stained fingers the knob of a splendid Zeiss microscope, in which there was an ordinary unstained specimen of

fresh amoebas. At the very moment when Persikov was changing the magnification from five to ten thousand, the door opened slightly, a pointed beard and leather bib appeared, and his assistant called:

"I've set up the mesentery, Vladimir Ipatych. Would you care to take a look?"

Persikov slid quickly down from the stool, letting go of the knob midway, and went into his assistant's room, twirling a cigarette slowly in his fingers. There, on the glass table, a half-suffocated frog stiff with fright and pain lay crucified on a cork mat, its transparent micaceous intestines pulled out of the bleeding abdomen under the microscope.

"Very good," said Persikov, peering down the eye-piece of the microscope.

He could obviously detect something very interesting in the frog's mesentery, where live drops of blood were racing merrily along the vessels as clear as daylight. Persikov quite forgot about his amoebas. He and Ivanov spent the next hour-and-a-half taking turns at the microscope and exchanging animated remarks, quite incomprehensible to ordinary mortals.

At last Persikov dragged himself away,

announcing:

"The blood's coagulating, it can't be helped."

The frog's head twitched painfully and its dimming eyes said clearly: "Bastards, that's what you are..."

Stretching his stiff legs, Persikov got up, returned to his laboratory, yawned, rubbed his permanently inflamed eyelids, sat down on the stool and looked into the microscope, his fingers about to move the knob. But move it he did not. With his right eye Persikov saw the cloudy white plate and blurred pale amoebas on it, but in the middle of the plate sat a coloured tendril, like a female curl. Persikov himself and hundreds of his students had seen this tendril many times before but taken no interest in it, and rightly so. The coloured streak of light merely got in the way and indicated that the specimen was out of focus. For this reason it was ruthlessly eliminated with a single turn of the knob, which spread an even white light over the plate. The zoologist's long fingers had already tightened on the knob, when suddenly they trembled and let go. The reason for this was Persikov's right eye. It tensed, stared in amazement and filled

with alarm. No mediocre mind to burden the Republic sat by the microscope. No, this was Professor Persikov! All his mental powers were now concentrated in his right eye. For five minutes or so in petrified silence the higher being observed the lower one, peering hard at the out-of-focus specimen. There was complete silence all around. Pankrat had gone to sleep in his cubby-hole in the vestibule, and only once there came a far-off gentle and musical tinkling of glass in cupboards—that was Ivanov going out and locking his laboratory. The entrance door groaned behind him. Then came the Professor's voice. To whom his question was addressed no one knows.

"What on earth is that? I don't understand..."

A late lorry rumbled down Herzen Street, making the old walls of the Institute shake. The shallow glass bowl with pipettes tinkled on the table. The Professor turned pale and put his hands over the microscope, like a mother whose child is threatened by danger. There could now be no question of Persikov turning the knob. Oh no, now he was afraid that some external force might push what he had

seen out of his field of vision.

It was a full white morning with a strip of gold which cut across the Institute's cream porch when the Professor left the microscope and walked over to the window on stiff legs. With trembling fingers he pressed a button, dense black shutters blotted out the morning and a wise scholarly night descended on the room. Sallow and inspired, Persikov placed his feet apart, staring at the parquet floor with his watering eyes, and exclaimed:

"But how can it be? It's monstrous! Quite monstrous, gentlemen," he repeated, addressing the toads in the terrarium, who were asleep and made no reply.

He paused, then went over to the button, raised the shutters, turned out all the lights and looked into the microscope. His face grew tense and he raised his bushy yellow eyebrows.

"Aha, aha," he muttered. "It's gone. I see. I understand," he drawled, staring with crazed and inspired eyes at the extinguished light overhead. "It's simple."

Again he let down the hissing shutters and put on the light. Then looked into the microscope and grinned happily, almost

greedily.

"I'll catch it," he said solemnly and gravely, crooking his finger. "I'll catch it. Perhaps the sun will do it too."

The shutters shot up once more. Now you could see the sun. It was shining on the walls of the Institute and slanting down onto the pavements of Herzen Street. The Professor looked through the window, working out where the sun would be in the afternoon. He kept stepping back and forwards, doing a little dance, and eventually lay stomach down on the window-sill.

After that he got down to some important and mysterious work. He covered the microscope with a bell glass. Then he melted a piece of sealing-wax in the bluish flame of the Bun-sen burner, sealed the edge of the glass to the table and made a thumb print on the blobs of wax. Finally he turned off the gas and went out, locking the laboratory door firmly behind him.

There was semi-darkness in the Institute corridors.

The Professor reached Pankrat's door and knocked for a long time to no effect. At last something inside growled like a

watchdog, coughed and snorted and Pankrat appeared in the lighted doorway wearing long striped underpants tied at the ankles. His eyes glared wildly at the scientist and he whimpered softly with sleep.

"I must apologise for waking you up, Pankrat," said the

Professor, peering at him over his spectacles. "But please don't go into my laboratory this morning, dear chap. I've left some work there that must on no account be moved. Understand?"

"Grrr, yessir," Pankrat replied, not understanding a thing.

He staggered a bit and growled.

"Now listen here, Pankrat, you just wake up," the zoologist ordered, prodding him lightly in the ribs, which produced a look of fright on Pankrat's face and a glimmer of comprehension in his eyes. "I've locked the laboratory," Persikov went on, "so you need not clean it until I come back. Understand?"

"Yessir," Pankrat croaked.

"That's fine then, go back to bed."

Pankrat turned round, disappeared inside and collapsed onto the bed. The Professor went into the vestibule. Putting

on his grey summer coat and soft hat, he remembered what he had observed in the microscope and stared at his galoshes for a few seconds, as if seeing them for the first time. Then he put on the left galosh and tried to put the right one over it, but it wouldn't go on.

"What an incredible coincidence that he called me away," said the scientist. "Otherwise I would never have noticed it. But what does it mean? The devil only knows!.."

The Professor smiled, squinted at his galoshes, took off the left one and put on the right. "Good heavens! One can't even imagine all the consequences..." The Professor prodded off the left galosh, which had irritated him by not going on top of the right, and walked to the front door wearing one galosh only. He also lost his handkerchief and went out, slamming the heavy door. On the porch he searched in his pockets for some matches, patting his sides, found them eventually and set off down the street with an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

The scientist did not meet a soul all the way to the church. There he threw back his head and stared at the golden dome.

The sun was licking it avidly on one side.

"Why didn't I notice it before? What a coincidence! Well, I never! Silly ass!" The Professor looked down and stared pensively at his strangely shod feet. "Hm, what shall I do? Go back to Pankrat? No, there's no waking him. It's a pity to throw the wretched thing away. I'll have to carry it." He removed the galosh and set off carrying it distastefully.

An old car drove out of Prechistenka with three passengers. Two men, slightly tipsy, with a garishly made-up woman in those baggy silk trousers that were all the rage in 1928 sitting on their lap.

"Hey, Dad!" she shouted in a low husky voice. "Did you sell the other galosh for booze?"

"The old boy got sozzled at the Alcazar," howled the man on the left, while the one on the right leaned out of the car and shouted:

"Is the night-club in Volkhonka still open, Dad? That's where we're making for!"

The Professor looked at them sternly over the top of his glasses, let the cigarette fall out of his mouth and then immediately forgot they existed. A beam was cutting its way through Prechistensky

Boulevard, and the dome of Christ the Saviour had begun to burn. The sun had come out.

CHAPTER III

PERSIKOV CATCHES IT

What had happened was this. When the Professor put his discerning eye to the microscope, he noticed for the first time in his life that one particular ray in the coloured tendril stood out more vividly and boldly than the others. This ray was bright red and stuck out of the tendril like the tiny point of a needle, say.

Thus, as ill luck would have it, this ray attracted the attention of the great man's experienced eye for several seconds.

In it, the ray, the Professor detected something a thousand

times more significant and important than the ray itself, that precarious offspring accidentally engendered by the movement of a microscope mirror and lens. Due to the assistant calling the Professor away, some amoebas had been subject to the action of the ray for an hour-and-a-half and this is what had happened: whereas the blobs of amoebas

on the plate outside the ray simply lay there limp and helpless, some very strange phenomena were taking place on the spot over which the sharp red sword was poised. This strip of red was teeming with life. The old amoebas were forming pseudopodia in a desperate effort to reach the red strip, and when they did they came to life, as if by magic. Some force seemed to breathe life into them. They flocked there, fighting one another for a place in the ray, where the most frantic (there was no other word for it) reproduction was taking place. In defiance of all the laws which Persikov knew like the back of his hand, they gemmated before his eyes with lightning speed. They split into two in the ray, and each of the parts became a new, fresh organism in a couple of seconds. In another second or two these organisms grew to maturity and produced a new generation in their turn. There was soon no room at all in the red strip or on the plate, and inevitably a bitter struggle broke out. The newly born amoebas tore one another to pieces and gobbled the pieces up. Among the newly born lay the corpses of those who had perished in the fight for survival. It was

the best and strongest who won. And they were terrifying. Firstly, they were about twice the size of ordinary amoebas and, secondly, they were far more active and aggressive. Their movements were rapid, their pseudopodia much longer than normal, and it would be no exaggeration to say that they used them like an octopus's tentacles.

On the second evening the Professor, pale and haggard, his only sustenance the thick cigarettes he rolled himself, studied the new generation of amoebas. And on the third day he turned to the primary source, i.e., the red ray.

The gas hissed faintly in the Bunsen burner, the traffic clattered along the street outside, and the Professor, poisoned by a hundred cigarettes, eyes half-closed, leaned back in his revolving chair.

"I see it all now. The ray brought them to life. It's a new ray, never studied or even discovered by anyone before. The first thing is to find out whether it is produced only by electricity, or by the sun as well," Persikov muttered to himself.

The next night provided the answer to this question. Persikov caught three rays in three microscopes from the arc light,

but nothing from the sun, and summed this up as follows:

"We must assume that it is not found in the solar spectrum... Hm, well, in short we must assume it can only be obtained from electric light." He gazed fondly at the frosted ball overhead, thought for a moment and invited Ivanov into the laboratory, where he told him all and showed him the amoebas.

Decent Ivanov was amazed, quite flabbergasted. Why on earth hadn't a simple thing as this tiny arrow been noticed before? By anyone, or even by him, Ivanov. It was really appalling! Just look...

"Look, Vladimir Ipatych!" Ivanov said, his eye glued to the microscope. "Look what's happening! They're growing before my eyes... You must take a look..."

"I've been observing them for three days," Persikov replied animatedly.

Then a conversation took place between the two scientists, the gist of which was as follows. Decent Ivanov undertook with the help of lenses and mirrors to make a chamber in which they could obtain the ray in magnified form without a microscope. Ivanov hoped, was even

convinced, that this would be extremely simple. He would obtain the ray, Vladimir Ipatych need have no doubts on that score. There was a slight pause.

"When I publish a paper, I shall mention that the chamber was built by you, Pyotr Stepanovich," Persikov interspersed, feeling that the pause should be ended.

"Oh, that doesn't matter... However, if you insist..."

And the pause ended. After that the ray devoured Ivanov as well. While Persikov, emaciated and hungry, spent all day and half the night at his microscope, Ivanov got busy in the brightly-lit physics laboratory, working out a combination of lenses and mirrors. He was assisted by the mechanic.

Following a request made to the Commissariat of Education, Persikov received three parcels from Germany containing mirrors, convexo-convex, concavo-concave and even some convexo-concave polished lenses. The upshot of all this was that Ivanov not only built his chamber, but actually caught the red ray in it. And quite brilliantly, it must be said. The ray was a thick one, about four centimetres in diameter, sharp and strong.

On June 1st the chamber was set up in Persikov's laboratory, and he began experimenting avidly by putting frog spawn in the ray. These experiments produced amazing results. In the course of forty-eight hours thousands of tadpoles hatched out from the spawn. But that was not all. Within another twenty-four hours the tadpoles grew fantastically into such vicious, greedy frogs that half of them were devoured by the other half. The survivors then began to spawn rapidly and two days later, without the assistance of the ray, a new generation appeared too numerous to count. Then all hell was let loose in the Professor's laboratory. The tadpoles slithered out all over the Institute. Lusty choirs croaked loudly in the terrariums and all the nooks and crannies, as in marshes. Pankrat, who was scared stiff of Persikov as it was, now went in mortal terror of him. After a week the scientist himself felt he was going mad. The Institute reeked of ether and potassium cyanide, which nearly finished off Pankrat when he removed his mask too soon. This expanding marshland generation was eventually exterminated with poison and the laboratories aired.

"You know, Pyotr Stepanovich," Persikov said to Ivanov, "the effect of the ray on deuteroplasm and on the ovule in general is quite extraordinary."

Ivanov, a cold and reserved gentleman, interrupted the Professor in an unusual voice:

"Why talk of such minor details as deuteroplasm, Vladimir Ipatych? Let's not beat about the bush. You have discovered something unheard-of..." With a great effort Ivanov managed to force the words out. "You have discovered the ray of life, Professor Persikov!"

A faint flush appeared on Persikov's pale, unshaven cheekbones.

"Well, well," he mumbled.

"You," Ivanov went on, "you will win such renown... It makes my head go round. Do you understand, Vladimir Ipatych," he continued excitedly, "H. G. Wells's heroes are nothing compared to you... And I thought that was all make-believe... Remember his Food for the Gods'!"

"Ah, that's a novel," Persikov replied.

"Yes, of course, but it's famous!"

"I've forgotten it," Persikov said. "I remember reading it, but I've forgotten it."

"How can you have? Just look at that!"

Ivanov picked up an incredibly large frog with a swollen belly from the glass table by its leg. Even after death its face had a vicious expression. "It's monstrous!"

CHAPTER IV

DROZDOVA, THE PRIEST'S WIDOW

Goodness only knows why, perhaps Ivanov was to blame or perhaps the sensational news just travelled through the air on its own, but in the huge seething city of Moscow people suddenly started talking about the ray and Professor Persikov. True, only in passing and vaguely. The news about the miraculous discovery hopped like a wounded bird round the shining capital, disappearing from time to time, then popping up again, until the middle of July when a short item about the ray appeared in the Science and Technology News section on page 20 of the newspaper Izvestia. It announced briefly that a well-

known professor at the Fourth University had invented a ray capable of increasing the activity of lower organisms to an incredible degree, and that the phenomenon would have to be checked. There was a mistake in the name, of course, which was given as "Pepsikov".

Ivanov brought the newspaper and showed Persikov the article.

"Pepsikov," muttered Persikov, as he busied himself with the chamber in his laboratory. "How do those newsmongers find out everything?"

Alas, the misprinted surname did not save the Professor from the events that followed, and they began the very next day, immediately turning Persikov's whole life upside down.

After a discreet knock, Pankrat appeared in the laboratory and handed Persikov a magnificent glossy visiting card.

"E's out there," Pankrat added timidly.

The elegantly printed card said:

Alfred Arkadyevich Bronsky

Correspondent for the Moscow magazines Red Light, Red Pepper, Red Journal and Red Searchlight and the newspaper Red Moscow Evening News

"Tell him to go to blazes," said Persikov

flatly, tossing the card under the table.

Pankrat turned round and went out, only to return five minutes later with a pained expression on his face and a second specimen of the same visiting card.

"Is this supposed to be a joke?" squeaked Persikov, his voice shrill with rage.

"Sez 'e's from the Gee-Pee-Yoo," Pankrat replied, white as a sheet.

Persikov snatched the card with one hand, almost tearing it in half, and threw his pincers onto the table with the other. The card bore a message in ornate handwriting: "Humbly request three minutes of your precious time, esteemed Professor, on public press business, correspondent of the satirical magazine Red Maria, a GPU publication."

"Send him in," said Persikov with a sigh.

A young man with a smoothly shaven oily face immediately popped out from behind Pankrat's back. He had permanently raised eyebrows, like a Chinaman, over agate eyes which never looked at the person he was talking to. The young man was dressed impeccably in the latest fashion. He wore a long narrow jacket down to his knees, extremely baggy trousers and unnaturally wide glossy

shoes with toes like hooves. In his hands he held a cane, a hat with a pointed top and a note-pad.

"What do you want?" asked Persikov in a voice which sent Pankrat scuttling out of the room. "Weren't you told that I am busy?"

In lieu of a reply the young man bowed twice to the Professor, to the left and to the right of him, then his eyes skimmed over the whole laboratory, and the young man jotted a mark in his pad.

"I am busy," repeated the Professor, looking with loathing into the visitor's eyes, but to no avail for they were too elusive.

"A thousand apologies, esteemed Professor," the young man said in a thin voice, "for intruding upon you and taking up your precious time, but the news of your incredible discovery which has astounded the whole world compels our journal to ask you for some explanations."

"What explanations, what whole world?" Persikov whined miserably, turning yellow. "I don't have to give you any explanations or anything of the sort... I'm busy... Terribly busy."

"What are you working on?" the young

man asked ingratiatingly, putting a second mark in his pad.

"Well, I'm... Why? Do you want to publish something?"

"Yes," replied the young man and suddenly started scribbling furiously.

"Firstly, I do not intend to publish anything until I have finished my work ... and certainly not in your newspapers... Secondly, how did you find out about this?" Persikov suddenly felt at a loss.

"Is it true that you have invented a new life ray?"

"What new life?" exploded the Professor. "You're talking absolute piffle! The ray I am working on has not been fully studied, and nothing at all is known yet! It may be able to increase the activity of protoplasm..."

"By how much?" the young man asked quickly.

Persikov was really at a loss now. "The insolent devil! What the blazes is going on?" he thought to himself.

"What ridiculous questions! Suppose I say, well, a thousand times!"

Predatory delight flashed in the young man's eyes.'

"Does that produce gigantic organisms?"

"Nothing of the sort! Well, of course, the organisms I have obtained are bigger than usual. And they do have some new properties. But the main thing is not the size, but the incredible speed of reproduction," Persikov heard himself say to his utmost dismay. Having filled up a whole page, the young man turned over and went on scribbling.

"Don't write it down!" Persikov croaked in despair, realising that he was in the young man's hands. "What are you writing?"

"Is it true that in forty-eight hours you can hatch two million tadpoles from frog-spawn?"

"From how much spawn?" exploded Persikov, losing his temper again. "Have you ever seen the spawn of a tree-frog, say?"

"From half-a-pound?" asked the young man, unabashed. Persikov flushed with anger.

"Whoever measures it like that? Pah! What are you talking about? Of course, if you were to take half-a-pound of frog-spawn, then perhaps... Well, about that much, damn it, but perhaps a lot more!"

Diamonds flashed in the young man's

eyes, as he filled up yet another page in one fell swoop.

"Is it true that this will cause a world revolution in animal husbandry?"

"Trust the press to ask a question like that," Persikov howled. "I forbid you to write such rubbish. I can see from your face that you're writing sheer nonsense!"

"And now, if you'd be so kind, Professor, a photograph of you," said the young man, closing his note-pad with a snap.

"What's that? A photograph of me? To put in those magazines of yours? Together with all that diabolical rubbish you've been scribbling down. No, certainly not... And I'm extremely busy. I really must ask you to..."

"Any old one will do. And we'll return it straightaway." "Pankrat!" the Professor yelled in a fury. "Your humble servant," said the young man and vanished. Instead of Pankrat came the strange rhythmic scraping sound of something metallic hitting the floor, and into the laboratory rolled a man of unusual girth, dressed in a blouse and trousers made from a woollen blanket. His left, artificial leg clattered and clanked, and he was holding a briefcase. The clean-shaven round face

resembling yellowish meat-jelly was creased into a welcoming smile. He bowed in military fashion to the Professor and drew himself up, his leg giving a springlike snap. Persikov was speechless.

"My dear Professor," the stranger began in a pleasant, slightly throaty voice, "forgive an ordinary mortal for invading your seclusion."

"Are you a reporter?" Persikov asked. "Pankrat!"

"Certainly not, dear Professor," the fat man replied. "Allow me to introduce myself—naval captain and contributor to the Industrial Herald, newspaper of the Council of People's Commissars."

"Pankrat!" cried Persikov hysterically, and at that very moment a red light went on in the corner and the telephone rang softly. "Pankrat!" the Professor cried again. "Hello."

"Verzeihen Sie bitte, Herr Professor," croaked the telephone in German, "das ich store. Ich bin Mitarbeiter des Berliner Tageblatts..."

"Pankrat!" the Professor shouted down the receiver. "Bin momentan sehr beschäftigt und kann Sie deshalb jetzt nicht empfangen. Pankrat!"

And just at this moment the bell at the main door started ringing.

"Terrible murder in Bronnaya Street!" yelled unnaturally hoarse voices, darting about between wheels and flashing headlights on the hot June roadway. "Terrible illness of chickens belonging to the priest's widow Drozdova with a picture of her! Terrible discovery of life ray by Professor Persikov!"

Persikov dashed out so quickly that he almost got run over by a car in Mokhovaya and grabbed a newspaper angrily.

"Three copecks, citizen!" cried the newsboy, squeezing into the crowd on the pavement and yelling: "Red Moscow Evening News, discovery of X-ray!"

The flabbergasted Persikov opened the newspaper and huddled against a lamp-post. On page two in the left-hand corner a bald man with crazed, unseeing eyes and a hanging lower jaw, the fruit of Alfred Bronsky's artistic endeavours,

stared at him from a smudged frame. The caption beneath it read: "V I. Persikov who discovered the mysterious ray." Lower down, under the heading World-Wide Enigma was an article which began as follows:

"'Take a seat,' the eminent scientist Persikov invited me hospitably..."

The article was signed with a flourish "Alfred Bronsky (Alonso)".

A greenish light soared up over the University roof; the words "Talking Newspaper" lit up in the sky, and a crowd jammed Mokhovaya.

"Take a seat!" an unpleasant thin voice, just like Alfred Bronsky's magnified a thousand times, yelled from a loudspeaker on the roof, "the eminent scientist Persikov invited me hospitably. 'I've been wanting to tell the workers of Moscow the results of my discovery for some time...'"

There was a faint metallic scraping behind Persikov's back, and someone tugged at his sleeve. Turning round he saw the yellow rotund face of the owner of the artificial leg. His eyes were glistening with tears and his lips trembled.

"You wouldn't tell me the results of your remarkable discovery, Professor," he said sadly with a deep sigh. "So that's farewell to a few more copecks."

He gazed miserably at the University roof, where the invisible Alfred raved on in the loudspeaker's black jaws. For some

reason Persikov felt sorry for the fat man.

"I never asked him to sit down!" he growled, catching words from the sky furiously. "He's an utter scoundrel! You must excuse me, but really when you're working like that and people come bursting in... I'm not referring to you, of course..."

"Then perhaps you'd just describe your chamber to me, Professor?" the man with the artificial leg wheedled mournfully. "It doesn't make any difference now..."

"In three days half-a-pound of frogspawn produces more tadpoles than you could possibly count," the invisible man in the loudspeaker boomed.

"Toot-toot," cried the cars on Mokhovaya.

"Ooo! Ah! Listen to that!" the crowd murmured, staring upwards.

"What a scoundrel! Eh?" hissed Persikov, shaking with anger, to the artificial man. "How do you like that? I'll lodge an official complaint against him."

"Disgraceful!" the fat man agreed.

A blinding violet ray dazzled the Professor's eyes, lighting up everything around-a lamp-post, a section of pavement, a yellow wall and the avid

faces.

"They're photographing you, Professor," the fat man whispered admiringly and hung on the Professor's arm like a ton weight. Something clicked in the air.

"To blazes with them!" cried Persikov wretchedly, pushing his way with the ton weight out of the crowd. "Hey, taxi! Prechistenka Street!"

A battered old jalopy, a 'twenty-four model, chugged to a stop, and the Professor climbed in, trying to shake off the fat man.

"Let go!" he hissed, shielding his face with his hands to ward off the violet light.

"Have you read it? What they're shouting? Professor Persikov and his children've had their throats cut in Malaya Bronnaya!" people were shouting in the crowd.

"I don't have any children, blast you!" yelled Persikov, suddenly coming into the focus of a black camera which snapped him in profile with his mouth wide open and eyes glaring.

"Chu... ug, chu... ug," revved the taxi and barged into the crowd.

The fat man was already sitting in the cab, warming the Professor's side.

CHAPTER V

THE TALE OF THE CHICKENS

In the small provincial town formerly called Trinity, but now Glassworks, in Kostroma Province (Glassworks District), a woman in a grey dress with a kerchief tied round her head walked onto the porch of a little house in what was formerly Church, but now Personal Street and burst into tears. This woman, the widow of Drozdov, the former priest of the former church, sobbed so loudly that soon another woman's head in a fluffy scarf popped out of a window in the house across the road and exclaimed:

"What's the matter, Stepanovna? Another one?"

"The seventeenth!" replied the former Drozdova, sobbing even louder.

"Dearie me," tutted the woman in the scarf, shaking her head, "did you ever hear of such a thing? 'Tis the anger of the Lord, and no mistake! Dead, is she?"

"Come and see, Matryona," said the priest's widow, amid loud and bitter sobs. "Take a look at her!"

Banging the rickety grey gate, the woman padded barefoot over the dusty hummocks in the road to be taken by the priest's widow into the chicken run.

It must be said that instead of losing heart, the widow of Father Sawaty Drozdov, who had died in twenty-six of anti-religious mortification, set up a nice little poultry business. As soon as things began to go well, the widow received such an exorbitant tax demand that the poultry business would have closed down had it not been for certain good folk. They advised the widow to inform the local authorities that she, the widow, was setting up a poultry cooperative. The cooperative consisted of Drozdova herself, her faithful servant Matryoshka and the widow's dear niece. The tax was reduced, and the poultry-farm prospered so much that in twenty-eight the widow had as many as 250 chickens, even including some Cochins. Each Sunday the widow's eggs appeared at Glassworks market. They were sold in Tambov and were even occasionally displayed in the windows of

the former Chichkin's Cheese and Butter Shop in Moscow.

And now, the seventeenth brahmaputra that morning, their dear little crested hen, was walking round the yard vomiting. The poor thing gurgled and retched, rolling her eyes sadly at the sun as if she would never see it again. In front of her squatted co-operative-member Matryoshka with a cup of water.

"Come on, Cresty dear... chuck-chuck-chuck... drink some water," Matryoshka begged, thrusting the cup under the hen's beak, but the hen would not drink. She opened her beak wide, threw back her head and began to vomit blood.

"Lord Jesus!" cried the guest, slapping her thighs. "Just look at that! Clots of blood. I've never seen a hen bring up like that before, so help me God!"

These words accompanied the poor hen on her last journey. She suddenly keeled over, digging her beak helplessly into the dust, and swivelled her eyes. Then she rolled onto her back with her legs sticking up and lay motionless. Matryoshka wept in her deep bass voice, spilling the water, and the Chairman of the cooperative, the priest's widow, wept too while her guest

lent over and whispered in her ear:

"Stepanovna, I'll eat my hat if someone hasn't put the evil eye on your hens. Whoever heard of it! Chickens don't have diseases like this! Someone's put a spell on them."

"Tis devils' work!" the priest's widow cried to heaven. "They want to see me good and done for!"

Her words called forth a loud cock-a-doodle-doo, and lurching sideways out of the chicken-coop, like a restless drunk out of a tavern, came a tatty scrawny rooster. Rolling his eyes at them ferociously, he staggered about on the spot and spread his wings like an eagle, but instead of flying up, he began to run round the yard in circles, like a horse on a rope. On his third time round he stopped, vomited, then began to cough and choke, spitting blood all over the place and finally fell down with his legs pointing up at the sun like masts. The yard was filled with women's wails, which were answered by an anxious clucking, clattering and fidgeting from the chicken-coop.

"What did I tell you? The evil eye," said the guest triumphantly. "You must get Father Sergius to sprinkle holy water."

At six o'clock in the evening, when the sun's fiery visage was sitting low among the faces of young sunflowers, Father Sergius, the senior priest at the church, finished the rite and took off his stole. Inquisitive heads peeped over the wooden fence and through the cracks. The mournful priest's widow kissed the crucifix and handed a torn yellow rouble note damp from her tears to Father Sergius, in response to which the latter sighed and muttered something about the good Lord visiting his wrath upon us. Father Sergius's expression suggested that he knew perfectly well why the good Lord was doing so, only he would not say.

Whereupon the crowd in the street dispersed, and since chickens go to sleep early no one knew that in the chicken-coop of Drozdova's neighbour three hens and a rooster had kicked the bucket all at once. They vomited like Drozdova's hens, only their end came inconspicuously in the locked chicken-coop. The rooster toppled off the perch head-first and died in that pose. As for the widow's hens, they gave up the ghost immediately after the service, and by evening there was a deathly hush in her chicken-coop and piles

of dead poultry.

The next morning the town got up and was thunderstruck to hear that the story had assumed strange, monstrous proportions. By midday there were only three chickens still alive in Personal Street, in the last house where the provincial tax inspector rented lodgings, but they, too, popped off by one p. m. And come evening, the small town of Glassworks was buzzing like a bee-hive with the terrible word "plague" passing from mouth to mouth. Drozdova's name got into The Red Warrior, the local newspaper, in an article entitled "Does This Mean a Chicken Plague?" and from there raced on to Moscow.

Professor Persikov's life took on a strange, uneasy and worrisome complexion. In short, it was quite impossible for him to work in this situation. The day after he got rid of Alfred Bronsky, he was forced to disconnect the telephone in his laboratory at the Institute by taking the receiver off, and in the evening as he was riding along Okhotny Row in a tram, the Professor saw himself on the roof of an enormous building with Workers' Paper in black letters. He, the

Professor, was climbing into a taxi, fuming, green around the gills, and blinking, followed by a rotund figure in a blanket, who was clutching his sleeve. The Professor on the roof, on the white screen, put his hands over his face to ward off the violet ray. Then followed in letters of fire: "Professor Persikov in a car explaining everything to our well-known reporter Captain Stepanov." And there was the rickety old jalopy dashing along Volkhonka, past the Church of Christ the Saviour, with the Professor bumping up and down inside it, looking like a wolf at bay.

"They're devils, not human beings," the zoologist hissed through clenched teeth as he rode past.

That evening, returning to his apartment in Prechistenka, the zoologist received from the housekeeper, Maria Stepanovna, seventeen slips of paper with the telephone numbers of people who had rung during his absence, plus Maria Stepanovna's oral statement that she was worn out. The Professor was about to tear the pieces of paper up, but stopped when he saw "People's Commissariat of Health" scribbled next to one of the numbers.

"What's up?" the eccentric scientist was genuinely puzzled. "What's the matter with them?"

At ten fifteen on the same evening the bell rang, and the Professor was obliged to converse with a certain exquisitely attired citizen. The Professor received him thanks to a visiting card which said (without mentioning any names) "Authorised Head of Trading Sections for Foreign Firms Represented in the Republic of Soviets."

"The devil take him," Persikov growled, putting his magnifying glass and some diagrams down on the baize cloth.

"Send him in here, that authorised whatever he is," he said to Maria Stepanovna.

"What can I do for you?" Persikov asked in a tone that made the authorised whatever he was shudder perceptibly. Persikov shifted his spectacles from his nose to his forehead and back again, and looked his visitor up and down. The latter glistened with hair cream and precious stones, and a monocle sat in his right eye. "What a foul-looking face," Persikov thought to himself for some reason.

The guest began in circuitous fashion by asking permission to smoke a cigar, as a

result of which Persikov reluctantly invited him to take a seat. Then the guest began apologising at length for having come so late. "But it's impossible to catch ... oh, tee-hee, pardon me ... to find the Professor at home in the daytime." (The guest gave a sobbing laugh like a hyena.)

"Yes, I'm very busy!" Persikov answered so curtly that the visitor shuddered visibly again.

Nevertheless he had taken the liberty of disturbing the famous scientist. Time is money, as they say ... the Professor didn't object to his cigar, did he?

"Hrmph, hrmph, hrmph," Persikov replied. He'd given him permission."

"You have discovered the ray of life, haven't you, Professor?"

"Balderdash! What life? The newspapers invented that!"

"Oh, no, tee-hee-hee..." He perfectly understood the modesty that is an invariable attribute of all true scholars... of course... There had been telegrams today... In the cities of Warsaw and Riga they had already heard about the ray. Professor Persikov's name was on everyone's lips... The whole world was following his work with bated breath... But

everyone knew how hard it was for scholars in Soviet Russia. Entre nous, soi-dis... There wasn't anyone else listening, was there? Alas, they didn't appreciate academic work here, so he would like to have a little talk with the Professor... A certain foreign state was offering Professor Persikov entirely disinterested assistance with his laboratory research. Why cast your pearls here, as the Scriptures say? This state knew how hard it had been for the Professor in 'nineteen and 'twenty during that tee-hee ... revolution. Of course, it would all be kept absolutely secret. The Professor would inform the state of the results of his work, and it would finance him in return. Take that chamber he had built, for instance. It would be interesting to have a peep at the designs for it...

At this point the guest took a pristine wad of banknotes out of his inside jacket pocket...

A mere trifle, a deposit of 5,000 roubles, say, could be given to the Professor this very moment... no receipt was required. The authorised whatever he was would be most offended if the Professor even mentioned a receipt.

"Get out!" Persikov suddenly roared so terrifyingly that the high keys on the piano in the drawing-room vibrated.

The guest vanished so quickly that after a moment Persikov, who was shaking with rage, was not sure whether he had been a hallucination or not.

"His galoshes?" Persikov yelled a moment later in the hall.

"The gentleman forgot them, sir," replied a quaking Maria Stepanovna.

"Throw them out!"

"How can I? The gentleman's bound to come back for them."

"Hand them over to the house committee. And get a receipt. Don't let me ever set eyes on them again! Take them to the committee! Let them have that spy's galoshes!"

Maria Stepanovna crossed herself, picked up the splendid leather galoshes and took them out of the back door. She stood outside for a while, then hid the galoshes in the pantry.

"Handed them over?" growled Persikov.

"Yes, sir."

"Give me the receipt."

"But the Chairman can't write, Vladimir Ipatych!"

"Get. Me. A. Receipt. At. Once. Let some literate rascal sign it for him."

Maria Stepanovna just shook her head, went off and returned a quarter of an hour later with a note which said:

"Rcvd for storage from Prof. Persikov I (one) pr. ga's. Kolesov."

"And what might that be?"

"It's a baggage check, sir."

Persikov trampled on the check, but put the receipt under the blotter. Then a sudden thought made his high forehead darken. He rushed to the telephone, rang Pankrat at the Institute and asked him if everything was alright there. Pankrat snarled something into the receiver, which could be interpreted as meaning that, as far as he could see, everything there was fine. But Persikov did not calm down for long. A moment later he grabbed the phone and boomed into the receiver:

"Give me the, what's it called, Lubyanka. Merci... Which of you should I report this to ... there are some suspicious-looking characters in galoshes round here, and... Professor Persikov of the Fourth University..."

The receiver suddenly cut the conversation short, and Persikov walked

away, cursing under his breath.

"Would you like some tea, Vladimir Ipatych?" Maria Stepanovna enquired timidly, peeping into the study.

"No, I would not ... and the devil take the lot of them... What's got into them!"

Exactly ten minutes later the Professor received some new visitors in his study. One of them was pleasant, rotund and very polite, in an ordinary khaki service jacket and breeches. A pince-nez perched on his nose, like a crystal butterfly. In fact he looked like a cherub in patent leather boots. The second, short and extremely grim, wore civilian clothes, but they seemed to constrict him. The third visitor behaved in a most peculiar fashion. He did not enter the Professor's study, but stayed outside in the dark corridor. The brightly lit study wreathed in clouds of tobacco smoke was entirely visible to him. The face of this third man, also in civilian clothes, was adorned by a tinted pince-nez.

The two inside the study wore Persikov out completely, examining the visiting card, asking him about the five thousand and making him describe what the man looked like.

"The devil only knows," Persikov muttered. "Well, he had a loathsome face. A degenerate."

"Did he have a glass eye?" the small man croaked.

"The devil only knows. But no, he didn't. His eyes darted about all the time."

"Rubinstein?" the cherub asked the small man quietly. But the small man shook his head gloomily.

"Rubinstein would never give cash without a receipt, that's for sure," he muttered. "This isn't Rubinstein's work. It's someone bigger."

The story about the galoshes evoked the liveliest interest from the visitors. The cherub rapped a few words down the receiver: "The State Political Board orders house committee secretary Kolesov to come to Professor Persikov's apartment I at once with the galoshes." In a flash Kolesov turned up in the study, pale-faced and clutching the pair of galoshes.

"Vasenska!" the cherub called quietly to the man sitting in the hall, who got up lethargically and slouched into the study. The tinted lenses had swallowed up his eyes completely.

"Yeh?" he asked briefly and sleepily.

"The galoshes."

The tinted lenses slid over the galoshes, and Persikov thought he saw a pair of very sharp eyes, not at all sleepy, flash out from under the lenses for a second. But they disappeared almost at once.

"Well, Vasenka?"

The man called Vasenka replied in a flat voice:

"Well what? They're Polenzhkovsky's galoshes."

The house committee was immediately deprived of Professor Persikov's present. The galoshes disappeared in a newspaper. Highly delighted, the cherub in the service jacket rose to his feet and began to pump the Professor's hand, even delivering a small speech, the gist of which was as follows: it did the Professor honour ... the Professor could rest assured ... he would not be disturbed any more, either at the Institute or at home ... steps would be taken, his chambers were perfectly safe...

"But couldn't you shoot the reporters?" asked Persikov, looking over his spectacles.

His question cheered the visitors up no end. Not only the small gloomy one, but even the tinted one in the hall gave a big

smile. Beaming and sparkling, the cherub explained that that was impossible.

"But who was that scoundrel who came here?"

The smiles disappeared at once, and the cherub replied evasively that it was just some petty speculator not worth worrying about. All the same he trusted that the Professor would treat the events of this evening in complete confidence, and the visitors left.

Persikov returned to his study and the diagrams, but he was not destined to study them. The telephone's red light went on, and a female voice suggested that the Professor might like to marry an attractive and amorous widow with a seven-roomed apartment. Persikov howled down the receiver:

"I advise you to get treatment from Professor Rossolimo..." and then the phone rang again.

This time Persikov softened somewhat, because the person, quite a famous one, who was ringing from the Kremlin enquired at length with great concern about Persikov's work and expressed the desire to visit his laboratory. Stepping back from the telephone, Persikov wiped

his forehead and took off the receiver. Then trumpets began blaring and the shrieks of the Valkyrie rang in the apartment upstairs. The cloth mill director's radio had tuned in to the Wagner concert at the Bolshoi. To the accompaniment of howls and rumbles descending from the ceiling, Persikov declared to Maria Stepanovna that he would take the director to court, smash his radio to bits, and get the blazes out of Moscow, because somebody was clearly trying to drive him out. He broke his magnifying glass, spent the night on the divan in the study and was lulled to sleep by the sweet trills of a famous pianist wafted from the Bolshoi Theatre.

The following day was also full of surprises. After taking the tram to the Institute, Persikov found a stranger in a fashionable green bowler hat standing on the porch. He scrutinised Persikov carefully, but did not address any questions to him, so Persikov put up with him. But in the Institute hall, apart from the dismayed Pankrat, a second bowler hat stood up as Persikov came in and greeted him courteously: "Good morning, Citizen Professor."

"What do you want?" asked Persikov furiously, tearing off his coat with Pankrat's help. But the bowler hat quickly pacified Persikov by whispering in the gentlest of voices that there was no need at all for the Professor to be upset. He, the bowler hat, was there precisely in order to protect the Professor from all sorts of importunate visitors. The Professor could rest assured not only about the laboratory doors, but also about the windows. So saying the stranger turned back the lapel of his jacket for a moment and showed the Professor a badge.

"Hm ... you work pretty efficiently, I must say," Persikov growled, adding naively: "What will you have to eat?"

Whereupon the bowler hat smiled and explained that someone would come to relieve him.

The next three days were splendid. The Professor had two visits from the Kremlin and one from the students whom he was to examine. The students all failed to a man, and you could see from their faces that Persikov now filled them with a superstitious dread.

"Go and be bus conductors! You're not fit to study zoology," came the shouts from

his laboratory.

"Strict, is he?" the bowler hat asked Pankrat.

"I should say so," Pankrat replied. "If any of 'em stick it to the end, they come staggerin' out, sweatin' like pigs, and make straight for the boozer."

With all this going on the Professor did not notice the time pass, but on the fourth day he was again brought back to reality, thanks to a thin, shrill voice from the street.

"Vladimir Ipatych!" the voice shouted through the open window from Herzen Street. The voice was in luck. Persikov had driven himself too hard in the last few days. And at that moment he was sitting in an armchair having a rest and a smoke, with a vacant stare in his red-rimmed eyes. He was exhausted. So it was even with a certain curiosity that he looked out of the window and saw Alfred Bronsky on the pavement. The Professor recognised the titled owner of the visiting card from his pointed hat and note-pad. Bronsky gave a tender and courteous bow to the window.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" asked the Professor. He did not have the strength to be angry

and was even curious to know what would happen next. Protected by the window he felt safe from Alfred. The ever-vigilant bowler hat outside immediately turned an ear to Bronsky. The latter's face blossomed into the smarmiest of smiles.

"Just a sec or two, dear Professor," said Bronsky, raising his voice to make himself heard. "I have one question only and it concerns zoology. May I put it to you?"

"You may," Persikov replied in a laconic, ironical tone, thinking to himself: "There's something American about that rascal, you know."

"What have you to say re the fowls, Professor?" shouted Bronsky, cupping his hands round his mouth.

Persikov was taken aback. He sat on the window-sill, then got down, pressed a knob and shouted, pointing at the window: "Let that fellow on the pavement in, Pankrat!"

When Bronsky walked into the room, Persikov extended his bonhomie to the point of barking "Sit down!" to him.

Smiling ecstatically, Bronsky sat down on the revolving stool

"Kindly explain something to me," Persikov began. "You write for those

newspapers of yours, don't you?"

"That is so," Alfred replied respectfully.

"Well, what I can't understand is how you can write if you can't even speak Russian properly. What do you mean by 'a sec or two' and 're the fowls'?"

Bronsky gave a thin, respectful laugh.

"Valentin Petrovich corrects it."

"And who might Valentin Petrovich be?"

"The head of the literary section."

"Oh, well. I'm not a philologist anyway. Now, leaving aside that Petrovich of yours, what exactly do you wish to know about fowls?"

"Everything you can tell me, Professor."

At this point Bronsky armed himself with a pencil. Sparks of triumph flashed in Persikov's eyes.

"You shouldn't have come to me, I don't specialise in our feathered friends. You should have gone to Yemelian Ivano-vich Portugalov, at the First University. I personally know very little..."

Bronsky smiled ecstatically to indicate that he had got the Professor's joke. "Joke-very little!" he scribbled in his pad.

"But if it interests you, of course. Hens, or cristates are a variety of bird from the fowl species. From the pheasant family,"

Persikov began in a loud voice, looking not at Bronsky, but into the far distance where he could see an audience of thousands. "From the pheasant family ...phasianus. They are birds with a fleshy skin crown and two gills under the lower jaw... Hm, although some have only one in the middle under the beak. Now, what else. Their wings are short and rounded. The tail is of medium length, somewhat stepped and even, I would say, roof-shaped. The middle feathers are bent in the form of a sickle... Pankrat... bring me model No. 705 from the model room, the cross-section of the domestic cock. You don't need it? Don't bring the model, Pankrat. I repeat, I am not a specialist. Go to Portugalov. Now let me see, I personally know of six types of wild fowl... Hm, Portugalov knows more... In India and on the Malaysian archipelago. For example, the Bankiva fowl, or *Callus bankiva*. It is found in the foothills of the Himalayas, throughout India, in Assam and Burma... The Java fowl, or *Gallus varius* on Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores. And on the island of Java there is the splendid *Gallus eneus* fowl. In south-east India I can recommend the very beautiful *Sonneratii*. I'll show you a drawing of it

later. As for Ceylon, here we have the Stanley fowl, which is not found anywhere else."

Bronsky sat there, eyes popping, and scribbled madly.

"Anything else I can tell you?"

"I'd like to hear something about fowl diseases," Alfred whispered quietly.

"Hm, it's not my subject. You should ask Portugalov. But anyway... Well, there are tape-worms, leeches, the itchmite, bird-mite, chicken louse, Eomenacanthus stramineus, fleas, chicken cholera, inflammation of the mucous membrane, Pneumonomicosis, tuberculosis, chicken mange... all sorts of things (Persikov's eyes flashed.) ... poisoning, tumours, rickets, jaundice, rheumatism, Ahorion Schonlein's fungus - that's a most interesting disease. Small spots like mould appear on the crown..."

Bronsky wiped the sweat off his brow with a coloured handkerchief.

"And what in your opinion, Professor, is the cause of the present catastrophe?"

"What catastrophe?"

"Haven't you read about it, Professor?" exclaimed Bronsky in surprise, pulling a crumpled page of Izvestia out of his

briefcase.

"I don't read newspapers," Persikov pouted.

"But why not, Professor?" Alfred asked gently.

"Because they write such rubbish," Persikov replied, without thinking.

"But surely not, Professor?" Bronsky whispered softly, unfolding the page.

"What's the matter?" asked Persikov, even rising to his feet. Bronsky's eyes were flashing now. He pointed a sharp painted finger at an incredibly large headline which ran right across the whole page: "Chicken plague in the Republic".

"What?" asked Persikov, pushing his spectacles onto his forehead...

CHAPTER VI

MOSCOW. JUNE 1928

The city shone, the lights danced, going out and blazing on. In Theatre Square the white lamps of buses mingled with the green lights of trams; above the former

Muir and Merilees, its tenth floor added later, skipped a multi-coloured electrical woman, tossing out letter by letter the multicoloured words:

"Workers' Credit". A crowd thronged and murmured in the small garden opposite the Bolshoi Theatre, where a multicoloured fountain played at night. And over the Bolshoi itself a huge loudspeaker kept making announcements.

"Anti-fowl vaccinations at Lefortovo Veterinary Institute have produced brilliant results. The number of... fowl deaths for today has dropped by half..."

Then the loudspeaker changed its tone, something growled inside it, a spray of green blazed up over the theatre, then went out and the loudspeaker complained in a deep bass:

"An extraordinary commission has been set up to fight the fowl plague consisting of the People's Commissar of Health, the People's Commissar of Agriculture, the head of animal husbandry, Comrade Ptakha-Porosyuk, Professors Persikov and Portugalov... and Comrade Rabinovich! New attempts at intervention," the loudspeaker giggled and cried, like a jackal, "in connection with the fowl

plague!"

Theatre Passage, Neglinnaya and Lubyanka blazed with white and violet neon strips and flickering lights amid wailing sirens and clouds of dust. People crowded round the large notices on the walls, lit by glaring red reflectors.

"All consumption of chickens and chicken eggs is strictly forbidden on pain of severe punishment. Any attempt by private traders to sell them in markets is punishable by law with confiscation of all property. All citizens in possession of eggs are urgently requested to take them to local police stations."

A screen on the roof of the Workers' Paper showed chickens piled up to the sky as greenish firemen, fragmenting and sparkling, hosed them with kerosene. Red waves washed over the screen, deathly smoke belched forth, swirling in clouds, and drifted up in a column, then out hopped the fiery letters:

"Dead chickens being burnt in Khodynka."

Amid the madly blazing windows of shops open until three in the morning, with breaks for lunch and supper, boarded-up windows with signs saying

"Eggs for sale. Quality guaranteed" stared out blindly. Hissing ambulances with "Moscow Health Dept." on them raced past policemen and overtook heavy buses, their sirens wailing.

"Someone else poisoned himself with rotten eggs," the crowd murmured.

The world-famous Empire Restaurant in Petrovsky Lines glowed with green and orange lamps, and inside it by the portable telephones on the tables lay liqueur-stained cardboard notices saying "No omelettes until further notice. Try our fresh oysters."

In the Hermitage Gardens, where Chinese lanterns shone like sad beads in dead choked foliage, on a blindingly lit stage the singers Shrams and Karmanchikov sang satirical songs composed by the poets Ardo and Arguyev,

Oh, Mama, what shall I do

Without my little eggies two?

accompanied by a tap-dance.

The theatre named after the deceased Vsevolod Meyerhold who, it will be remembered, met his end in 1927 during a production of Pushkin's Boris Godunov, when the trapezes with naked boyars collapsed, sported a running coloured

neon strip announcing a new play by the writer Erendors, entitled "Fowl Farewell" directed by Kuchterman, a pupil of Meyerhold. Next door, at the Aquarium Gardens, ablaze with neon advertisements and shining half-naked women, the revue "Son-of-a-Hen" by the writer Lenivtsev was playing to loud applause among the foliage of the open-air variety stage. And along Tverskaya trotted a line of circus donkeys, with lanterns under each ear and gaudy posters. The Korsh Theatre was reviving Rostand's Chantecler.

Newspaper boys bellowed and yelled among the motor wheels:

"Horrific find in underground cave! Poland preparing for horrific war! Horrific experiments by Professor Persikov!"

In the circus of the former Nikitin, in a rich brown arena smelling sweetly of dung, the deathly white clown Born was talking to Bim, all swollen up with dropsy.

"I know why you're so fed up!"

"Why ith it?" squealed Bim.

"You buried your eggs under a gooseberry bush, and the 15th District police squad has found them."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha," laughed the circus, so hard that the blood curdled happily and

longingly in their veins and the trapezes and cobwebs stirred under the old dome.

"Allez-ooop!" the clowns shouted loudly, and a well-fed white horse trotted out bearing a stunningly beautiful woman with shapely legs in a crimson costume.

Not looking at or taking heed of anyone and ignoring the prostitutes' nudges and soft, enticing invitations, the inspired and solitary Professor Persikov crowned with unexpected fame made his way along Mokhovaya to the neon clock by the Manege. Here, engrossed in his thoughts and not looking where he was going, he collided with a strange, old-fashioned man and banged his fingers painfully against the wooden holster hanging from the man's belt.

"What the devil!" squealed Persikov. "My apologies!" "Pardon me!" replied an unpleasant voice in return, and they managed to disentangle themselves in the mass of people. The Professor continued on his way to Prechistenka, putting the incident out of his head straightaway.

CHAPTER VII

FEIGHT

Whether or not the Lefortovo veterinary vaccinations were effective, the Samara quarantine teams efficient, the strict measures taken with regard to buyers-up of eggs in Kaluga and Voronezh adequate and the work of the Special Moscow Commission successful, is not known, but what is known is that a fortnight after Persikov's last meeting with Alfred there was not a single chicken left in the Republic. Here and there in provincial back-yards lay plaintive tufts of feathers, bringing tears to the eyes of the owners, and in hospital the last gluttons recovered from diarrhea and vomiting blood. The loss in human life for the whole country was not more than a thousand, fortunately. There were also no large-scale disturbances. True, in Volokolamsk someone calling himself a prophet announced that the commissars, no less, were to blame for the chicken plague, but no one took much notice of him. A few policemen who were confiscating chickens

from peasant women at Volokolamsk market got beaten up, and some windows in the local post and telegraph office were smashed. Fortunately, the efficient Volokolamsk authorities took measures as a result of which, firstly, the prophet ceased his activities and, secondly, the telegraph windows were replaced.

After travelling north as far as Archangel and Syumkin Vyselok, the plague stopped of its own accord for the simple reason that it could go no further—there are no chickens in the White Sea, as we all know. It also stopped in Vladivostok, because after that came the ocean. In the far south it died down and disappeared somewhere in the scorched expanses of Ordubat, Djilfa and Karabulak, and in the west it stopped miraculously right at the Polish and Rumanian frontiers. Perhaps the climate there was different or the quarantine cordon measures taken by these neighbouring states helped. But the fact remains that the plague went no further. The foreign press discussed the unprecedented plague loudly and avidly, and the Soviet government, without kicking up a racket, worked tirelessly round the clock. The Extraordinary

Commission to combat the chicken plague was renamed the Extraordinary Commission to encourage and revive poultry-keeping in the Republic and supplemented by a new extraordinary troika consisting of sixteen comrades. "Volunteer-Fowl" was founded, of which Persikov and Portugalov became honorary deputy chairmen. The newspapers carried pictures of them with the captions "Mass purchase of eggs from abroad" and "Mr Hughes tries to sabotage egg campaign". A venomous article by the journalist Kolechkin, ending with the words: "Keep your hands off our eggs, Mr Hughes-you've got eggs of your own!", resounded all over Moscow.

Professor Persikov had worked himself to a state of complete exhaustion over the last three weeks. The fowl events had disturbed his usual routine and placed an extra burden on him. He had to spend whole evenings attending fowl committee meetings and from time to time endure long talks either with Alfred Bronsky or the fat man with the artificial leg. And together with Professor Portugalov and docents Ivanov and Borngart he anatomised and microscopised fowls in

search of the plague bacillus and even wrote a brochure in the space of only three evenings, entitled "On Changes in the Liver of Fowls Attacked by Plague".

Persikov worked without great enthusiasm in the fowl field, and understandably so since his head was full of something quite different, the main and most important thing, from which the fowl catastrophe had diverted him, i.e., the red ray. Undermining his already overtaxed health by stealing time from sleeping and eating, sometimes not returning to Prechistenka but dozing on the oilskin divan in his room at the Institute, Persikov spent night after night working with the chamber and the microscope.

By the end of July the commotion had abated somewhat. The renamed commission began to work along normal lines, and Persikov resumed his interrupted studies. The microscopes were loaded with new specimens, and fish- and frog-spawn matured in the chamber at incredible speed. Specially ordered lenses were delivered from Königsberg by aeroplane, and in the last few days of July, under Ivanov's supervision, mechanics installed two big new chambers, in which

the beam was as broad as a cigarette packet at its base and a whole metre wide at the other end. Persikov rubbed his hands happily and began to prepare some mysterious and complex experiments. First of all, he came to some agreement with the People's Commissar of Education by phone, and the receiver promised him the most willing assistance of all kinds, then Persikov had a word with Comrade Ptakha-Porosyuk, head of the Supreme Commission's Animal Husbandry Department. Persikov met with the most cordial attention from Ptakha-Porosyuk with respect to a large order from abroad for Professor Persikov. Ptakha-Porosyuk said on the phone that he would cable Berlin and New York rightaway. After that there was a call from the Kremlin to enquire how Persikov was getting on, and an important-sounding voice asked affectionately if he would like a motor-car.

"No, thank you. I prefer to travel by tram," Persikov replied.

"But why?" the mysterious voice asked, with an indulgent laugh.

Actually everyone spoke to Persikov either with respect and awe, or with an affectionate laugh, as if addressing a silly,

although very important child.

"It goes faster," Persikov said, after which the resonant bass on the telephone said:

"Well, as you like."

Another week passed, during which Persikov withdrew increasingly from the subsiding fowl problems to immerse himself entirely in the study of the ray. His head became light, somehow transparent and weightless, from the sleepless nights and exhaustion. The red rims never left his eyes now, and almost every night was spent at the Institute. Once he abandoned his zoological refuge to read a paper on his ray and its action on the ovule in the huge hall of the Central Commission for Improving the Living Conditions of Scientists in Prechistenka. This was a great triumph for the eccentric zoologist. The applause in the hall made the plaster flake off the ceiling, while the hissing arc lamps lit up the black dinner jackets of club-members and the white dresses of their ladies. On the stage, next to the rostrum, a clammy grey frog the size of a cat sat breathing heavily in a dish on a glass table. Notes were thrown onto the stage. They included seven love letters,

which Persikov tore up. The club president had great difficulty persuading him onto the platform. Persikov bowed angrily. His hands were wet with sweat and his black tie was somewhere behind his left ear, instead of under his chin. Before him in a breathing haze were hundreds of yellow faces and white male chests, when suddenly the yellow holster of a pistol flashed past and vanished behind a white column. Persikov noticed it vaguely and then forgot about it. But after the lecture, as he was walking down the red carpet of the staircase, he suddenly felt unwell. For a second the bright chandelier in the vestibule clouded and Persikov came over dizzy and slightly queasy. He seemed to smell burning and feel hot, sticky blood running down his neck... With a trembling hand the Professor clutched the banisters.

"Is anything the matter, Vladimir Ipatych?" he was besieged by anxious voices on all sides.

"No, no," Persikov replied, pulling himself together. "I'm just rather tired. Yes. Kindly bring me a glass of water."

It was a very sunny August day. This disturbed the Professor, so the blinds were pulled down. One flexible standing

reflector cast a pencil of sharp light onto the glass table piled with instruments and lenses. The exhausted Persikov was leaning against the back of his revolving chair, smoking and staring through clouds of smoke with dead-tired but contented eyes at the slightly open door of the chamber inside which a red sheaf of light lay quietly, warming the already stuffy and fetid air in the room.

There was a knock at the door.

"What is it?" Persikov asked.

The door creaked lightly, and in came Pankrat. He stood to attention, pallid with fear before the divinity, and announced:

"Feight's come for you, Professor."

The ghost of a smile flickered on the scientist's face. He narrowed his eyes and said:

"That's interesting. Only I'm busy."

"E says 'e's got an official warrant from the Kremlin."

"Fate with a warrant? That's a rare combination," Persikov remarked. "Oh, well, send him in then!"

"Yessir," Pankrat replied, slithering through the door like a grass-snake.

A minute later it opened again, and a man appeared on the threshold. Persikov

creaked his chair and stared at the newcomer over the top of his spectacles and over his shoulder. Persikov was very isolated from real life. He was not interested in it. But even Persikov could not fail to notice the main thing about the man who had just come in. He was dreadfully old-fashioned. In 1919 this man would have looked perfectly at home in the streets of the capital. He would have looked tolerable in 1924, at the beginning. But in 1928 he looked positively strange. At a time when even the most backward part of the proletariat, bakers, were wearing jackets and when military tunics were a rarity, having been finally discarded at the end of 1924, the newcomer was dressed in a double-breasted leather jacket, green trousers, foot bindings and army boots, with a big old-fashioned Mauser in the cracked yellow holster at his side. The newcomer's face made the same impression on Persikov as on everyone else, a highly unpleasant one. The small eyes looked out on the world with a surprised, yet confident expression, and there was something unduly familiar about the short legs with their flat feet. The face was

bluish-shaven. Persikov frowned at once. Creak' ing the screw mercilessly, he peered at the newcomer over his spectacles, then through them, and barked:

"So you've got a warrant, have you? Where is it then?"

The newcomer was clearly taken aback by what he saw. In general he was not prone to confusion, but now he was confused. Judging by his eyes, the thing that impressed him most was the bookcase with twelve shelves stretching right up to the ceiling and packed full of books. Then, of course, the chambers which, hell-like, were flooded with the crimson ray swelling up in the lenses. And Persikov himself in the semi-darkness by sharp point of the ray falling from the reflector looked strange and majestic in his revolving chair. The newcomer stared at him with an expression in which sparks of respect flashed clearly through the self-assurance, did not hand over any warrant, but said:

"I am Alexander Semyonovich Feight!"

"Well then? So what?"

"I have been put in charge of the Red Ray Model State Farm," the newcomer

explained.

"So what?"

"And so I have come to see you on secret business, comrade."

"Well, I wonder what that can be. Put it briefly, if you don't mind."

The newcomer unbuttoned his jacket and pulled out some instructions typed on splendid thick paper. He handed the paper to Persikov, then sat down uninvited on a revolving stool.

"Don't push the table," said Persikov with hatred.

The newcomer looked round in alarm at the table, on the far edge of which a pair of eyes glittered lifelessly like diamonds in a damp dark opening. They sent shivers down your spine.

No sooner had Persikov read the warrant, than he jumped up and rushed to the telephone. A few seconds later he was already saying hastily in a state of extreme irritation:

"Forgive me... I just don't understand... How can it be? Without my consent or advice... The devil only knows what he'll do!"

At that point the stranger, highly offended, spun round on the stool.

"Pardon me, but I'm in charge..." he began.

But Persikov shook a crooked finger at him and went on:

"Excuse me, but I just don't understand. In fact, I object categorically. I refuse to sanction any experiments with the eggs... Until I have tried them myself..."

Something croaked and rattled in the receiver, and even at a distance it was clear that the indulgent voice on the phone was talking to a small child. In the end a purple-faced Persikov slammed down the receiver, shouting over it at the wall:

"I wash my hands of the whole business!"

Going back to the table, he picked up the warrant, read it once from top to bottom over his spectacles, then from bottom to top through them, and suddenly howled:

"Pankrat!"

Pankrat appeared in the doorway as if he had shot up through the trap-door in an opera. Persikov glared at him and barked:

"Go away, Pankrat!" And Pankrat disappeared, his face not expressing the slightest surprise.

Then Persikov turned to the newcomer

and said:

"I beg your pardon. I will obey. It's none of my business.

And of no interest to me."

The newcomer was not so much offended as taken aback.

"Excuse me," he began, "but comrade..."

"Why do you keep saying comrade all the time," Persikov muttered, then fell silent.

"Well, I never," was written all over Feight's face.

"Pard..." "Alright then, here you are," Persikov interrupted him.

"See this arc lamp. From this you obtain by moving the eyepiece," Persikov clicked the lid of the chamber, like a camera, "a beam which you can collect by moving the lenses, number 1 here... and the mirror, number 2." Persikov put the ray out, then lit it again on the floor of the asbestos chamber. "And on the floor you can put anything you like and experiment with it. Extremely simple, is it not?"

Persikov intended to express irony and contempt, but the newcomer was peering hard at the chamber with shining eyes and did not notice them.

"Only I warn you," Persikov went on. "You must not put your hands in the ray,

because from my observations it causes growths of the epithelium. And whether they are malignant or not, I unfortunately have not yet had time to establish."

Hereupon the newcomer quickly put his hands behind his back, dropping his leather cap, and looked at the Professor's hands. They were stained with iodine, and the right hand was bandaged at the wrist.

"But what about you, Professor?"

"You can buy rubber gloves at Schwabe's on Kuznetsky," the Professor replied irritably. "I'm not obliged to worry about that"

At this point Persikov stared hard at the newcomer as if through a microscope.

"Where are you from? And why have you..."

Feight took offence at last.

"Pard..."

"But a person should know what he's doing! Why have you latched on to this ray?"

"Because it's a matter of the greatest importance..."

"Hm. The greatest importance? In that case... Pankrat!"

And when Pankrat appeared:

"Wait a minute, I must think." " Pankrat

dutifully disappeared again.

"There's one thing I can't understand," said Persikov. "Why the need for all this speed and secrecy?"

"You've got me all muddled up. Professor," Feight replied. "You know there's not a single chicken left in the whole country."

"Well, what of it?" Persikov howled. "Surely you're not going to try and resurrect them all at the drop of a hat, are you? And why do you need this ray which hasn't been properly studied yet?"

"Comrade Professor," Feight replied, "you've got me all muddled, honest you have. I'm telling you that we must put poultry-keeping back on its feet again, because they're writing all sorts of rotten things about us abroad. Yes."

"Well, let them..."

"Tut-tut," Feight replied enigmatically, shaking his head.

"Who on earth, I should like to know, would ever think of using the ray to hatch chickens..."

"Me," said Feight.

"Oh, I see. And why, if you don't mind my asking? How did you find out about the properties of the ray?"

"I was at your lecture, Professor."

"But I haven't done anything with the eggs yet! I'm only planning to!"

"It'll work alright, honest it will," said Feight suddenly with great conviction. "Your ray's so famous it could hatch elephants, not only chickens."

"Now listen here," Persikov said. "You're not a zoologist, are you? That's a pity. You would make a very bold experimenter. Yes, only you risk ... failure ... and you're taking up my time."

"We'll give the chambers back to you. Don't you worry!"

"When?"

"After I've hatched out the first batch."

"How confidently you said that! Very well! Pankrat!"

"I've brought some people with me," said Feight. "And a guard..."

By evening Persikov's study was desolate. The tables were empty. Feight's people took away the three big chambers, only leaving the Professor the first, the small one which he had used to begin the experiments.

The July dusk was falling. A greyness invaded the Institute, creeping along the corridors. Monotonous steps could be

heard in the study. Persikov was pacing the large room from window to door, in the dark... And strange though it may seem all the inmates of the Institute, and the animals too, were prey to a curious melancholy that evening. For some reason the toads gave a very mournful concert, croaking in a most sinister, ominous fashion. Pankrat had to chase a grass-snake that slipped out of its chamber, and when he caught it in the corridor the snake looked as if it would do anything just to get away from there.

Late that evening the bell from Persikov's study rang. Pankrat appeared on the threshold to be greeted by a strange sight. The scientist was standing alone in the middle of the study, staring at the tables. Pankrat coughed and froze to attention.

"There, Pankrat," said Persikov, pointing at the empty table. Pankrat took fright. It looked in the dark as if the Professor had been crying. That was unusual, terrifying.

"Yessir," Pankrat replied plaintively, thinking, "If only you'd bawl at me!"

"There," Persikov repeated, and his lips trembled like a little boy's whose favourite

toy has suddenly been taken away from him.

"You know, my dear Pankrat," Persikov went on, turning away to face the window. "My wife who left me fifteen years ago and joined an operetta company has now apparently died... So there, Pankrat, dear chap... I got a letter..."

The toads croaked mournfully, and darkness slowly engulfed the Professor. Night was falling. Here and there white lamps went on in the windows. Pankrat stood to attention with fright, confused and miserable.

"You can go, Pankrat," the Professor said heavily, with a wave of the hand. "Go to bed, Pankrat, my dear fellow."

And so night fell. Pankrat left the study quickly on tiptoe for some reason, ran to his cubby-hole, rummaged among a pile of rags in the corner, pulled out an already opened bottle of vodka and gulped down a large glassful. Then he ate some bread and salt, and his eyes cheered up a bit.

Late that evening, just before midnight, Pankrat was sitting barefoot on a bench in the poorly lit vestibule, talking to the indefatigable bowler hat on duty and scratching his chest under a calico shirt.

"Honest, it would've been better if he'd done me in..."

"Was he really crying?" asked the bowler hat, inquisitively.

"Honest he was," Pankrat insisted.

"A great scientist," the bowler hat agreed. "A frog's no substitute for a wife, anyone knows that."

"It sure isn't," Pankrat agreed.

Then he paused and added:

"I'm thinking of bringing the wife up here... No sense her staying in the country. Only she couldn't stand them there reptiles..."

"I'm not surprised, the filthy things," agreed the bowler hat.

Not a sound could be heard from the Professor's study. The light was not on either. There was no strip under the door.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INCIDENT AT THE STATE FARM

There is no better time of the year than mid-August in Smolensk Province, say. The

summer of 1928 was a splendid one, as we all know, with rains just at the right time in spring, a full hot sun, and a splendid harvest... The apples on the former Sheremetev family estate were ripening, the forests were a lush green and the fields were squares of rich yellow... Man becomes nobler in the lap of nature. Alexander Se-myonovich too did not seem quite as unpleasant as in the town. And he wasn't wearing that revolting jacket. His face had a bronze tan, the unbuttoned calico shirt revealed a chest thickly covered with black hair. He had canvas trousers on. And his eyes were calmer and kinder.

Alexander Semyonovich trotted excitedly down the colon-naded porch, which sported a notice with the words "Red Ray State Farm" under a star, and went straight to the truck that had just brought the three black chambers under escort.

All day Alexander Semyonovich worked hard with his assistants setting up the chambers in the former winter garden, the Sheremetevs' conservatory. By evening all was ready. A white frosted arc lamp shone under the glass roof, the chambers were set up on bricks and, after much tapping

and turning of shining knobs, the mechanic who had come with the chambers produced the mysterious red ray on the asbestos floor in the black crates.

Alexander Semyonovich bustled about, climbing up the ladder himself and checking the wiring.

The next day the same truck came back from the station and spat out three boxes of magnificent smooth plywood stuck all over with labels and white notices on a black background that read:

"Vorsicht: Eier!"

"Eggs. Handle with care!"

"Why have they sent so few?" Alexander Semyonovich exclaimed in surprise and set about unpacking the eggs at once. The unpacking also took place in the conservatory with the participation of the following: Alexander Semyonovich himself, his unusually plump wife Manya, the one-eyed former gardener of the former Sheremetevs, who now worked for the state farm in the universal post of watchman, the guard doomed to live on the state farm, and the cleaning girl Dunya. It was not Moscow, and everything here was simpler, more friendly and more

homely. Alexander Semyonovich gave the instructions, glancing avidly from time to time at the boxes which lay like some rich present under the gentle sunset glow from the upper panes in the conservatory. The guard, his rifle dozing peacefully by the door, was ripping open the braces and metal bands with a pair of pliers. There was a sound of cracking wood. Clouds of dust rose up. Alexander Semyonovich padded around in his sandals, fussing by the boxes.

"Gently does it," he said to the guard. "Be careful. Can't you see it's eggs?"

"Don't worry," croaked the provincial warrior, bashing away happily. "Won't be a minute..."

Wrr-ench. Down came another shower of dust.

The eggs were beautifully packed: first came sheets of waxed paper under the wooden top, next some blotting paper, then a thick layer of wood shavings and finally the sawdust in which the white egg-tops nestled.

"Foreign packing," said Alexander Semyonovich lovingly, rummaging around in the sawdust. "Not the way we do it. Careful, Manya, or you'll break them."

"Have you gone daft, Alexander Semyonovich," replied his wife. "What's so special about this lot? Think I've never seen eggs before? Oh, what big ones!"

"Foreign," said Alexander Semyonovich, laying the eggs out on the wooden table. "Not like our poor old peasant eggs. Bet they're all brahmaputras, the devil take them! German..."

"I should say so," the guard agreed, admitting the eggs.

"Only why are they so dirty?" Alexander Semyonovich mused thoughtfully. "Keep an eye on things, Manya. Tell them to go on unloading. I'm going off to make a phone call."

And Alexander Semyonovich went to use the telephone in the farm office across the yard.

That evening the phone rang in the laboratory at the Zoological Institute. Professor Persikov tousled his hair and went to answer it.

"Yes?" he asked.

"There's a call for you from the provinces," a female voice hissed quietly down the receiver.

"Well, put it through then," said Persikov disdainfully into the black mouthpiece.

After a bit of crackling a far-off male voice asked anxiously in his ear:

"Should the eggs be washed. Professor?"

"What's that? What? What did you say?" snapped Persikov irritably. "Where are you speaking from?"

"Nikolskoye, Smolensk Province," the receiver replied.

"Don't understand. Never heard of it. Who's that speaking?"

"Feight," the receiver said sternly.

"What Feight? Ah, yes. It's you. What did you want to know?"

"Whether to wash them. They've sent a batch of chicken eggs from abroad..."

"Well?"

"But they're all mucky..."

"You must be wrong. How can they be 'mucky', as you put it? Well, of course, maybe a few, er, droppings got stuck to them, or something of the sort."

"So what about washing them?"

"No need at all, of course. Why, are you putting the eggs into the chambers already?"

"Yes, I am," the receiver replied.

"Hm," Persikov grunted.

"So long," the receiver clattered and fell silent.

"So long," Persikov repeated distastefully to Decent Ivanov. "How do you like that character, Pyotr Stepanovich?"

Ivanov laughed.

"So it was him, was it? I can imagine what he'll concoct out of those eggs."

"Ye-e-es," Persikov began maliciously. "Just think, Pyotr Stepanovich. Well, of course, it's highly possible that the ray will have the same effect on the deutero-plasma of a chicken egg as on the plasma of amphibians. It is also highly possible that he will hatch out chickens. But neither you nor I can say precisely what sort of chickens they will be. They may be of no earthly use to anyone. They may die after a day or two. Or they may be inedible. And can I even guarantee that they'll be able to stand up. Perhaps they'll have brittle bones." Persikov got excited, waved his hand and crooked his fingers.

"Quite so," Ivanov agreed.

"Can you guarantee, Pyotr Stepanovich, that they will be able to reproduce? Perhaps that character will hatch out sterile chickens. He'll make them as big as a dog, and they won't have any chicks until kingdom come."

"Precisely," Ivanov agreed.

"And such nonchalance," Persikov was working himself into a fury. "Such perkiness! And kindly note that I was asked to instruct that scoundrel." Persikov pointed to the warrant delivered by Feight (which was lying on the experimental table). "But how am I to instruct that ignoramus when I myself can say nothing about the question?"

"Couldn't you have refused?" asked Ivanov.

Persikov turned purple, snatched up the warrant and showed it to Ivanov who read it and gave an ironic smile.

"Yes, I see," he said significantly.

"And kindly note also that I've been expecting my shipment for two months, and there's still no sign of it. But that rascal got his eggs straightaway and all sorts of assistance."

"It won't do him any good, Vladimir Ipatych. In the end they'll just give you back your chambers."

"Well, let's hope it's soon, because they're holding up my experiments."

"Yes, that's dreadful. I've got everything ready."

"Has the protective clothing arrived?"

"Yes, today."

Persikov was somewhat reassured by this and brightened up.

"Then I think we'll proceed like this. We can close the doors of the operating-room tight and open up the windows."

"Of course," Ivanov agreed.

"Three helmets?"

"Yes, three."

"Well then, that's you and me, and we'll ask one of the students. He can have the third helmet."

"Grinmut would do."

"That's the one you've got working on salamanders, isn't it? Hm, he's not bad, but, if you don't mind my saying so, last spring he didn't know the difference between a *Pseudotyphlops* and a *Platyplecturus*," Persikov added with rancour.

"But he's not bad. He's a good student," Ivanov defended him.

"We'll have to go without sleep completely for one night," Persikov went on. "Only you must check the gas, Pyotr Stepanovich. The devil only knows what it's like. That Volunteer-Chem lot might send us some rubbish."

"No, no," Ivanov waved his hands. "I tested it yesterday. You must give them

some credit, Vladimir Ipatych, the gas is excellent."

"What did you try it on?"

"Some common toads. You just spray them with it and they die instantly. And another thing, Vladimir Ipatych. Write and ask the GPU to send you an electric revolver."

"But I don't know how to use it."

"I'll see to that," Ivanov replied. "We tried one out on the Klyazma, just for fun. There was a GPU chap living next to me. It's a wonderful thing. And incredibly efficient. Kills outright at a hundred paces without making a sound. We were shooting ravens. I don't even think we'll need the gas."

"Hm, that's a bright idea. Very bright." Persikov went into the corner, lifted the receiver and barked:

"Give me that, what's it called, Lubyanka."

The weather was unusually hot. You could see the rich transparent heat shimmering over the fields. But the nights were wonderful, green and deceptive. The moon made the former estate of the Sheremetevs look too beautiful for words. The palace-cum-state farm glistened as if

it were made of sugar, shadows quivered in the park, and the ponds had two different halves, one a slanting column of light, the other fathomless darkness. In the patches of moonlight you could easily read Izvestia, except for the chess section which was in small nonpareil. But on nights like these no one read Izvestia, of course. Dunya the cleaner was in the woods behind the state farm and as coincidence would have it, the ginger-moustached driver of the farm's battered truck happened to be there too. What they were doing there no one knows. They were sheltering in the unreliable shade of an elm tree, on the driver leather coat which was spread out on the ground. A lamp shone in the kitchen, where the two market-gardeners were having supper, - and Madame Feight was sitting in a white negligé on the columned veranda, gazing at the beautiful moon and dreaming.

At ten o'clock in the evening when the sounds had died down in the village of Kontsovka behind the state farm, the idyllic landscape was filled with the charming gentle playing of a flute. This fitted in with the groves and former columns of the Sheremetev palace more

than words can say. In the duet the voice of the delicate Liza from The Queen of Spades blended with that of the passionate Polina and soared up into the moonlit heights like a vision of the old and yet infinitely dear, heartbreakingly entrancing regime.

Do fade away... Fade away...

pipled the flute, trilling and sighing.

The coppers were hushed, and Dunya, fatal as a wood nymph, listened, her cheek pressed against the rough, ginger and manly cheek of the driver.

"He don't play bad, the bastard," said the driver, putting a manly arm round Dunya's waist.

The flute was being played by none other than the manager of the state farm himself, Alexander Semyonovich Feight, who, to do him justice, was playing it beautifully. The fact of the matter was that Alexander Semyonovich had once specialised in the flute. Right up to 1917 he had played in the well-known concert ensemble of the maestro Petukhov, filling the foyer of the cosy little Magic Dreams cinema in the town of Yekaterinoslav with its sweet notes every evening. But the great year of 1917, which broke the

careers of so many, had swept Alexander Semyonovich onto a new path too. He left the Magic Dreams and the dusty star-spangled satin of its foyer to plunge into the open sea of war and revolution, exchanging his flute for a death-dealing Mauser. For a long time he was tossed about on waves which washed him ashore, now in the Crimea, now in Moscow, now in Turkestan, and even in Vladivostok. It needed the revolution for Alexander Semyonovich to realise his full potential. It turned out that here was a truly great man, who should not be allowed to waste his talents in the foyer of Magic Dreams, of course. Without going into unnecessary detail, we shall merely say that the year before, 1927, and the beginning of 1928 had found Alexander Semyonovich in Turkestan where he first edited a big newspaper and then, as a local member of the Supreme Economic Commission, became renowned for his remarkable contribution to the irrigation of Turkestan. In 1928 Feight came to Moscow and received some well-deserved leave. The Supreme Commission of the organisation, whose membership card this provincially old-fashioned man carried with honour in

his pocket, appreciated his qualities and appointed him to a quiet and honorary post. Alas and alack! To the great misfortune of the Republic, Alexander Semyonovich's seething brain did not quieten down. In Moscow Feight learned of Persikov's discovery, and in the rooms of Red Paris in Tverskaya Street Alexander Semyonovich had the brainwave of using the ray to restore the Republic's poultry in a month. The Animal Husbandry Commission listened to what he had to say, agreed with him, and Feight took his warrant to the eccentric scientist.

The concert over the glassy waters, the grove and the park was drawing to a close, when something happened to cut it short. The dogs in Kontsovka, who should have been fast asleep by then, suddenly set up a frenzied barking, which gradually turned into an excruciating general howl. The howl swelled up, drifting over the fields, and was answered by a high-pitched concert from the million frogs on the ponds. All this was so ghastly, that for a moment the mysterious enchanted night seemed to fade away.

Alexander Semyonovich put down his flute and went onto the veranda.

"Hear that, Manya? It's those blasted dogs... What do you think set them off like that?"

"How should I know?" she replied, gazing at the moon.

"Hey, Manya, let's go and take a look at the eggs," Alexander Semyonovich suggested.

"For goodness sake, Alexander Semyonovich. You're darned crazy about those eggs and chickens. Have a rest for a bit."

"No, Manya, let's go."

A bright light was burning in the conservatory. Dunya came in too with a burning face and shining eyes. Alexander Semyonovich opened the observation windows carefully, and they all began peeping into the chambers. On the white asbestos floor lay neat rows of bright-red eggs with spots on them. There was total silence in the chambers, except for the hissing of the 15,000 candle-power light overhead.

"I'll hatch those chicks out alright!" exclaimed Alexander Semyonovich excitedly, looking now through the observation windows at the side, now through the wide ventilation hatches

overhead. "You'll see. Eh? Don't you think so?"

"You know what, Alexander Semyonovich," said Dunya, smiling. "The men in Kontsovka think you're the Antichrist. They say your eggs are from the devil. It's a sin to hatch eggs with machines. They want to kill you."

Alexander Semyonovich shuddered and turned to his wife. His face had gone yellow.

"Well, how about that? Ignorant lot! What can you do with people like that? Eh? We'll have to fix up a meeting for them, Manya. I'll phone the district centre tomorrow for some Party workers. And I'll give 'em a speech myself. This place needs a bit of working over alright. Stuck away at the back of beyond..."

"Thick as posts," muttered the guard, who had settled down on his greatcoat in the conservatory doorway.

The next day was heralded by some strange and inexplicable events. In the early morning, at the first glint of sunlight, the groves, which usually greeted the heavenly body with a strong and unceasing twitter of birds, met it with total silence. This was noticed by

absolutely everybody. It was like the calm before a storm. But no storm followed. Conversations at the state farm took on a strange and sinister note for Alexander Semyonovich, especially because according to the well-known Kontsovka trouble-maker and sage nicknamed Goat Gob, all the birds had gathered in flocks and flown away northwards from Sheremetevo at dawn, which was quite ridiculous. Alexander Semyonovich was most upset and spent the whole day putting a phone call through to the town of Grachevka. Eventually they promised to send him in a few days' time two speakers on two subjects, the international situation and the question of Volunteer-Fowl.

The evening brought some more surprises. Whereas in the morning the woods had fallen silent, showing clearly how suspiciously unpleasant it was when the trees were quiet, and whereas by midday the sparrows from the state farmyard had also flown off somewhere, that evening there was not a sound from the Sheremetevka pond either. This was quite extraordinary, because everyone for twenty miles around was familiar with the croaking of the Sheremetev frogs. But now

they seemed to be extinct. There was not a single voice from the pond, and the sedge was silent. It must be confessed that this really upset Alexander Semyonovich. People had begun to talk about these happenings in a most unpleasant fashion, i.e., behind his back.

"It really is strange," said Alexander Semyonovich to his wife at lunch. "I can't understand why those birds had to go and fly away."

"How should I know?" Manya replied. "Perhaps it's because of your ray."

"Don't be so silly, Manya!" exclaimed Alexander Semyonovich, flinging down his spoon. "You're as bad as the peasants. What's the ray got to do with it?" "I don't know. Stop pestering me." That evening brought the third surprise. The dogs began howling again in Kontsovka and how! Their endless whines and angry, mournful yelping wafted over the moonlit fields.

Alexander Semyonovich rewarded himself somewhat with yet another surprise, a pleasant one this time, in the conservatory. A constant tapping had begun inside the red eggs in the chambers. "Tappity-tappity-tappity," came

from one, then another, then a third.

The tapping in the eggs was a triumph for Alexander Semyonovich. The strange events in the woods and on the pond were immediately forgotten. Everyone gathered in the conservatory, Manya, Dunya, the watchman and the guard, who left his rifle by the door.

"Well, then? What about that?" asked Alexander Semyonovich triumphantly. Everyone put their ears eagerly to the doors of the first chamber. "That's them tapping with their little beaks, the chickens," Alexander Semyonovich went on, beaming. "So you thought I wouldn't hatch out any chicks, did you? Well, you were wrong, my hearties." From an excess of emotion he slapped the guard on the shoulder. "I'll hatch chickens that'll take your breath away. Only now I must keep alert," he added strictly. "Let me know as soon as they start hatching."

"Right you are," replied the watchman, Dunya and the guard in a chorus.

"Tappity-tappity-tappity," went one egg, then another, in the first chamber. In fact this on-the-spot spectacle of new life being born in a thin shining shell was so intriguing that they all sat for a long time

on the upturned empty crates, watching the crimson eggs mature in the mysterious glimmering light. By the time they went to bed it was quite late and a greenish night had spread over the farm and the surrounding countryside. The night was mysterious, one might even say frightening, probably because its total silence was broken now and then by the abject, excruciating howls of the dogs in Kontsovka. What on earth had got into those blasted dogs no one could say.

An unpleasant surprise awaited Alexander Semyonovich the next morning. The guard was extremely upset and kept putting his hands on his heart, swearing that he had not fallen asleep but had noticed nothing.

"I can't understand it," the guard insisted. "It's through no fault of mine, Comrade Feight."

"Very grateful to you, I'm sure," retorted Alexander Semyonovich heatedly. "What do you think, comrade? Why were you put on guard? To keep an eye on things. So tell me where they are. They've hatched out, haven't they? So they must have run away. That means you must have left the door open and gone off somewhere. Get

me those chickens!"

"Where could I have gone? I know my job." The guard took offence. "Don't you go accusing me unfairly, Comrade Feight!"

"Then where are they?"

"How the blazes should I know!" the guard finally exploded. "I'm not supposed to guard them, am I? Why was I put on duty? To see that nobody pinched the chambers, and that's what I've done. Your chambers are safe and sound. But there's no law that says I must chase after your chickens. Goodness only knows what they'll be like. Maybe you won't be able to catch them on a bicycle."

This somewhat deflated Alexander Semyonovich. He muttered something else, then relapsed into a state of perplexity. It was a strange business indeed. In the first chamber, which had been switched on before the others, the two eggs at the very base of the ray had broken open. One of them had even rolled to one side. The empty shell was lying on the asbestos floor in the ray.

"The devil only knows," muttered Alexander Semyonovich. "The windows are closed and they couldn't have flown away over the roof, could they?"

He threw back his head and looked at some big holes in the glass roof.

"Of course, they couldn't, Alexander Semyonovich!" exclaimed Dunya in surprise. "Chickens can't fly. They must be here somewhere. Chuck, chuck, chuck," she called, peering into the corners of the conservatory, which were cluttered with dusty flower pots, bits of boards and other rubbish. But no chicks answered her call.

The whole staff spent about two hours running round the farmyard, looking for the runaway chickens and found nothing. The day passed in great excitement. The duty guard on the chambers was reinforced by the watchman, who had strict orders to look through the chamber windows every quarter of an hour and call Alexander Semyonovich if anything happened. The guard sat huffily by the door, holding his rifle between his knees. What with all the worry Alexander Semyonovich did not have lunch until nearly two. After lunch he slept for an hour or so in the cool shade on the former She-remetev ottoman, had a refreshing drink of the farm's kvass and slipped into the conservatory to make sure everything was alright. The old watchman was lying

on his stomach on some bast matting and staring through the observation window of the first chamber. The guard was keeping watch by the door.

But there was a piece of news: the eggs in the third chamber, which had been switched on last, were making a kind of gulping, hissing sound, as if something inside them were whimpering.

"They're hatching out alright," said Alexander Semyonovich. "That's for sure. See?" he said to the watchman.

"Aye, it's most extraordinary," the latter replied in a most ambiguous tone, shaking his head.

Alexander Semyonovich squatted by the chambers for a while, but nothing hatched out. So he got up, stretched and announced that he would not leave the grounds, but was going for a swim in the pond and must be called if there were any developments. He went into the palace to his bedroom with its two narrow iron bedsteads, rumpled bedclothes and piles of green apples and millet on the floor for the newly-hatched chickens, took a towel and, on reflection, his flute as well to play at leisure over the still waters. Then he ran quickly out of the palace, across the

farmyard and down the willow-lined path to the pond. He walked briskly, swinging the towel, with the flute under his arm. The sky shimmered with heat through the willows, and his aching body begged to dive into the water. On the right of Feight began a dense patch of burdock, into which he spat en passant. All at once there was a rustling in the tangle of big leaves, as if someone was dragging a log. With a sudden sinking feeling in his stomach, Alexander Semyonovich turned his head towards the burdock in surprise. There had not been a sound from the pond for two days. The rustling stopped, and above the burdock the smooth surface of the pond flashed invitingly with the grey roof of the changing hut. Some dragonflies darted to and fro in front of Alexander Semyonovich. He was about to turn off to the wooden platform, when there was another rustle in the burdock accompanied this time by a short hissing like steam coming out of an engine. Alexander Semyonovich tensed and stared at the dense thicket of weeds.

At that moment the voice of Feight's wife rang out, and her white blouse flashed in and out through the raspberry bushes.

"Wait for me, Alexander Semyonovich. I'm coming for a swim too."

His wife was hurrying to the pond, but Alexander Se-myonovich's eyes were riveted on the burdock and he did not reply. A greyish olive-coloured log had begun to rise out of the thicket, growing ever bigger before his horrified gaze. The log seemed to be covered with wet yellowish spots. It began to straighten up, bending and swaying, and was so long that it reached above a short gnarled willow. Then the top of the log cracked, bent down slightly, and something about the height of a Moscow electric lamp-post loomed over Alexander Semyonovich. Only this something was about three times thicker than a lamp-post and far more beautiful because of its scaly tattooing. Completely mystified, but with shivers running down his spine, Alexander Semyonovich looked at the top of this terrifying lamp-post, and his heart almost stopped beating. He turned to ice on the warm August day, and everything went dark before his eyes as if he were looking at the sun through his summer trousers.

On the tip of the log was a head. A flattened, pointed head adorned with a

round yellow spot on an olive background. In the roof of the head sat a pair of lidless icy narrow eyes, and these eyes glittered with indescribable malice. The head moved as if spitting air and the whole post slid back into the burdock, leaving only the eyes which glared at Alexander Semyonovich without blinking. Drenched with sweat, the latter uttered five incredible fear-crazed words. So piercing were the eyes between the leaves.

"What the devil's going on..."

Then he remembered about fakirs... Yes, yes, in India, a wicker basket and a picture. Snake-charming.

The head reared up again, and the body began to uncoil. Alexander Semyonovich raised his flute to his lips, gave a hoarse squeak and, gasping for breath, began to play the waltz from Eugene Onegin. The eyes in the burdock lit up at once with implacable hatred for the opera.

"Are you crazy, playing in this heat?" came Manya's cheerful voice, and out of the corner of his eye Alexander Semyonovich glimpsed a patch of white.

Then a terrible scream shattered the farm, swelling, rising, and the waltz began to limp painfully. The head shot out of the

burdock, its eyes leaving Alexander Semyonovich's soul to repent of his sins. A snake about thirty feet long and as thick as a man uncoiled like a spring and shot out of the weeds. Clouds of dust sprayed up from the path, and the waltz ceased. The snake raced past the state farm manager straight to the white blouse. Feight saw everything clearly: Manya went a yellowish-white, and her long hair rose about a foot above her head like wire. Before Feight's eyes the snake opened its mouth, something fork-like darting out, then sank its teeth into the shoulder of Manya, who was sinking into the dust, and jerked her up about two feet above the ground. Manya gave another piercing death cry. The snake coiled itself into a twelve-yard screw, its tail sweeping up a tornado, and began to crush Manya. She did not make another sound. Feight could hear her bones crunching. High above the ground rose Manya's head pressed lovingly against the snake's cheek. Blood gushed out of her mouth, a broken arm dangled in the air and more blood spurted out from under the fingernails. Then the snake opened its mouth, put its gaping jaws over Manya's head and slid onto the

rest of her like a glove slipping onto a finger. The snake's breath was so hot that Feight could feel it on his face, and the tail all but swept him off the path into the acrid dust. It was then that Feight went grey. First the left, then the right half of his jet-black head turned to silver. Nauseated to death, he eventually managed to drag himself away from the path, then turned and ran, seeing nothing and nobody, with a wild shriek that echoed for miles around.

CHAPTER IX

A WRITHING MASS

Shukin, the GPU agent at Dugino Station, was a very brave man. He said thoughtfully to his companion, the ginger-headed Polaitis:

"Well, let's go. Eh? Get the motorbike." Then he paused for a moment and added, turning to the man who was sitting on the bench: "Put the flute down."

But instead of putting down the flute, the

trembling grey-haired man on the bench in the Dugino GPU office, began weeping and moaning. Shukin and Polaitis realised they would have to pull the flute away. His fingers seemed to be stuck to it. Shukin, who possessed enormous, almost circus-like strength, prised the fingers away one by one. Then they put the flute on the table.

It was early on the sunny morning of the day after Manya's death.

"You come too," Shukin said to Alexander Semyonovich, "and show us where everything is." But Feight shrank back from him in horror, putting up his hands as if to ward off some terrible vision.

"You must show us," Polaitis added sternly. "Leave him alone. You can see the state he's in."

"Send me to Moscow," begged Alexander Semyonovich, weeping.

"You really don't want to go back to the farm again?"

Instead of replying Feight shielded himself with his hands again, his eyes radiating horror.

"Alright then," decided Shukin. "You're really not in a fit state... I can see that. There's an express train leaving shortly,

you can go on it."

While the station watchman helped Alexander Semyonovich, whose teeth were chattering on the battered blue mug, to have a drink of water, Shukin and Polaitis conferred together. Polaitis took the view that nothing had happened. But that Feight was mentally ill and it had all been a terrible, hallucination. Shukin, however, was inclined to believe that a boa constrictor had escaped from the circus on tour in the town of Grachevka. The sound of their doubting whispers made Feight rise to his feet. He had recovered somewhat and said, raising his hands like an Old Testament prophet:

"Listen to me. Listen. Why don't you believe me? I saw it. Where is my wife?"

Shukin went silent and serious and immediately sent off a telegram to Grachevka. On Shukin's instructions, a third agent began to stick closely to Alexander Semyonovich and was to accompany him to Moscow. Shukin and Polaitis got ready for the journey. They only had one electric revolver, but it was good protection. A 1927 model, the pride of French technology for shooting at close range, could kill at a mere hundred paces,

but had a range of two metres in diameter and within this range any living thing was exterminated outright. It was very hard to miss. Shukin put on this shiny electric toy, while Polaitis armed himself with an ordinary light machine-gun, then they took some ammunition and raced off on the motorbike along the main road through the early morning dew and chill to the state farm. The motorbike covered the twelve miles between the station and the farm in a quarter of an hour (Feight had walked all night, occasionally hiding in the grass by the wayside in spasms of mortal terror), and when the sun began to get hot, the sugar palace with columns appeared amid the trees on the hill overlooking the winding River Top. There was a deathly silence all around. At the beginning of the turning up to the state farm the agents overtook a peasant on a cart. He was riding along at a leisurely pace with a load of sacks, and was soon left far behind. The motorbike drove over the bridge, and Polaitis sounded the horn to announce their arrival. But this elicited no response whatsoever, except from some distant frenzied dogs in Kontsovka. The motorbike slowed down as it approached

the gates with verdigris lions. Covered with dust, the agents in yellow gaiters dismounted, padlocked their motorbike to the iron railings and went into the yard. The silence was eerie.

"Hey, anybody around?" shouted Shukin loudly.

But no one answered his deep voice. The agents walked round the yard, growing more and more mystified. Polaitis was scowling. Shukin began to search seriously, his fair eyebrows knit in a frown. They looked through an open window into the kitchen and saw that it was empty, but the floor was covered with broken bits of white china.

"Something really has happened to them, you know. I can see it now. Some catastrophe," Polaitis said.

"Anybody there? Hey!" shouted Shukin, but the only reply was an echo from the kitchen vaults. "The devil only knows! It couldn't have gobbled them all up, could it? Perhaps they've run off somewhere. Let's go into the house."

The front door with the colonnaded veranda was wide open. The palace was completely empty inside. The agents even climbed up to the attic, knocking and

opening all the doors, but they found nothing and went out again into the yard through the deserted porch.

"We'll walk round the outside to the conservatory," Shukin said. "We'll give that a good going over and we can phone from there too."

The agents set off along the brick path, past the flowerbeds and across the backyard, at which point the conservatory came into sight.

"Wait a minute," whispered Shukin, unbuckling his revolver. Polaitis tensed and took his machine-gun in both hands. A strange, very loud noise was coming from the conservatory and somewhere behind it. It was like the sound of a steam engine. "Zzzz-zzzz," the conservatory hissed.

"Careful now," whispered Shukin, and trying not to make a sound the agents stole up to the glass walls and peered into the conservatory.

Polaitis immediately recoiled, his face white as a sheet. Shukin froze, mouth open and revolver in hand.

The conservatory was a terrible writhing mass. Huge snakes slithered across the floor, twisting and intertwining, hissing and uncoiling, swinging and shaking their

heads. The broken shells on the floor crunched under their bodies. Overhead a powerful electric lamp shone palely, casting an eery cinematographic light over the inside of the conservatory. On the floor lay three huge photographic-like chambers, two of which were dark and had been pushed aside, but a small deep-red patch of light glowed in the third. Snakes of all sizes were crawling over the cables, coiling round the frames and climbing through the holes in the roof. From the electric lamp itself hung a jet-black spotted snake several yards long, its head swinging like a pendulum. There was an occasional rattle amid the hissing, and a strange putrid pond-like smell wafted out of the conservatory. The agents could just make out piles of white eggs in the dusty corners, an enormous long-legged bird lying motionless by the chambers and the body of a man in grey by the door, with a rifle next to him.

"Get back!" shouted Shukin and began to retreat, pushing Polaitis with his left hand and raising his revolver with his right. He managed to fire nine hissing shots which cast flashes of green lightning all round. The noise swelled terribly as in response

to Shukin's shots the whole conservatory was galvanised into frantic motion, and flat heads appeared in all the holes. Peals of thunder began to roll over the farm and echo on the walls. "Rat-tat-tat-tat," Polaitis fired, retreating backwards. There was a strange four-footed shuffling behind him. Polaitis suddenly gave an awful cry and fell to the ground. A brownish-green creature on bandy legs, with a huge pointed head and a cristate tail, like an enormous lizard, had slithered out from behind the barn, given Polaitis a vicious bite in the leg, and knocked him over.

"Help!" shouted Polaitis. His left arm was immediately snapped up and crunched by a pair of jaws, while his right, which he tried in vain to lift, trailed the machine-gun over the ground. Shukin turned round in confusion. He managed to fire once, but the shot went wide, because he was afraid of hitting his companion. The second time he fired in the direction of the conservatory, because amid the smaller snake-heads a huge olive one on an enormous body had reared up and was slithering straight towards him. The shot killed the giant snake, and Shukin hopped and skipped round Polaitis, already half-

dead in the crocodile's jaws, trying to find the right spot to shoot the terrible monster without hitting the agent. In the end he succeeded. The electric revolver fired twice, lighting up everything around with a greenish flash, and the crocodile shuddered and stretched out rigid, letting go of Polaitis. Blood gushed out of his sleeve and mouth. He collapsed onto his sound right arm, dragging his broken left leg. He was sinking fast.

"Get out... Shukin," he sobbed.

Shukin fired a few more shots in the direction of the conservatory, smashing several panes of glass. But behind him a huge olive-coloured coil sprang out of a cellar window, slithered over the yard, covering it entirely with its ten-yard-long body and wound itself round Shukin's legs in a flash. It dashed him to the ground, and the shiny revolver bounced away. Shukin screamed with all his might, then choked, as the coils enfolded all of him except his head. Another coil swung round his head, ripping off the scalp, and the skull cracked. No more shots were heard in the farm. Everything was drowned by the all-pervading hissing. In reply to the hissing the wind wafted distant howls

from Kontsovka, only now it was hard to say who was howling, dogs or people.

CHAPTER X

CATASTROPHE

In the editorial office of Izvestia the lights were shining brightly, and the fat duty editor was laying out the second "column with telegrams "Around the Union Republics". One galley caught his eye. He looked at it through his pince-nez;

and laughed, then called the proof-readers and the maker-up and showed them it. On the narrow strip of damp paper they read:

"Grachevka, Smolensk Province. A hen that is as big as a horse and kicks like a horse has appeared in the district. It has bourgeois lady's feathers instead of a tail."

The compositors laughed themselves silly.

"In my day," said the duty editor, chuckling richly, "when I was working for Vanya Sytin on The Russian Word they used to see elephants when they got sozzled. That's right. Now it's ostriches."

The compositors laughed.

"Yes, of course, it's an ostrich," said the maker-up. "Shall we put it in, Ivan Vonifatievich?"

"Are you crazy?" the editor replied. "I'm surprised the secretary let it through. It was written under the influence alright."

"Yes, they must have had a drop or two," agreed the composers, and the maker-up removed the ostrich report from the desk.

So it was that Izvestia came out next day containing, as usual, a mass of interesting material but no mention whatsoever of the Grachevka ostrich. Decent Ivanov, who was conscientiously reading Izvestia in his office, rolled it up and yawned, muttering: "Nothing of interest," then put on his white coat. A little later the Bunsen burners went on in his room and the frogs started croaking. In Professor Persikov's room, however, there was hell let loose. The petrified Pankrat Stood stiffly to attention.

"Yessir, I will," he was saying.

Persikov handed him a sealed packet and told him:

"Go at once to the head of the Husbandry Department, and tell him straight that he's a swine. Tell him that I said so. And give him this packet."

"That's a nice little errand and no mistake," thought the pale-faced Pankrat and disappeared with the packet.

Persikov fumed angrily.

"The devil only knows what's going on," he raged, pacing up and down the office and rubbing his gloved hands. "It's making a mockery of me and zoology. They're bringing him pile upon pile of those blasted chicken eggs, when I've been waiting two months for what I really need. America's not that far away! It's sheer inefficiency! A real disgrace!" He began counting on his fingers. "Catching them takes, say, ten days at the most, alright then, fifteen, well, certainly not more than twenty, plus two days to get them to London, and another one from London to Berlin. And from Berlin it's only six hours to get here. It's an utter disgrace!"

He snatched up the phone in a rage and began ringing someone.

Everything in his laboratory was ready for some mysterious and highly dangerous experiments. There were strips of paper to seal up the doors, divers' helmets with snorkels and several cylinders shining like mercury with labels saying "Volunteer-Chem" and "Do not touch" plus the

drawing of a skull and cross-bones on the label.

It took at least three hours for the Professor to calm down and get on with some minor jobs. Which is what he did. He worked at the Institute until eleven in the evening and therefore had no idea what was happening outside its cream-painted walls. Neither the absurd rumours circulating around Moscow about terrible dragons, nor the newsboys' shouts about a strange telegram in the evening paper reached his ears. Docent Ivanov had gone to see TsarFyodor Ivanovich at the Arts Theatre, so there was no one to tell the Professor the news.

Around midnight Persikov arrived at Prechistenka and went to bed, where he read an English article in the Zoological Proceedings received from London. Then he fell asleep, like the rest of late-night Moscow. The only thing that did not sleep was the big grey building set back in Tverskaya Street where the Izvestia rotary presses clattered noisily, shaking the whole block. There was an incredible din and confusion in the office of the duty editor. He was rampaging around with bloodshot eyes like a madman, not

knowing what to do, and sending everyone to the devil. The maker-up followed close on his heels, breathing out wine fumes and saying:

"It can't be helped, Ivan Vonifatievich. Let them bring out a special supplement tomorrow. We can't take the paper off the presses now."

Instead of going home, the composers clustered together reading the telegrams that were now arriving in a steady stream, every fifteen minutes or so, each more eerie and disturbing than the one before. Alfred Bronsky's pointed hat flashed by in the blinding pink light of the printing office, and the fat man with the artificial leg scraped and hobbled around. Doors slammed in the entrance and reporters kept dashing up all night. The printing office's twelve telephones were busy non-stop, and the exchange almost automatically replied to the mysterious calls by giving the engaged signal, while the signal horns beeped constantly before the sleepless eyes of the lady telephonists.

The composers had gathered round the metal-legged ocean-going captain, who was saying to them:

"They'll have to send aeroplanes with

gas."

"They will and all," replied the composers. "It's a downright disgrace, it is!" Then the air rang with foul curses and a shrill voice cried:

"That Persikov should be shot!"

"What's Persikov got to do with it?" said someone in the crowd. "It's that son-of-a-bitch at the farm who should be shot."

"There should have been a guard!" someone shouted.

"Perhaps it's not the eggs at all."

The whole building thundered and shook from the rotary machines, and it felt as if the ugly grey block was blazing in an electrical conflagration.

Far from ceasing with the break of a new day, the pandemonium grew more intense than ever, although the electric lights went out. One after another motorbikes and automobiles raced into the asphalted courtyard. All Moscow rose to don white sheets of newspapers like birds. They fluttered down and rustled in everyone's hands. By eleven a.m. the newspaper-boys had sold out, although that month they were printing a million and a half copies of each issue of Izvestia. Professor Persikov took the bus from Prechistenka to the

Institute. There he was greeted by some news. In the vestibule stood three wooden crates neatly bound with metal strips and covered with foreign labels in German, over which someone had chalked in Russian: "Eggs. Handle with care!"

The Professor was overjoyed.

"At last!" he cried. "Open the crates at once, Pankrat, only be careful not to damage the eggs. And bring them into my office."

Pankrat carried out these instructions straightaway, and a quarter of an hour later in the Professor's office, strewn with sawdust and scraps of paper, a voice began shouting angrily.

"Are they trying to make fun of me?" the Professor howled, shaking his fists and waving a couple of eggs. "That Porosyuk's a real beast. I won't be treated like this. What do you think they are, Pankrat?"

"Eggs, sir," Pankrat replied mournfully.

"Chicken eggs, see, the devil take them! What good are they to me? They should be sent to that rascal on his state farm!"

Persikov rushed to the phone, but did not have time to make a call.

"Vladimir Ipatych! Vladimir Ipatych!" Ivanov's voice called urgently down the

Institute's corridor.

Persikov put down the phone and Pankrat hopped aside to make way for the decent. The latter hurried into the office and, contrary to his usual gentlemanly practice, did not even remove the grey hat sitting on his head. In his hand he held a newspaper.

"Do you know what's happened, Vladimir Ipatych?" he cried, waving before Persikov's face a sheet with the headline "Special Supplement" and a bright coloured picture in the middle.

"Just listen to what they've done!" Persikov shouted back at him, not listening. "They've sent me some chicken eggs as a nice surprise. That Porosyuk's a positive cretin, just look!"

Ivanov stopped short. He stared in horror at the open crates, then at the newspaper, and his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"So that's it," he gasped. "Now I understand. Take a look at this, Vladimir Ipatych." He quickly unfolded the paper and pointed with trembling fingers at the coloured picture. It showed an olive-coloured snake with yellow spots swaying like terrible fire hose in strange smudgy

foliage. It had been taken from a light aeroplane flying cautiously over the snake. "What is that in your opinion, Vladimir Ipatych?"

Persikov pushed the spectacles onto his forehead, then pulled them back onto his nose, stared at the photograph and said in great surprise:

"Well, I'll be damned. It's ... it's an anaconda. A boa constrictor..."

Ivanov pulled off his hat, sat down on a chair and said, banging the table with his fist to emphasise each word:

"It's an anaconda from Smolensk Province, Vladimir Ipatych. What a monstrosity! That scoundrel has hatched out snakes instead of chickens, understand, and they are reproducing at the same fantastic rate as frogs!"

"What's that?" Persikov exclaimed, his face turning ashen. "You're joking, Pyotr Stepanovich. How could he have?"

Ivanov could say nothing for a moment, then regained the power of speech and said, poking a finger into the open crate where tiny white heads lay shining in the yellow sawdust:

"That's how."

"Wha-a-at?" Persikov howled, as the

truth gradually dawned on him.

"You can be sure of it. They sent your order for snake and ostrich eggs to the state farm by mistake, and the chicken eggs to you."

"Good grief ... good grief," Persikov repeated, his face turning a greenish white as he sank down onto a stool.

Pankrat stood petrified by the door, pale and speechless. Ivanov jumped up, grabbed the newspaper and, pointing at the headline with a sharp nail, yelled into the Professor's ear:

"Now the fun's going to start alright! What will happen now, I simply can't imagine. Look here, Vladimir Ipatych." He yelled out the first passage to catch his eye on the crumpled newspaper: "The snakes are swarming in the direction of Mozhaisk ... laying vast numbers of eggs. Eggs have been discovered in Dukhovskiy District... Crocodiles and ostriches have appeared. Special armed units... and GPU detachments put an end to the panic in Vyazma by burning down stretches of forest outside the town and checking the reptiles' advance..."

With an ashen blotched face and demented eyes, Persikov rose from the

stool and began to gasp:

"An anaconda! A boa constrictor! Good grief!" Neither Ivanov nor Pankrat had ever seen him in such a state before.

The Professor tore off his tie, ripped the buttons off his shirt, turned a strange paralysed purple and staggered out with vacant glassy eyes. His howls echoed beneath the Institute's stone vaulting.

"Anaconda! Anaconda!" they rang.

"Go and catch the Professor!" Ivanov cried to Pankrat who was hopping up and down with terror on the spot. "Get him some water. He's had a fit."

CHAPTER XI

BLOODSHED AND DEATH

A frenzied electrical night blazed in Moscow. All the lights were burning, and the flats were full of lamps with the shades taken off. No one was asleep in the whole of Moscow with its population of four million, except for small children. In their apartments people ate and drank whatever came to hand, and the slightest cry brought fear-distorted faces to the windows on all floors to stare up at the night sky criss-crossed by searchlights. Now and then white lights flared up, casting pale melting cones over Moscow before they faded away. There was the constant low drone of aeroplanes. It was particularly frightening in Tverskaya-Yamskaya Street. Every ten minutes trains made up of goods vans, passenger carriages of different classes and even tank-trucks kept arriving at Alexandrovsky Station with fear-crazed folk clinging to them, and Tverskaya-Yamskaya was packed with people riding in buses and on

the roofs of trams, crushing one another and getting run over. Now and then came the anxious crack of shots being fired above the crowd at the station. That was the military detachments stopping panic-stricken demented people who were running along the railway track from Smolensk Province to Moscow. Now and then the glass in the station windows would fly out with a light frenzied sob and the steam engines start wailing. The streets were strewn with posters, which had been dropped and trampled on, while the same posters stared out from the walls under the hot red reflectors. Everyone knew what they said, and no one read them any more. They announced that Moscow was now under martial law. Panicking was forbidden on threat of severe punishment, and Red Army detachments armed with poison gas were already on their way to Smolensk Province. But the posters could not stop the howling night. In their apartments people dropped and broke dishes and vases, ran about banging into things, tied and untied bundles and cases in the vain hope of somehow getting to Kalanchevskaya Square and Yaroslavl or

Nikolayevsky Station. But, alas, all the stations to the north and east were surrounded by a dense cordon of infantry, and huge lorries, swaying and rattling their chains, piled high with boxes on top of which sat Red Army men in pointed helmets, bayonets at the ready, were evacuating gold bullion from the vaults of the People's Commissariat of Finances and large crates marked "Tretyakov Gallery. Handle with care!" Cars were roaring and racing all over Moscow.

Far away in the sky was the reflected glow of a fire, and the constant boom of cannons rocked the dense blackness of August.

Towards morning, a huge snake of cavalry, thousands strong, hooves clattering on the cobble-stones, wended its way up Tverskaya through sleepless Moscow, which had still not extinguished a single light. Everyone in its path huddled against entrances and shop-windows, knocking in panes of glass. The ends of crimson helmets dangled down grey backs, and pike tips pierced the sky. At the sight of these advancing columns cutting their way through the sea of madness, the frantic, wailing crowds of people seemed

to come to their senses. There were hopeful shouts from the thronged pavements.

"Hooray! Long live the cavalry!" shouted some frenzied women's voices.

"Hooray!" echoed some men.

"We'll be crushed to death!" someone wailed.

"Help!" came shouts from the pavement.

Packets of cigarettes, silver coins and watches flew into the columns from the pavements. Some women jumped out into the roadway, at great risk, and ran alongside the cavalry, clutching the stirrups and kissing them. Above the constant clatter of hooves rose occasional shouts from the platoon commanders:

"Rein in."

There was some rowdy, lewd singing and the faces in cocked crimson helmets stared from their horses in the flickering neon lights of advertisements. Now and then, behind the columns of open-faced cavalry, came weird figures, also on horseback, wearing strange masks with pipes that ran over their shoulders and cylinders strapped to their backs. Behind them crawled huge tank-trucks with long hoses like those on fire-engines. Heavy

tanks on caterpillar tracks, shut tight, with narrow shinning loopholes, rumbled along the roadway. The cavalry columns gave way to grey armoured cars with the same pipes sticking out and white skulls painted on the sides over the words "Volunteer-Chem. Poison gas".

"Let 'em have it, lads!" the crowds on the pavements shouted. "Kill the reptiles! Save Moscow!"

Cheerful curses rippled along the ranks. Packets of cigarettes whizzed through the lamp-lit night air, and white teeth grinned from the horses at the crazed people. A hoarse heartrending song spread through the ranks:

...No ace, nor queen, nor jack have we,
But we'll kill the reptiles sure as can be.
And blast them into eternity...

Loud bursts of cheering surged over the motley throng as the rumour spread that out in front on horseback, wearing the same crimson helmet as all the other horsemen, was the now grey-haired and elderly cavalry commander who had become a legend ten years ago. The crowd howled, and their hoorays floated up into the sky, bringing a little comfort to their desperate hearts.

The Institute was dimly lit. The events reached it only as isolated, confused and vague echoes. At one point some shots rang out under the neon clock by the Manege. Some marauders who had tried to loot a flat in Volkhonka were being shot on the spot. There was little traffic in the street here. It was all concentrated round the railway stations. In the Professor's room, where a single lamp burned dimly casting a circle of light on the desk, Persikov sat silently, head in hands. Streak of smoke hung around him. The ray in the chamber had been switched off. The frogs in the terrariums were silent, for they were already asleep. The Professor was not working or reading. At his side, under his left elbow, lay the evening edition of telegrams in the narrow column, which announced that Smolensk was in flames and artillery were bombarding the Mozhaisk forest section by section, destroying deposits of crocodile eggs in all the damp ravines. It also reported that a squadron of aeroplanes had carried out a highly successful operation near Vyazma, spraying almost the whole district with poison gas, but there were countless human losses in the area because instead

of leaving it in an orderly fashion, the population had panicked and made off in small groups to wherever the fancy took them. It also said that a certain Caucasian cavalry division on the way to Mozhaisk had won a brilliant victory against hordes of ostriches, killing the lot of them and destroying huge deposits of ostrich eggs. The division itself had suffered very few losses. There was a government announcement that if it should prove impossible to keep the reptiles outside the 120-mile zone around Moscow, the capital would be completely evacuated. Office- and factory-workers should remain calm. The government would take the strictest measures to avoid a repetition of the Smolensk situation, as a result of which, due to the pandemonium caused by a sudden attack from rattlesnakes numbering several thousands, the town had been set on fire in several places when people had abandoned burning stoves and begun a hopeless mass exodus. It also announced that Moscow's food supplies would last for at least six months and that a committee under the Commander-in-Chief was taking urgent measures to armour apartments against

attacks by reptiles in the streets of the capital, if the Red Army and aeroplanes did not succeed in halting their advance.

The Professor read none of this, but stared vacantly in front of him and smoked. Apart from him there were only two other people in the Institute, Pankrat and the house-keeper, Maria Stepanovna, who kept bursting into tears. This was her third sleepless night, which she was spending in the Professor's laboratory, because he flatly refused to leave his only remaining chamber, even though it had been switched off. Maria Stepanovna had taken refuge on the oilcloth-covered divan, in the shade in the corner, and maintained a grief-stricken silence, watching the kettle with the Professor's tea boil on the tripod of a Bunsen Burner. The Institute was quiet. It all happened very suddenly.

Some loud angry cries rang out in the street, making Maria Stepanovna jump up and scream. Lamps flashed outside, and Pankrat's voice was heard in the vestibule. The Professor misinterpreted this noise. He raised his head for a moment and muttered: "Listen to them raving... what can I do now?" Then he went into a trance again. But he was soon brought out of it.

There was a terrible pounding on the iron doors of the Institute in Herzen Street, and the walls trembled. Then a whole section of mirror cracked in the neighbouring room. A window pane in the Professor's laboratory was smashed as a grey cobble-stone flew through it, knocking over a glass table. The frogs woke up in the terrariums and began to croak. Maria Stepanovna rushed up to the Professor, clutched his arm and cried: "Run away, Vladimir Ipatych, run away!" The Professor got off the revolving chair, straightened up and crooked his finger, his eyes flashing for a moment with a sharpness which recalled the earlier inspired Persikov.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "It's quite ridiculous. They're rushing around like madmen. And if the whole of Moscow has gone crazy, where could I go? And please stop shouting. What's it got to do with me? Pankrat!" he cried, pressing the button.

He probably wanted Pankrat to stop all the fuss, which he had never liked. But Pankrat was no longer in a state to do anything. The pounding had ended with the Institute doors flying open and the

sound of distant gunfire. But then the whole stone building shook with a sudden stampede, shouts and breaking glass. Maria Stepanovna seized hold of Persikov's arms and tried to drag him away, but he shook her off, straightened himself up to his full height and went into the corridor, still wearing his white coat.

"Well?" he asked. The door burst open, and the first thing to appear on the threshold was the back of a soldier with a red long-service stripe and a star on his left sleeve. He was firing his revolver and retreating from the door, through which a furious crowd was surging. Then he turned and shouted at Persikov:

"Run for your life, Professor! I can't help you anymore."

His words were greeted by a scream from Maria Stepanovna. The soldier rushed past Persikov, who stood rooted to the spot like a white statue, and disappeared down the dark winding corridors at the other end. People rushed through the door, howling:

"Beat him! Kill him..."

"The villain!"

"You let the reptiles loose!"

The corridor was a swarming mass of

contorted faces and torn clothes. A shot rang out. Sticks were brandished. Persikov stepped back and half-closed the door of his room, where Maria Stepanovna was kneeling on the floor in terror, then stretched out his arms like one crucified. He did not want to let the crowd in and shouted angrily:

"It's positive madness. You're like wild animals. What do you want?" Then he yelled: "Get out of here!" and finished with the curt, familiar command: "Get rid of them, Pankrat."

But Pankrat could not get rid of anyone now. He was lying motionless in the vestibule, torn and trampled, with a smashed skull. More and more people swarmed past him, paying no attention to the police firing in the street.

A short man on crooked ape-like legs, in a tattered jacket and torn shirt-front all askew, leapt out of the crowd at Persikov and split the Professor's skull open with a terrible blow from his stick. Persikov staggered and collapsed slowly onto one side. His last words were:

"Pankrat. Pankrat."

The totally innocent Maria Stepanovna was killed and torn to pieces in the

Professor's room. They also smashed the chamber with the extinguished ray and the terrariums, after killing and trampling on the crazed frogs, then the glass tables and the reflectors. An hour later the Institute was in flames. Around lay corpses cordoned off by a column of soldiers armed with electric revolvers, while fire-engines sucked up water and sprayed it on all the windows through which long roaring tongues of flame were leaping.

CHAPTER XII

A FROSTY GOD EX MACHINA

On the night of 19th August, 1928, there was an unheard-of frost the likes of which no elderly folk could recall within living memory. It lasted forty-eight hours and reached eighteen degrees below. Panic-stricken Moscow closed all its doors and windows. Only towards the end of the third day did the public realise that the frost had saved the capital and the endless

expanses under its sway afflicted by the terrible disaster of 1928. The cavalry army by Mozhaisk, which had lost three-quarters of its men, was on its last legs, and the poison gas squads had been unable to halt the loathsome reptiles, who were advancing on Moscow in a semi-circle from the west, south-west and south.

They were killed off by the frost. The foul hordes could not survive two days of minus eighteen degrees centigrade, and come the last week of August, when the frost disappeared leaving only damp and wet behind it, moisture in the air and trees with leaves dead from the unexpected cold, there was nothing to fight. The catastrophe was over. The forests, fields and boundless marshes were still covered with coloured eggs, some bearing the strange pattern unfamiliar in these parts, which Feight, who had disappeared no one knew where, had taken to be muck, but these eggs were now completely harmless. They were dead, the embryos inside them had been killed.

For a long time afterwards these vast expanses were heavy with the rotting corpses of crocodiles and snakes brought

to life by the ray engendered in Herzen Street under a genius's eye, but they were no longer dangerous. These precarious creations of putrid tropical swamps perished in two days, leaving a terrible stench, putrefaction and decay over three provinces. There were epidemics and widespread diseases from the corpses of reptiles and people, and the army was kept busy for a long time, now supplied not with poison gas, but with engineering equipment, kerosene tanks and hoses to clean the ground. It completed this work by the spring of 1929.

And in the spring of 'twenty-nine Moscow began to dance, whirl and shimmer with lights again. Once more you could hear the old shuffling sound of the mechanical carriages, a crescent moon hung, as if by a thread, over the dome of Christ the Saviour, and on the site of the two-storey Institute which burnt down in August 'twenty-eight they built a new zoological palace, with Docent Ivanov in charge. But Persikov was no more. No more did people see the persuasive crooked finger thrust at them or hear the rasping croaking voice. The world went on talking and writing about the ray and the

catastrophe of '28 for a long time afterwards, but then the name of Professor Vladimir Ipatievich Persikov was enveloped in mist and extinguished, like the red ray discovered by him on that fateful April night. No one succeeded in producing this ray again, although that refined gentleman, Pyotr Stepanovich Ivanov, now a professor, occasionally tried. The first chamber was destroyed by the frenzied crowd on the night of Persikov's murder. The other three chambers were burnt on the Red Ray State Farm in Nikolskoye during the first battle of the aeroplanes with the reptiles, and it did not prove possible to reconstruct them. Simple though the combination of the lenses with the mirror-reflected light may have been, it could not be reproduced a second time, in spite of Ivanov's efforts. Evidently, in addition to mere knowledge it required something special, something possessed by one man alone in the whole world, the late Professor Vladimir Ipatievich Persikov.

THE HEART OF A DOG

1

Oo-oo-oo-woo-woo-woo-hoo-oo! Look at me, look, I'm dying. The wind under the archway howls at my departing, and I howl with it. I'm done for, done for. That villain in a cook's hat — the chef at the canteen of Normative Nourishment for the employees of the Central Council of the People's Economy — splashed boiling water at me and scalded my left side. Swine that he is, and him a proletarian. Oh, my God, how it hurts. That boiling water's seared me to the bone. And now I howl and howl, but what's the use of howling...

What harm did I ever do him? Surely I won't eat the Council of the People's Economy out of house and home just by poking around in the rubbish? The greedy, grudging beast! Just take a look at his face some time; it's wider than it's long. A thief

with a mug like copper. Ah, good people! It was midday he gave me the boiling water treatment and now it's dark, four o'clock in the afternoon or thereabouts, to judge by the smell of onion from the Prechistenka fire brigade. The firemen have buckwheat for supper, as you know. But that's the pits, as bad as mushrooms. Some dogs I know from Prechistenka, by the way, told me that in the restaurant Bar on Neglinny Alley the *plat-du-jour* is mushrooms in sauce-piquante at 3 roubles 75 kopecks per portion. An acquired taste — like licking galoshes. Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo...

My side hurts unbearably and my future prospects are only too clear; tomorrow I'll be all sores and what, I ask, am I to do about that? In summer you can sneak off to Sokolniki Park, there's a special kind of grass there, very good for you, and apart from that you can stuff yourself for free with salami-ends and lick your fill from the greasy paper folk scatter about. And if it wasn't for the cattawauler who stands on that round platform in the moonlight and sings *Beloved Aida* to turn your stomach it would be really first rate. But where can you go now? Have you been booted up the rump? You have. Have you had your ribs

dented by bricks? Often enough. I've had everything and I'm resigned to my fate and if I'm crying now it's only because I'm in pain and cold, but my spirit's not fizzled out altogether ... a dog's spirit dies hard.

This body of mine, though, it's all broken, all beaten, people have committed just about every outrage you can think of on it. The main thing is that when the boiling water hit me it ate through my coat and there's absolutely no protection for my left side. I may easily get pneumonia and once that happens, citizens, I'll die of hunger. The proper thing to do if you have pneumonia is to lie under the main stairway at the front entrance, but then who will go out scavenging for me, a bedridden bachelor? It'll get on my lung, I'll crawl about for a while on my stomach getting weaker and weaker, then any toff who happens along will finish me off with a stick. And those janitors with the badges on their chests will take me by the legs and fling me out on the rubbish cart...

Of all the proletariat janitors are the most vile filth. Human refuse of the basest sort. Chefs vary. Take Vlas — the late Vlas from Prechistenka Street. The lives he

saved! Because the most important thing when you are ill is to get hold of a bite to eat, and it could happen, or so the old dogs say, that Vlas would throw you a bone, and with 50 grammes of meat on it. God rest his soul for the real character that he was, a gentleman's cook from the establishment of the Counts Tolstoy, not from the Council of Normative Nourishment. The things they get up to there in Normative Nourishment — it's beyond the mind of dog to understand. They put putrid salt meat in the cabbage soup, you know, and those poor wretched customers of theirs know nothing about it. They come running, gobble it, lap it up.

There's one typist, for instance, gets a category 9 salary of 45 roubles and if you must know her lover gives her Persian thread stockings. But what she has to put up with for those stockings! He doesn't do it the normal way but subjects her to French-style lovemaking. Nasty bits of work, those Frenchmen, between you and me. Even if they do eat well, and everything with red wine. Yes ... that little typist comes running. You can't afford the Bar on 45 a month, you know. She hasn't even enough for the cinema and the

cinema is woman's one comfort in this life. She shudders, screws up her eyes, but she eats... And just think of it. Two courses for 40 kopecks and both courses aren't worth more than 15 as the other 25 kopecks have been syphoned off by the senior catering officer. And is that the sort of thing she should be eating? The top of her right lung isn't all that it should be, she has some female disease because of all that French business, they docked her wages at work and now they're feeding her rotten meat at the canteen, there she goes, there she goes ... running under the archway in her lover's stockings. Her legs are cold, there's draughts all around her stomach because she's got no more hair on it than I have and those panties of hers have no warmth in them, pure illusion, lace-trimmed. Tatters for the lover-boy. If she tried wearing flannel knickers he'd yell: "You're so inelegant. I'm sick of my Matryona, I'm fed up with flannel knickers, from now on things are going to go *my* way. Now I'm Chairman and however much I steal it all goes on the female body, on chocolates, on Crimean champagne. Because I did my stint in the hungry brigade when I was young, enough

is enough, and there is no life beyond the grave."

I'm sorry for her, very sorry! But not so sorry as I am for myself. I'm not being selfish, oh, no, but there really is no comparison. At least for her it's warm at home, but for me, for me... Where can I go? Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo!

"Pup-pup-pup! Sharik, hey, Sharik ... why are you howling, poor thing? Who's been unkind to you? Ooh!.."

That witch, the blizzard, rushed clanging into the gates and caught the young girl over the ear with her broom. It whirled up her brief skirt to show her knees in their cream-coloured stockings and a narrow strip of ill-washed, lacy underclothes, swept away her words and powdered the dog with dry snow.

Good Lord ... what weather... Ooh ... and what a pain in the stomach. It's the salt meat, the salt meat! And when will all this end?

Lowering her head, the girl went over to the offensive and battled her way out through the gates. Once in the open street she was whirled around and around, thrown this way and that, sent spinning in snow-spiral — and vanished.

But the dog remained under the archway and, in pain from his mutilated side, pressed up against the cold wall, scarcely breathing and firmly resolved not to move from this place but to die where he lay, under the entrance-arch. Despair had brought him low. He felt so miserable and bitter, so lonely and afraid, that small canine teardrops like white spots welled from his eyes and dried without falling. His disfigured side was all cavernous hollows and frozen lumps, between which showed the ugly red patches of scalded skin. How unthinking are chefs, how dull-witted and cruel. "Sharik," she had called him... Like hell he was a "Sharik". A Sharik is something round and well-nourished, stupid, eats porridge, the son of distinguished parents, whereas he was shaggy, lank and tattered, a skinny vagrant, a homeless cur. Still, thanks for the kind words.

The door leading into the brightly-lit shop across the road banged and from it there emerged a citizen. A citizen, note, and not a comrade — or even, to be still more precise, a gentleman. The nearer he came the more clearly was this to be seen: a gentleman. You think I judge by the

coat? Nonsense. Many people, even from the proletariat, wear overcoats nowadays. True, the collars aren't what they were, there's no getting away from that, but still it's quite possible to confuse them at a distance. It's by the eyes you can tell — from afar and close up. Oh, eyes are very important. Something like a barometer. You can see everything — who has a great drought in his soul, who is likely to put the toe of his boot to your ribs for no good reason, who is himself afraid of everyone and everything. It's the ankles of the last type one really enjoys taking a snap at. You're afraid — take that. If you're afraid — you deserve ... gr-r-r ... gruff ... wuff...

The gentleman walked confidently straight through the pillar of snow whipped up by the blizzard and advanced upon the archway. Yes, yes, it was quite clear the sort of man he was. You wouldn't catch him eating rotten salt meat, and if anyone should happen to serve him such a thing he would make a real fuss, write to the newspapers: I, Philip Philipovich, have been served indigestible food.

There he came, nearer and nearer. That was a man who ate well and did not have to steal, a man who would not kick you but

would not be afraid either, and would not be afraid because he always had enough to eat. He was a gentleman who earned his living by intellectual work; he had a pointed French beard and a grey, downy, dashing moustache such as the French knights of old used to have, but the smell wafting from him on the blizzard was a bad smell: hospitals. And cigars.

What ill wind, one wondered, was blowing him into the Cooperative of the People's Economy? Here he is, right here... What's he after? Oo-oo-oo-oo... What could he have bought in that rotten little shop? Weren't the posh Okhotny Ryad shops ⁽¹⁾ enough for him? What was that? Sa-la-mi. Sir, if you had only seen what that salami is made of you would not have gone near that shop! Give it to me.

The dog made one last effort and, in his madness, crawled out from the archway onto the pavement. The stormwind went off like a gun above his head, flapping the huge lettering on a canvas sign. "Is it possible to restore youth?"

Of course it was possible. The smell restored mine, got me up from my belly, the smell that sent hot waves to contract a stomach empty for the last forty-eight

hours, the smell that overpowered the stink of hospital, the blissful smell of chopped horse-meat, garlic and pepper. I feel it, I know it — in the left pocket of his fur coat there is a stick of salami. He is above me now. Oh, my sovereign! Look down upon me. I perish. What slavish souls we have, what an ignoble lot is ours!

The dog crept on like a serpent on his stomach, tears raining from his eyes. Take note of what that chef did to me. But of course it will never enter your head to give it to me. Okh, I know very well what rich people are like. But when you come to think of it — what good is it to you? What do you want with a bit of putrid horse? Poison like that's not to be gotten ... from any place but Mosselprom ⁽²⁾. And you surely breakfasted today, you who are a great man of world importance all thanks to the glands in the male sexual organ. Oo-oo-oo-oo... Whatever is happening to the world? It would seem it's early days yet to die and that despair really is a sin. Lick his hands, what else can I do.

The mysterious gentleman bent over the dog and, the golden frames of his eyes flashing, pulled from his right-hand pocket a long, white packet. Without removing his

brown gloves, he undid the paper, which was immediately seized by the blizzard, and broke off a piece of the salami, known as "Cracow special". And gave that piece to the dog. Oh, generous personage! Oo-oo-oo!

"Phew-phew," the gentleman whistled and added sternly, "Take! Sharik, Sharik!"

Sharik again. What a name to give me, still, call me what you will ... for such a unique act of kindness.

The dog ripped through the skin instantaneously and with a gasp sunk his teeth into the Cracow delicacy and downed it before you could count up to two. He choked on salami and snow to the point of tears, almost swallowing the string in his avidity. I am ready to lick your hand again and again. I kiss the hem of your trousers, my benefactor!

"That'll do for now..." the gentleman spoke abruptly, in a tone of command. He bent over Sharik, looked searchingly into the dog's eyes and unexpectedly passed his gloved hand over Sharik's stomach in an intimate, caressing gesture.

"Aha," he pronounced significantly. "No collar, splendid, just what I need. Come

with me," he snapped his fingers. "Phew-phew!"

Come with you? To the end of the world! You can kick me with those felt half-boots and I'll never say a word.

All along Prechistenka the street-lights were shining. The scalded flank hurt unbearably but Sharik sometimes even forgot about it, possessed by one single thought: how not to lose the wondrous apparition in the fur coat in the bustle and how best to express his love and devotion to it. Seven or more times on the way along Prechistenka to Obukhov Alley he did express it. He kissed his boot. Then, at the corner of Myortvy Alley, where the crowd got in their way, he set up such a wild howling that he frightened a lady into sitting on a rubbish bin, after which he once or twice emitted a small whimper to sustain the compassionate attitude.

A villainous stray cat masquerading as a Siberian sprang out from behind a drainpipe, having caught a whiff of the salami. The world went dark for Sharik at the thought that the rich eccentric with a penchant for collecting wounded dogs in gateways might equally well string this thief along with him, and that then he

would have to share the delicacy from Mosselprom. For this reason he gnashed his teeth at the cat to such effect that it shinned up the drainpipe as far as the third floor, hissing like a leaking hose. Fr-r-r... Wuff! Be off! The whole of Mosselprom can't provide enough to feed all the tramps on Prechistenka.

The gentleman appreciated this show of devotion and, just by the fire station, beneath a window from which issued the pleasant murmuring of a clarinet, he rewarded the dog with another piece, not quite so big this time.

Funny fellow! Luring me on. Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere. I'll follow you wherever you say.

"Phew-phew-phew! Here! Here!"

Down Obukhov? With pleasure. We are very well acquainted with this alley.

Phew-phew! Here? With pleas... Oh, no, you don't! No. There's a uniformed porter at the door. And there's nothing worse than that in the whole world. Many times more dangerous than a janitor. An altogether loathsome breed. More repulsive even than cats.

"Don't be afraid, come on."

"Good day, Philip Philipovich."

"Good day, Fyodor."

Now that is a Somebody. My God, who have you landed me onto, me and my dog's life. What kind of a Somebody is this who can lead dogs from the street past a porter into a block of cooperative flats? Just look at him, the creep — not a word, not a movement! True — his eyes are a bit threatening, but on the whole he's indifferent under that cap with the gold braid. Just as if it were all in the nature of things. He's full of respect, gentlemen, and such respect! All right then, I am with him and following him. See? Put *that* in your pipe and smoke it. It would be good to take a snap at that proletarian horny foot. For all the times the likes of you have tormented me. How many times have you made a mess of my muzzle with your broom, eh?

"Here. Here."

We understand, we understand, pray do not worry. Where you go, we will follow. Just lead the way and I'll keep up somehow, in spite of my injured flank.

Down from the stairway:

"No letters for me, Fyodor?"

Respectfully, from below stairs: "No, Sir, no, Philip Philipovich." (Confidentially in a soft voice after him.) "There're new residents — comrades from the house management committee been put into Flat Three."

The distinguished benefactor of stray curs spun round on the stair and, leaning out over the banister, inquired on a note of horror:

"Well?"

His eyes grew round and his moustache bristled.

The porter below threw back his head, raised his palm to his mouth and confirmed:

"Yes, indeed, Sir, four of them, no less."

"Good God! I can imagine what will happen to the flat now. What are they doing there?"

"Nothing special, Sir."

"And Fyodor Pavlovich?"

"Gone to get screens and bricks. Going to make partitions."

"I don't know what the world's coming to!"

"They're going to put people in all the flats except for yours, Philip Philipovich. There's just been a meeting. They've

elected a new committee and thrown out the old one."

"The things that go on. Dear me, dear me... Phew! Phew!"

I'm coming as quick as I can. My flank is so sore, you see. Permit me to lick your boot.

The porter's gold braid disappeared below us. There was a draft of warm air from the central heating on the marble landing, we took one more turn and there we were on the landing of the first floor.

2

There is absolutely no call to learn to read when one can smell meat a mile off. Nevertheless, if you happen to live in Moscow and you have any brains at all, you are bound to pick up your letters, even without any particular instruction. Of the forty thousand dogs in Moscow there can only be the odd idiot who doesn't know the letters for "salami".

Sharik had begun to learn by colours. When he was only just four months old they hung out blue-green signs all over

Moscow bearing the legend MSPO — the meat trade. As we said before, all that was quite unnecessary because you can smell meat anyway. It even led to some confusion when Sharik, whose sense of smell had been disorientated by the stink of petrol from a passing car, took his cue from the caustic blue-green colour and made a raid on Golubizner Bros, electric goods shop. There at the brothers' shop the dog made the acquaintance of isolated electric cable, something to be reckoned with even more seriously than a cabby's horse-whip. That occasion should be considered the beginning of Sharik's education. Already out on the pavement it occurred to Sharik that "blue" did not necessarily mean "meat" and, tail tucked between his legs, he recalled, howling from the burning pain, that at all butchers' signs the first letter on the left was a golden or reddish curlicue shaped something like a sleigh.

As time went on he improved his knowledge still more. "A" he learned from the legend "Glavryba" on the corner of Mokhovaya Street and, after that, from the same source, "B" — it was easier for him to sneak up from the tail of the word

ryba (fish) because there was a militiaman on duty at its head.

Square tiles on the corners of houses in Moscow always, unfailingly meant "Cheese". The black samovar-tap at the head of the next word stood for the ex-owner of a chain of cheese shops whose name was Chichkin, for mountains of red Dutch cheese and ferocious shop assistants, the brutes, dog-haters to a man, and sawdust on the floor and that repulsive, evil smelling cheese...

If there was someone playing the harmonica, which was really not much better than *Beloved Aida*, and at the same time there was a smell of sausages, then the first letters on the white hoardings could be comfortably deciphered as "impro" which meant "improper language and tipping are strictly forbidden". In such places fights would suddenly boil up like whirlpools and people would hit each other in the face with their fists, though to be honest this did not happen often, whereas dogs were always catching it either from napkins or boots.

If slightly off hams or tangerines were on show in the window, the letters read gr-gr-ro-ocers. If there were dark bottles with

a nasty liquid content... Wer-wi-ner-er-wine... Eliseyev Bros., ex-owners. ⁽³⁾

The unknown gentleman who had enticed the dog to the door of his luxurious first floor flat rang the bell, and the dog immediately raised his eyes to the large black card with gold lettering hanging to one side of the wide door panelled with rosy, ribbed glass. The first three letters he made out straightaway: "P-r-o — Pro". But after that came a paunchy two-sided trashy sort of a letter which might mean anything: surely not "Pro-letariat"? thought Sharik with surprise...

"Impossible!" He raised his nose, took another sniff at the fur coat and thought with conviction: No, not so much as a whiff of the proletariat. A learned word and God knows what it means.

Unexpectedly, a cheerful light came on behind the pink glass, showing up the black card even more vividly. The door opened without a sound and a pretty young woman in a white apron and a lace cap materialised before the dog and his master. The former was conscious of a divine wave of warmth and from the

woman's skirt there wafted a scent like lily-of-the-valley.

This is life, thought the dog, I really fancy this.

"Do us the honour, Mister Sharik," the gentleman ironically ushered him over the threshold, and Sharik reverently did him the honour, wagging his tail.

The rich entrance hall was full of things. A full-length mirror impressed itself on the dog's memory with an immediate reflection of a second shaggy, ragged Sharik. There were a terrifying pair of antlers high up on the wall, endless fur coats and galoshes and an opalescent tulip with electricity hanging from the ceiling.

"Where *did* you find such a creature, Philip Philipovich?" asked the woman, smiling and helping him take off the heavy coat with its silver-fox lining. "Good heavens! He's covered in mange!"

"Nonsense. Where do you see mange?" demanded the gentleman with abrupt severity.

Having taken off his coat he turned out to be dressed in a black suit of English cloth and a golden chain glistened joyfully but not too brightly across his stomach.

"Wait now, don't wiggle, phew ... don't wiggle, stupid. Hm!.. That's not mange ... stand still, you devil!.. Hm! Aha. It's a burn. What villain scalded you, eh? Stand *still*, will you?.."

"That jail-bird of a chef, the chef!" the dog pronounced with pathetic eyes and whimpered.

"Zina," the gentleman ordered. "Into the consulting room with him this instant and bring me my smock."

The woman whistled and snapped her fingers and, after a moment's doubt, the dog followed her. Together they proceeded along a narrow, dimly-lit corridor, passed one varnished door, went on to the end and then turned left into a dark cupboard of a room to which the dog took an instant dislike because of the ominous smell. The darkness clicked and was transformed into blinding day; sparkling, shining white lights beaming in at him from every side.

Oh no, you don't, the dog howled inwardly. Thanks very much, but I'm not putting up with this. Now I understand, may the devil take you and your salami. You've brought me to a dog's hospital and now you'll pour castor oil down me and

chop up that flank of mine which is too sore to be touched with your knives!

"Hey, where are you off to?" cried the woman called Zina.

The dog twisted away from her, gathered himself together and suddenly struck the door with his good side so violently that the thud could be heard all over the flat. He rebounded and began to spin round and round on the spot like a whipped top, overturning a white basket with chunks of cotton wool. As he spun the walls revolved around him with their glass cupboards full of shiny instruments and he kept getting glimpses of a white apron and a distorted woman's face.

"Where are you going, you shaggy devil?" yelled Zina in desperation. "You hellhound, you!"

Where's the back stairs? wondered the dog. He rolled himself up into a ball and dashed himself against the glass in the hope that this might be a second door. A cloud of splinters flew out, clattering and tinkling, a fat jar leapt out at him full of nasty red stuff which immediately spilt all over the floor, stinking. The real door opened.

"Stop, you b-brute!" shouted the gentleman struggling into his smock which was half on, half off and seizing the dog by the leg. "Zina, get him by the scruff, the blighter."

"H-heavens alive, what a dog!"

The door opened wider still and in burst another person of male gender in a smock. Crushing the broken glass underfoot, he made a dive not for the dog but for the cupboard, opened it, and immediately the room was filled with a sweet, sickly smell. Then this person flung himself on the dog from above, stomach first, and Sharik enthusiastically sunk his teeth into his leg just above the shoe laces. The person grunted but did not lose his head. The sickly liquid set the dog gasping for breath, his head spun and his legs gave way and he keeled over sideways. Thank you, it's the end of my troubles, he thought dreamily as he collapsed onto sharp fragments of glass. This is it. Farewell, Moscow! I'll never see Chichkin again, nor the proletarians, nor Cracow salami. I'm on my way to heaven for the dog's life I bore with such patience. Brothers, murderers, why did you do this to me?

And with that he finally keeled over on his side and breathed his last.

*

When life returned, his head was still spinning gently, he felt slightly sick and it was as though he had no sore side, it had sunk into sweet oblivion. The dog opened a sleepy right eye and out of the corner of it perceived that he was tightly bandaged round the side and stomach.

So they did me after all, the sons of bitches, he thought vaguely. But they made a good job of it, I'll say that for them.

"From Seville to Granada ... in the still of the night," an absent-minded, out-of-tune voice struck up from above.

The dog opened both eyes in surprise and saw at two paces a male leg on a white stool. The trouser-leg and longjohns were rolled up and the bare shin was marred by dried blood and iodine.

Saints alive! thought the dog, that must be where I took a bite out of him. My work. Well, that'll mean a beating!

"*You can hear the serenada and the clash of steel so bright!* Why did you have to go and bite the doctor, you tramp? Eh? Why did you break the glass? Ah?"

"Oo-oo-oo," howled the dog pathetically.

"Ah, never mind! You've come to, so just lie there, stupid."

"How ever did you manage to lure such a nervous dog, Philip Philipovich?" asked a pleasant man's voice and the longjohns of knitted fabric descended. There was a smell of tobacco and a clink of glass phials in the cupboard.

"By kindness. The only way to deal with a living being. You'll never do anything with an animal by terror, at whatever stage of development. I have always said so, I do say so and I shall continue to say so. They are quite wrong to think that terror will help them. No, Sir, no, indeed, it won't help at all — be it white, red or even brown! Terror has a totally paralysing effect on the nervous system. Zina! I bought that good-for-nothing a piece of Cracow salami for one rouble forty kopecks. Be so good as to feed him once he stops being sick."

There was a crunching sound of glass being swept away and a woman's voice observed flirtatiously:

"Cracow salami! Gracious, the best he deserves is bits from the butcher's at twenty kopecks. I wouldn't mind the Cracow salami myself."

"Just you try. I won't have it! Poison to the human stomach, that's what it is. You a grown-up girl and you go putting all sorts of nasty things in your mouth like a child. Don't you dare! I warn you, neither I nor Doctor Bormental will have any sympathy if you get stomach-ache... *All who claim that another can with thy loveliness compare...*"

A gentle tinkling ringing sound went echoing through the entire flat and from far away in the hall came the spasmodic murmur of voices. The telephone rang. Zina disappeared.

Philip Philipovich tossed the stub of his cigarette into the bucket, buttoned up his smock before the mirror on the wall, straightened his downy moustache and called the dog:

"Phew! Phew! It's all right, now, it's all right. We'll go to reception."

The dog heaved himself up on uncertain legs but quickly recovered and set off in pursuit of the billowing hem of Philip Philipovich's smock. Again he traversed the narrow corridor but noticed this time that it was brightly lit by a ceiling lamp. When the varnished door opened he entered Philip Philipovich's study and was quite overcome by the decor. First and foremost it all blazed with light: a light burning from the moulded ceiling, another on the table, others on the wall and reflected from the glass cupboards. The light poured out over a mass of objects of which the most intriguing was a huge owl sitting on a leafless bough on the wall.

"Lie down," ordered Philip Philipovich.

The carved door opposite opened to admit the man he had bitten who could now, in the bright light, be seen to be very handsome, young, with a pointed beard. The man handed over a sheet of paper and pronounced:

"An old patient..."

Thereupon he vanished soundlessly and Philip Philipovich, spreading out the hem of his smock, took his place behind the vast writing-table and immediately

assumed an air of the utmost dignity and importance.

No, it's not a hospital, I've landed up in some other place, thought the dog in some confusion and lay down on the patterned carpet by the leather sofa. We'll look into that owl later...

The door opened softly and in came a man who made such an impression on the dog that he gave a small bark, albeit very timidly...

"Quiet! Gracious me, you've changed beyond all recognition, my good man."

The man coming in bowed with respect and some embarrassment.

"He-he! You are a magician and a wonder-worker, Professor," he uttered shyly.

"Take off your trousers," Philip Philipovich commanded and got up.

Good Lord, thought the dog, what a creep!

On the creep's head grew tufts of completely green hair but at the nape of the neck there was a rusty, tobacco-coloured gleam to them. The creep's face was covered with wrinkles, but the complexion was pale pink, like a baby's. The left leg was stiff, he had to drag it

behind him across the carpet, but to make up for it the right leg jerked rhythmically. On the lapel of his splendid jacket a precious stone bulged like an eye.

The dog was so interested he no longer felt sick.

"Wuff-wuff!" he barked softly.

"Quiet! How do you sleep, my dear fellow?"

"He-he. Are we alone, Professor? It is beyond words," the visitor launched out bashfully. "*Parole d'honneur* — it's 25 years since anything of the sort," the type began undoing his trouser buttons, "would you believe it, Professor, every night — naked girls, swarms of them. I am quite enchanted. You are a conjuror."

"Hm," Philip Philipovich smiled absently as he examined the pupils of his visitor's eyes.

The latter had at last managed to undo his buttons and took off his striped trousers. Beneath them were the most extraordinary underpants. They were cream-coloured with black cats embroidered all over them and smelt of perfume.

The dog could not restrain himself at the sight of the cats and let out such a wuff that the guest jumped.

"Oh, dear!"

"I'll thrash you! Don't be afraid, he doesn't bite."

I don't bite? — the dog was taken aback.

From the pocket of his trousers the visitor dropped a small envelope on which there was a picture of a beautiful girl with flowing hair. The type gave a little skip, bent down and picked it up, blushing deeply.

"You be careful, though," warned Philip Philipovich shaking his finger. "Be careful, all the same, don't overdo it."

"I don't over..." the type muttered in embarrassment. "It was just an experiment, dear Professor."

"Well, and what happened? What was the result?" inquired Philip Philipovich severely.

The type gestured ecstatically.

"Twenty-five years, as God is my witness, Professor, there's been nothing of the sort. The last time was in 1899 in Paris on the Rue de la Paix."

"And why have you gone green?"

The guest's face grew overcast.

"That accursed Zhirkost! [*Cosmetics factory.— Ed.*] You can't imagine, Professor, what those good-for-nothings palmed me off with in the guise of hair-dye. Just look," muttered the individual, peering round for a mirror.

"I'd like to smash their faces in!" he added, waxing more and more indignant. "What am I to do now, Professor?" he demanded tearfully.

"Hm, shave your head."

"Professor," the visitor exclaimed pitifully, "it will grow grey again! Apart from which I won't dare show my face at work, as it is, this is the third day I've kept away. Ah, Professor, if only you could discover a way to restore youth to the hair."

"Not all at once, not all at once, my dear fellow," murmured Philip Philipovich.

Bending over the patient, eyes shining, he examined his naked stomach:

"Well now, that's splendid, everything is just as it should be. To tell the truth I had scarcely expected such a result. *Streams of blood, and songs galore...* You may get dressed, dear Sir."

"*And to the one who's most enchanting!*" the patient joined in in a

voice as rattly as an old frying pan and, beaming, began to get back into his clothes. Having tidied himself up, skipping and exhaling perfume, he paid out a packet of white banknotes to Philip Philipovich, caught him by both hands and pressed them tenderly.

"You need not come for another check-up for two weeks," said Philip Philipovich, "but nevertheless I must ask you to be careful."

"Professor!" his voice sounded ecstatically from behind the door. "You may rest assured..." With a last delighted titter, he vanished.

The tinkling bell echoed through the flat, the varnished door opened and the bitten man handed Philip Philipovich a piece of paper and announced:

"The age is not filled in correctly. Probably between 54 and 55. Cardiac sounds are rather muffled."

He disappeared only to be replaced by a rustling lady in a dashingy angled hat and with a sparkling necklace on her flabby, creased neck. There were terrible black bags under her eyes and the cheeks were red like a doll's. She was very ill at ease.

"Madam! How old are you?" Philip Philipovich inquired sternly.

The lady took fright and even grew pale under the layer of rouge.

"Professor, I swear to you, if you only knew what I am going through!"

"Your *age*, Madam?" insisted Philip Philipovich more sternly still.

"On my honour ... well, forty-five..."

"Madam," Philip Philipovich raised his voice, "there are people waiting for me. Don't waste my time, if you please, you are not the only one!"

The lady's breast heaved with emotion.

"I will tell you and you only, as a luminary of science. But I swear to you, it is so appalling..."

"How old are you?" Philip Philipovich demanded in a furious falsetto, and his spectacles flashed.

"Fifty-one!" writhing with terror, replied the lady.

"Take off your knickers, Madam," ordered Philip Philipovich with relief and pointed to a high white scaffold in the corner.

"I swear, Professor," murmured the lady, undoing some kind of press-studs on her

belt with trembling fingers. "That Morris... I confess to you, honestly..."

"*From Seville to Granada,*" Philip Philipovich struck up absent-mindedly and pressed a pedal of the marble washstand.

There was a sound of running water.

"I swear to God!" said the lady, and spots of real colour broke through the artificial ones on her cheeks. "I know this is my last passion. But he's such a bad man! Oh, Professor! He cheats at cards, all Moscow knows it. He can't resist a single disgusting little salesgirl. He is so devilish young," the lady muttered, casting out a screwed up tangle of lace from beneath her rustling petticoats.

The dog's vision blurred and he felt quite giddy.

To hell with you, he thought dimly, laying his head on his paws and dozing off for shame. I shan't even try to understand what it's all about — I won't understand anyway.

He awoke from the sound of tinkling to see Philip Philipovich throwing some glittering tubes into basin.

The spotted lady, hands clasped to her breast, was looking expectantly at Philip Philipovich. The latter, frowning

importantly, sat down at his desk and wrote something down.

"I will graft you the ovaries of a monkey, Madam," he announced and gave her a minatory glance.

"Oh, Professor, not a monkey, surely?"

"Yes," answered Philip Philipovich inexorably.

"When is the operation?" the lady asked in a weak voice, turning pale.

"*From Seville to Granada...* Hm ... on Monday. You will go into the clinic that morning. My assistant will prepare you."

"Oh, I don't want to go to the clinic. Could I not have it done here, Professor?"

"You must understand I only do operations here if there are very special circumstances. It will be very expensive — 500 roubles."

"I agree, Professor."

Again there was the sound of running water, the feathered hat dipped briefly, then there appeared a bald pate gleaming like china and embraced Philip Philipovich. The dog dozed off again, he no longer felt sick, he was luxuriating in the absence of pain in his flank and the warmth and even gave a little snore and dreamt a fragment of an agreeable dream

in which he managed to pull a whole bunch of feathers from the tale of that owl ... then an excited voice sounded directly above his head.

"I am too well known in Moscow, Professor. What am I to do?"

"Gentlemen!" cried Philip Philipovich with indignation. "This is impossible. You must control yourselves. How old is she?"

"Fourteen, Professor ... you understand, it will be the end of me if this comes out. In a day or two I should be going abroad on a business trip."

"But I am not a lawyer, dear Sir... Well, wait a couple of years, then marry her."

"I *am* married, Professor."

"Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen!"

Doors opened, one face succeeded another, the instruments rattled in the cupboard and Philip Philipovich worked on without a break.

What a brothel of a flat, thought the dog, but what comfort! What the hell did he need me for, though? Will he let me live here? What an eccentric! He could have a breathtaking dog at the drop of a hat, anything he wanted. But there, perhaps I am good-looking. My luck, when you come

to think of it! But that owl is trash... Cheeky.

The dog eventually came to late that evening when the bell had ceased tinkling and at the precise moment when the door opened to admit some special visitors. There were four of them all at once. All young men and all very modestly dressed.

What are those ones after? thought the dog in some surprise. Philip Philipovich met the guests with considerable hostility. He stood behind his desk and surveyed the intruders as a general the foe. The nostrils of his hawk-like nose expanded. The newcomers shifted from foot to foot.

"We have come to see you, Professor," said one whose shock of thick, dark hair rose at least six inches above his head, "on a matter of business..."

"You, my good sirs, are most unwise to be going around without galoshes in weather like this," Philip Philipovich interrupted him reprovngly. "In the first place, you will catch cold and, in the second, you have left dirty footprints all over my carpets, and all my carpets are Persian."

The one with a shock of hair was struck dumb and all four of them gazed at Philip

Philipovich in amazement. The silence lasted for several seconds, only broken by the tap-tapping of Philip Philipovich's fingers on the painted wooden plate on his desk.

"In the first place, we're not gentlemen," pronounced the most youthful of the four who had peach-like complexion and was wearing a leather jacket.

"In the first place," Philip Philipovich interrupted him, "are you a man or a woman?"

The four of them again fell silent and their mouths fell open. This time the first to rally was the one with the shock of hair.

"What difference does that make, comrade?" he inquired proudly.

"I am a woman," admitted the youth with the peach-like complexion and blushed brightly. After him one of the other newcomers, a blonde in a high fur hat, for some reason best known to himself, blushed a deep red.

"In that case you may keep your cap on but I would request you, good sirs, to take off your hats," pronounced Philip Philipovich quellingly.

"Don't sir me," said the blonde, taking off his hat.

"We came to you," the one with the shock of hair began again.

"First and foremost, who are *we*?"

"We are the new house management committee for this block," said the black-haired fellow with controlled fury. "I am Shvonder, she is Vyazemskaya, he is Comrade Pestrukhin and that's Zharovkin. And now we..."

"It was you they settled into Fyodor Pavlovich Sablin's flat?"

"Us," replied Shvonder.

"Ah, God, how is the house of Kalabukhov fallen!" the Professor cried out, flinging wide his hands in despair.

"Are you joking, Professor?" Shvonder asked indignantly.

"It's no joking matter!" cried the Professor, then, in despair. "Whatever will happen to the central heating?"

"Are you making fun of us, Professor Preobrazhensky?"

"What is your business with me? Tell me and make it brief. I am about to go and dine."

"We, the house committee," Shvonder began with hatred, "have come to you after a general meeting of the inhabitants

of our block at which the question of reallocation of living space stood..."

"Who stood on who?" Philip Philipovich raised his voice. "Be so good as to express yourself more clearly."

"The question of the reallocation of living space stood on the agenda."

"Enough! I understand! You know that according to the resolution of 12 August of this year my flat is excepted from any and every reallocation and resettlement?"

"We know that," replied Shvonder. "But the general meeting, after due consideration of the question, came to the conclusion that, by and large, you occupy too much space. Much too much. You live alone in seven rooms."

"I live alone and *work* in seven rooms," replied Philip Philipovich, "and I should very much like an eighth. It is quite essential to house my books."

The four were lost for words.

"An eighth room! O-ho-ho," said the blonde, stripping off his hat. "That's cool."

"That's indescribable!" exclaimed the youth who had turned out to be a woman.

"I have a reception room and note that it serves also as a library, a dining room, a study — 3. A consulting room for the

examination of patients — 4. An operation theatre — 5. My bedroom — 6 and the maid's room — 7. On the whole — it's not enough. My flat is exempt and that is all there is to it. May I go and dine?"

"Excuse me," said the fourth who looked like a sturdy beetle.

"Excuse me," Shvonder interrupted him. "It is precisely about the consulting room and the dining room that we are here. Our general meeting requests you voluntarily, in the interest of labour discipline, to give up your dining room. Nobody in Moscow has a dining room."

"Not even Isadora Duncan," the woman affirmed in ringing tones.

Something came over Philip Philipovich as a result of which his face became a delicate crimson and he did not pronounce another word, waiting for further developments.

"And also that you should give up the consulting room," continued Shvonder. "Your study can double perfectly well as a consulting room."

"I see," Philip Philipovich murmured in a curious voice. "And where am I supposed to partake of food?"

"In the bedroom," all four replied in chorus.

Philip Philipovich's crimson flush took on a tinge of grey.

"To partake of food in the bedroom," he began in slightly muffled voice, "to read in the consulting room, to get dressed in the reception room, to perform operations in the maid's room and to examine people in the dining room. I can well believe that Isadora Duncan does so. Possibly she has dinner in the study and dissects rabbits in the bathroom. But I am not Isadora Duncan!" he roared suddenly, and the crimson turned yellow. "I will continue to dine in the dining room and operate in the operating theatre. Pray inform the general meeting of this and I would humbly request you to get back to your own business and leave me to go on partaking of my meals where all normal people do so, that is in the dining room and not in the hall and not in the nursery."

"In that case, Professor, in view of your stubborn resistance, we shall complain of you to higher authorities."

"Aha," said Philip Philipovich. "Is that so?" and his voice took on a suspiciously

courteous tone. "May I ask you to wait just one moment?"

What a fellow, the dog thought with enthusiasm. Just like me. Oh, he'll bite in a moment, how he'll bite. I don't know how yet, in what way, but he'll bite all right. At 'em! I could take that one with the bulging leg just above his boot in the tendons behind the knee ... gr-r-r..."

Philip Philipovich tapped the telephone, took off the receiver and spoke into it as follows:

"Please ... yes ... thank you ... give me Pyotr Alexandrovich, if you please. Professor Preobrazhensky. Pyotr Alexandrovich? So glad that I found you. Thank you, quite well. Pyotr Alexandrovich, your operation will have to be postponed. What? Indefinitely, I'm afraid, just like all the other operations. This is why. I am giving up my practice in Moscow, in Russia in general... Four people have just come in to see me, one of them a woman dressed as a man, two armed with revolvers, and are terrorising me in my own flat with the idea of taking part of it from me."

"Professor, what are you saying?" began Shvonder, his face changing.

"Pray hold me excused. I cannot bring myself to repeat everything they said. I have no taste for nonsense. Suffice it to say that they proposed that I should renounce my consulting room or in other words should perform operations in a room hitherto devoted to the dissection of rabbits. In such conditions it is not only that I cannot work, I have no right to do so. And so I shall cease my activities, close down the flat and leave for Sochi. I can leave the keys with Shvonder. Let him take over the operations."

The four stood rooted to the spot. The snow melted on their boots.

"Well, what can one do... I'm very distressed myself..."

How? Oh, no, Pyotr Alexandrovich! Oh, no. I can't go on like this. My patience is at an end. This is already the second attempt since August. How? Hm... As you wish. At the least. But on one condition. I don't mind who, or where or what, but it must be the kind of paper the existence of which would keep Shvonder or whoever from even approaching the door of my flat. A paper to end all papers! Factual! Genuine! A warrant. There should be no mention of my name, even. An end to all

this. As far as they are concerned I am dead. Yes, yes. Please. Who by? Well, that's another matter. Aha... Good. I'll give him the telephone. Be so kind," Philip Philipovich hissed at Shvonder. "They want a word with you."

"But, Professor," said Shvonder, now flushing, now turning pale, "you twisted our words."

"I must ask you not to use such expressions."

At a loss, Shvonder took the receiver and said: "Hullo. Yes... Chairman of the house committee. We were acting in accordance with the rules. The Professor has quite exceptional privileges anyway... We know about his work ... we intended to leave him no less than five rooms... Well, all right ... if that's the case ... all right..."

Red-faced, he hung up and turned round.

Ran rings round them! What a fellow! thought the dog with the utmost enthusiasm. Is it some special word he knows, I wonder? Now you can beat me black and blue if you like but I'm not leaving this place.

The three, mouths open, gaped at the humiliated Shvonder.

"Shameful, that's what it is!" he said uncertainly.

"If there were a discussion now," said the woman, flushing hotly, "I would prove to Pyotr Alexandrovich..."

"I beg your pardon, but do you wish to open the discussion this minute?" inquired Philip Philipovich politely.

The woman's eyes sparkled.

"I understand your irony, Professor, we will go now... Only I, as the chairman of cultural department of our house..."

"Chairwoman," Philip Philipovich corrected her.

"Would like to ask you," at this point the woman pulled out of her coat-front a few brightly coloured journals, still damp from the snow, "to take a few journals sold for the benefit of German children. 50 kopecks each."

"No, thank you," replied Philip Philipovich briefly, glancing at the journals.

The four indicated total amazement and the woman went the colour of cranberry juice.

"Why do you refuse?"

"I don't want them."

"You have no sympathy for the children of Germany?"

"On the contrary."

"You grudge fifty copecks?"

"No."

"Why then?"

"I don't want them."

There was a short silence.

"Do you know what, Professor?" said the girl, heaving a deep sigh. "If you were not a luminary known to all Europe and if you had not been interceded for in the most disgraceful manner by... (the fair man tugged at the end of her jacket but she shook him off) by people who, I am quite sure, we will eventually get to the bottom of, you should be arrested."

"And what for?" inquired Philip Philipovich with some curiosity.

"You are a proletariat-hater!" said the woman proudly.

"Yes, I do dislike the proletariat," Philip Philipovich agreed sadly and pressed a knob. A bell sounded. A door opened somewhere in the corridor.

"Zina," called Philip Philipovich, "you may serve dinner. You will permit me, gentlemen?"

The four filed silently out of the study, silently traversed the reception room and the hall, then you could hear the front door closing heavily and resonantly behind them.

The dog stood up on its hind legs and made an act of prayerful obeisance to Philip Philipovich.

3

On black-bordered plates patterned with flowers of paradise lay slivers of thinly cut smoked salmon and pickled eels. On a heavy board there was a lump of very fresh cheese and, in a little silver dish surrounded by ice, caviar. Amongst the plates stood a selection of small, slim glasses and three cut glass decanters with different coloured vodkas. All these objects were arrayed on a small marble table, neatly joined to a huge sideboard of carved oak all a gleam with glass and silver. In the middle of the room was the table, heavy as a tombstone, spread with a white cloth, and on it were set two places, napkins starched and folded into the

shape of papal tiaras, and three dark bottles.

Zina brought in a covered silver dish in which something was sizzling. The aroma arising from the dish was such that the dog's mouth promptly filled with watery saliva. The Gardens of Semiramis, he thought and thudded his tail on the floor like a stick.

"Bring them here," commanded Philip Philipovich in a resonant voice. "Doctor Bormental, I beg you to be circumspect with the caviar. And if you want good advice, pour yourself not the English but the plain Russian vodka."

The handsome young man he had bitten (now without his smock and dressed in a decent, black suit) shrugged his broad shoulders, permitted himself a polite grin and helped himself to the transparent vodka.

"With the blessing of the state?" he inquired. "How could you, my dear Sir," his host replied. "It's spirit. Darya Petrovna makes excellent vodka herself."

"Don't say so, Philip Philipovich. It's the general opinion that the new state brew is excellent vodka. 30° proof." "Vodka ought to be 40° not 30° that's in the first place,"

interrupted Philip Philipovich, laying down the law. "And, in the second, one can never tell what they put in it. Can you tell me what might come into their heads?"

"Anything," said the bitten young man with conviction.

"And I am of the same opinion exactly," added Philip Philipovich and emptied the contents of his glass down his throat in one go. "Mm ... Doctor Bormental, I implore you, pass me that thing there immediately, and if you are going to tell me what it is ... I shall be your sworn enemy for the rest of your life. *From Seville to Granada...*"

With these words he himself speared something resembling a small, dark square of bread with a clawed silver fork. The bitten man followed his example. Philip Philipovich's eyes gleamed.

"Is that bad?" demanded Philip Philipovich, chewing. "Is that bad? Answer me, my dear doctor."

"Superb," replied the bitten man sincerely.

"I should rather say so... Note, Ivan Arnoldovich, that only country squires who have survived the Bolsheviks take cold hors-d'oeuvre and soup with their

vodka. Any person with the least self-respect operates with hot hors-d'oeuvre. And of all hot Moscow hors-d'oeuvres, this is the best. They used to prepare them quite splendidly at the Slavyansky Bazar Restaurant. Take it, good dog."

"If you're going to feed that dog in the dining room," a woman's voice sounded, "you'll never get him out again not for love nor money."

"Never mind. The poor fellow's hungry," Philip Philipovich offered the dog one of the savouries on the end of a fork. It was received with the dexterity of a conjuring trick, after which the fork was thrown with a clatter into the fingerbowl.

After this a crayfish-scented steam rose from the dishes; the dog sat in the shadow of the table-cloth with the air of a sentry mounting guard over a store of gunpowder. Philip Philipovich, however, tucking the tail of a starched napkin into his shirt collar, held forth:

"It is not a simple problem, Ivan Arnoldovich. One has to know about food, and — can you imagine? — the majority of people do not. You don't just have to know what to eat, but when and how." Philip Philipovich wagged his spoon pontifically.

"And what to talk about. Yes indeed. If you have a care for your digestion, my advice is: avoid the subjects of Bolshevism and medicine at the dinner-table. And whatever you do, don't read the Soviet newspapers before dinner."

"Hm ... but there aren't any other papers."

"That's what I mean, don't read newspapers. You know that I set up thirty experiments in the clinic. And what do you think? The patients who read no newspapers felt fine. The ones whom I especially ordered to read *Pravda* lost weight."

"Hm..." the bitten man responded with interest, his face flushed from the hot soup and wine.

"And not only that. Weaker reflexes, poor appetite, depression."

"Hell! You don't say!"

"Yes, indeed. But what am I thinking of? Here am I being the first to bring up medicine."

Philip Philipovich, leaning back, rang the bell and from behind the cherry-coloured door-curtain appeared Zina. The dog received a thick, pale piece of sturgeon which he did not like and

immediately after that a slice of juicy rare roast beef. Having downed this, the dog suddenly felt that he wanted to sleep and could not bear the sight of any more food. What a queer feeling, he thought, blinking heavy lids, I don't mind if I never set eyes on food again and to smoke after dinner is a stupid thing to do.

The dining room filled up with unpleasant blue smoke. The dog dozed, its head on its front paws.

"Saint-Julien is a decent wine," the dog heard through his sleep. "Only you can't get it any more."

From somewhere above and to the side came the sound of choral singing, softened by ceilings and carpets.

Philip Philipovich rang the bell and Zina came.

"Zina, what does that mean?"

"They've called another general meeting, Philip Philipovich," answered Zina.

"Another one!" Philip Philipovich exclaimed. "Well, I suppose now it's really got under way and the house of Kalabukhov is lost indeed. I'll have to go, but the question is: where to? Everything will go now. At first there'll be a singsong

every evening, then the pipes will freeze in the lavatories, then the central heating boiler will burst, etc. And that will be the end of Kalabukhov."

"Philip Philipovich is upset," Zina remarked smiling as she bore off a pile of plates.

"How can I help not being upset?" exploded Philip Philipovich. "What a house it used to be — you must understand!"

"You are too pessimistic, Philip Philipovich," the handsome bitten man replied. "They are very different now, you know."

"My dear Sir, you know me? Do you not? I am a man of fact, a man of observation. I am the enemy of unfounded hypotheses. And that is very well known not only in Russia but in Europe. If I venture an opinion, it is because there is some fact behind it on which I base my conclusions. And here is the fact for you: the coat stand and galoshes rack in our house."

"Interesting..."

Nonsense — galoshes. There's no joy in galoshes, thought the dog. But he's still an exceptional person.

"If you please we will take the rack. Since 1903 I have been living in this

house. All this time until March 1917 there was not a single case — and I underline this in red pencil — not one case that a single pair of galoshes disappeared from our front hall, even though the door was never locked. And note, there are twelve flats here and I receive patients. In March 1917 all the galoshes vanished in a single day, amongst them two pairs of my own, three walking sticks, a coat and the porter's samovar. And that was the end of the galoshes rack. My dear Sir! I won't mention the central heating. I won't mention it. Let us make allowances: when there's a social revolution going on one does without central heating... But I ask you: why, when it all began, did everyone begin to march up and down the marble staircase in their dirty galoshes and felt boots? Why, to this day, do we have to keep our galoshes under lock and key? Why have they removed the carpet from the main staircase? Did Karl Marx forbid us to carpet our staircases? Is it written anywhere in Karl Marx that the 2nd staircase entrance to the Kalabukhov house on Prechistenka Street should be boarded up so that all the inhabitants should have to go round the back through

the tradesmen's entrance? Who requires all this? Why can't the proletariat leave its galoshes downstairs, why does it have to dirty the marble?"

"But they don't have galoshes, Philip Philipovich," the bitten man tried to contradict.

"Not so!" roared Philip Philipovich in reply and poured himself a glass of wine. "Hm, I don't approve of liqueurs after dinner; they make one feel heavy and have a bad effect on the liver. Not so at all! They do have galoshes now, and those galoshes are mine. They are precisely those very same galoshes that disappeared in 1917. Who else pinched them, I'd like to know? Did I? Impossible. That bourgeois Sablin? (Philip Philipovich pointed a finger at the ceiling.) The very idea is absurd! The sugar-manufacturer Polozov? (Philip Philipovich pointed to the wall.) Never! It was done by those songbirds up there. Yes, indeed! But if only they would take them off when they go upstairs! (Philip Philipovich began to turn crimson.) And why the hell did they remove the flowers from the landings? Why does the electricity which, if I remember aright, only failed twice in 20

years, now leave us blacked out regularly once a month? Doctor Bormental, statistics are a fearful thing. You, who have read my latest work, know that better than anyone."

"It's the Disruption, Philip Philipovich."

"No," Philip Philipovich contradicted him with the utmost certainty. "You should be the first, dear Ivan Arnoldovich, to refrain from using that particular word. It is a mirage, smoke, fiction." Philip Philipovich spread wide his short fingers so that two shadows resembling tortoises began to wriggle across the table-cloth. "What is this Disruption of yours? An old woman with a staff? A witch who goes round knocking out the window-panes and putting out the lamps? Why, she doesn't exist at all. What do you mean by the word?" demanded Philip Philipovich furiously of the unfortunate cardboard duck suspended legs uppermost by the side-board, and answered for it himself.

"I'll tell you what it means. If I stop doing operations every evening and initiate choir practice in my flat instead, I'll get Disruption. If, when I go to the lavatory, I, if you'll forgive the expression, begin to piss and miss the bowl, and Zina

and Darya Petrovna do the same, then we get Disruption in the lavatory. So it follows that Disruption is in the head. So, when all these baritones start calling upon us to 'Beat Disruption', I just laugh." (Philip Philipovich's face twisted into such a terrible grimace that the bitten man's mouth fell open.) "Believe me, I just laugh. It means that every one of them should begin by knocking himself over the head! And when he's whacked out all the hallucinations and begins to clean out the barns — the job he was made for — Disruption will disappear of its own accord. You can't serve two gods! It is impossible at one and the same time to sweep the tram lines and to organise the fate of a lot of Spanish ragamuffins. No one can do that, Doctor, and still less people who are roughly two hundred years behind Europe in their general development and are still none too sure how to button up their own trousers!"

Philip Philipovich was quite carried away. His hawk-like nostrils were extended. Having recuperated his forces thanks to an excellent dinner, he was thundering away like a prophet of olden times, and his hair shone silver.

His words reached the sleepy dog like a dull rumbling from beneath the earth. Now the owl with its stupid yellow eyes leapt out at him in his dream, now the foul face of the chef in his dirty white cap, now the dashing moustache of Philip Philipovich, lit by the harsh electric light from beneath the lampshade, now sleepy sleighs scraped past and disappeared, and in the juice of the dog's stomach floated a chewed piece of roast beef.

He could make money as a speaker at meetings, the dog thought vaguely through his sleep. Talk the hind leg off a donkey, he would. Still, he seems to be made of money as it is.

"The policeman on the beat!" yelled Philip Philipovich. "The policeman!" Oohoo-hoo-hoo! Something in the nature of rising bubbles broke in the dog's mind. "The policeman! That and that only. And it makes no odds whatsoever whether he has a badge on his chest or wears a red cap. Attach a policeman to every single person and let him have orders to control the vocal impulses of the citizens. You say — Disruption. I say to you, Doctor, that nothing will change for the better in our house or in any other house for that

matter until such time as they put down those singers! As soon as they give up their concerts, and not before, things will change for the better."

"What counter-revolutionary things you do say, Philip Philipovich," remarked the bitten man jokingly. "It's to be hoped you'll not be overheard."

"No danger to anyone," Philip Philipovich retorted hotly. "No counter-revolution whatsoever, and that, by the way, is another word I simply cannot stand. It is an absolute riddle— what does it imply? The devil alone knows. So I say to you that there is no counter-revolution whatsoever behind my words: just experience of life and common sense."

At this point Philip Philipovich untucked the tail of the brilliantly white unfolded napkin from his collar and, crumpling it, put it down on the table next to his unfinished glass of wine. The bitten man rose to his feet and said: "Merci."

"Just a moment, Doctor!" Philip Philipovich halted him, taking his wallet from a trouser pocket. He narrowed his eyes, counted out some white notes and handed them to the bitten man with the

words: "Today, Ivan Arnoldovich, you are owed 40 roubles. Be so good."

The dog's victim thanked him politely and, blushing, thrust the money into the pocket of his jacket.

"Do you not need me this evening, Philip Philipovich?" he asked.

"No, thank you, dear Doctor. We will not do any more today. In the first place, the rabbit has died and, in the second, *Aida* is on at the Bolshoi. And it's quite a while since I heard it. One of my favourites... Remember? The duet... Tari-ra-rim."

"How do you find the time, Philip Philipovich?" asked the doctor respectfully.

"The person who always finds time is the one who is never in a hurry," explained his host didactically. "Of course, if I began to flutter from meeting to meeting or sing like a nightingale all day long, I wouldn't have time for anything." Under Philip Philipovich's fingers in his pocket a repeater-watch chimed divinely. "Just after eight o'clock... I shall arrive for the second act... I am all for the division of labour. Let them sing at the Bolshoi, and I shall operate. That's how it should be. And no Disruption... Remember, Ivan Arnoldovich,

keep a close watch: the moment there is a suitable fatality, off the operating table, into sterilised isotonic saline and round to me!"

"Don't worry, Philip Philipovich, I have a promise from the pathoanatomists."

"Good, and in the meantime we'll keep this nervous wreck from the street under observation. Give his side a chance to heal."

He's taking thought for me, thought the dog. A very good man. I know who he is. He's a magician, one of those wonder workers and conjurors out of dogs' fairy-tales... It can't be that I dreamt it all. What if it is all a dream? (The dog shuddered in his sleep.) I'll wake up and there'll be nothing left. Not the lamp with the silk cover, nor the warmth, nor feeling full. And it'll all start again: that crazy cold under the archway, the icy tarmac, hunger, unkind people... The canteen, snow... Oh God, how miserable I shall be!

But nothing of all this happened. It was the arched gateway that melted away like a foul dream never to return. Evidently the Disruption was not so terrible. In spite of it the grey accordions under the window were filled with heat twice a day and

warmth rippled out from them right through the flat.

It was quite clear that the dog had drawn the winning ticket in the dogs' lottery. No less than twice a day now his eyes filled with tears of gratitude to the wise man of Prechistenka. Apart from this, all the glass-fronted cupboards in the drawing-room reflected a successful, handsome dog.

I am a beauty. Perhaps an unknown canine Prince, incognito, thought the dog, surveying the shaggy coffee-coloured hound with the contented face strolling about in the mirrored distances. It is very probable that my grandmother had an affair with a Newfoundland. That's it, I see I have a white patch on my face. Where did that come from, I wonder? Philip Philipovich is a man of excellent taste, he would not take in any old mongrel stray.

In the course of a week, the dog had devoured as much food as in the whole course of his last, hungry month-and-a-half on the street. Only by weight, of course. As to the quality of food in Philip Philipovich's house, there was simply no comparison. Even if one did not count the 18 kopecks worth of scrap meat which

Darya Petrovna bought every day from the Smolensk Market, one only need mention the titbits from dinner at 7 o'clock in the dining room, which the dog always attended in spite of the protests of the elegant Zina. During these meals Philip Philipovich had been finally elevated to divine status. The dog sat up and begged and nibbled his jacket; the dog learnt Philip Philipovich's ring at the door (two sharp authoritative stabs at full pitch), and rushed out barking excitedly to meet him in the hall. The master was all wrapped in silver fox fur, glittering with a million tiny snow-flakes, he smelt of tangerines, cigars, scent, lemons, petrol, eau-de-Cologne and cloth, and his voice sounded like a trumpet through the whole flat:

"Why did you tear up that owl, you scoundrel? What harm did it ever do to you? What harm, I'm asking you? Why did you break Professor Mechnikov?"

"Philip Philipovich, he should be given a good hiding, even if only once," Zina declared indignantly. "Or he'll get completely spoilt. Just look what he's done to your galoshes."

"Nobody should ever be given a hiding," Philip Philipovich said warmly. "And don't

forget it. People and animals can only be worked upon by suggestion, admonition. Did you give him his meat today?"

"Heavens, he's eating us all out of house and home! How can you ask, Philip Philipovich? I'm surprised he hasn't burst."

"Well, let him eat, bless him... But what did that owl ever do to you, hooligan?"

"Oo-oo!" the toady-dog whimpered and crept up on his stomach, paws spread.

Then he was dragged willy-nilly by the scruff of the neck through the hall into the study. The dog yelped, snapped, dug his claws into the carpet, slid along on his behind as though performing in a circus. In the middle of the study on the carpet lay glass-eyed owl with red rags smelling of mothballs hanging out from its torn stomach. On the table lay the shattered portrait.

"I haven't cleared up on purpose so that you could see for yourself," Zina informed him, thoroughly upset. "He jumped up on the table, you see, the villain! And got it by the tail — snap! Before I knew where I was he'd torn it to bits. Push his face into the owl, Philip Philipovich, so that he knows not to spoil things."

A howl went up. The dog was dragged, still clinging to the carpet, to have his nose pushed into the owl, shedding bitter tears and thinking: Beat me if you like, only don't turn me out of the flat.

"Send the owl to the taxidermist without delay. Besides, here, take 8 roubles and 16 kopecks for the tram, go to the central department store and buy him a good collar and a chain."

The next day the dog was arrayed in a broad, shiny collar. To begin with he was very upset when he saw himself in the mirror, tucked his tail between his legs and went slinking off to the bathroom, meditating on how to rub it off on some chest or crate. Very soon, however, the dog understood that this was simply foolish. Zina took him for a walk on the lead along Obukhov Alley and the dog burnt with shame as he walked like some felon under arrest but, by the time he had walked the length of Prechistenka as far as the Church of Christ the Saviour, he realised what a collar meant in a dog's life. Furious envy was clearly to be seen in the eyes of all the curs they encountered and at Myortvy Alley, a lanky stray who'd lost part of his tail barked ferociously,

calling him a "bloody aristo" and a "boot-licker". When they crossed the tram track the militiaman glanced at the collar with pleasure and respect and, when they returned home, the most incredible thing happened: Fyodor the porter opened the front door himself to let in Sharik. At the same time he remarked to Zina:

"My-my, what a shaggy dog Philip Philipovich has acquired. And remarkably fat."

"Not surprising, he eats enough for six", explained Zina, all pink and pretty from the frost.

A collar is as good as a briefcase, the dog joked to himself and, wagging his tail, proceeded on up to the first floor like a gentleman.

Having discovered the true worth of the collar, the dog paid his first visit to the main department of paradise which, up to now, had been strictly forbidden him — to the realm of Darya Petrovna, the cook. The whole flat was not worth one square yard of Darya's realm. Every day flames crackled and threw off sparks in the tiled stove with the black top. The oven crackled. Between crimson pillars burnt the face of Darya Petrovna, eternally

condemned to fiery torment and unslaked passion. It shone and shimmered with grease. In the fashionable hair-do—down over the ears, then swept back into a twist of fair hair on the nape of the neck —gleamed 22 artificial diamonds. About the walls golden saucepans hung on hooks and all the kitchen was loud with smells, bubbling and hissing in' closed pots.

"Out!" yelled Darya Petrovna. "Out, you thieving stray! You were all I needed! I'll take the poker to you..."

What's wrong? Now why are you scolding? Ingratiatingly, the dog smiled up at her with half-closed eyes. Now why should you think I'm a thief? Haven't you noticed my collar? And poking his muzzle through the door he crept sideways into the kitchen.

Sharik the dog knew some kind of secret to win people's hearts. In two days' time he was already lying next to the coal-scuttle and watching Darya Petrovna at work. With a long, narrow knife she chopped off the heads and claws of defenceless partridges then, like a furious executioner, cut meat off the bones, gutted the chickens, passed something through the mincing, machine. Meanwhile Sharik

was worrying the head of a partridge. From a bowl of milk Darya fished out soaked white bread, mixed it with mincemeat on a wooden board, poured on some cream and then set about shaping meat balls on the same board. The oven hummed as though there was a regular furnace within it and from the saucepan came a great grumbling, bubbling and spitting. The stove door opened with a bang to disclose a terrifying hell in which the flames leapt and shimmered.

In the evenings, the gaping stone jaws lost their fire and, in the window of the kitchen above the white half-curtain, there was a glimpse of the dense and solemn Prechistenka night with a single star. It was damp on the floor of the kitchen, the pots and pans gleamed balefully, dully, and on the table lay a fireman's cap. Sharik lay on the warm stove like a lion on a gate, one ear cocked from curiosity, and looked through the half-open door to Zina's and Darya Petrovna's room where a black-moustached, excited man in a broad leather belt was embracing Darya Petrovna. Her face burned with anguish and passion, all of it, that is, but the indelibly powdered nose. A ray of light

illumined a portrait of a man with a black moustache from which was suspended a paper Easter rose.

"Like a demon, you are," Darya Petrovna murmured in the half dark. "Leave off! Zina'll come any moment now. What's got into you, you been having your youth restored too?"

"Don't need to," the man with the black moustache answered hoarsely, almost beside himself. "You're so fiery!"

In the evening, the star over Prechistenka hid behind heavy curtains and, if *Aida* was not playing at the Bolshoi and there was no meeting of the All-Russian Society of Surgeons, the divinity took his place in a deep armchair in the study. There were no ceiling lights. Only one green lamp shone on the table. Sharik lay on the carpet in the shadow and, fascinated, observed terrible things. Human brains floated in a repulsive, caustic and muddy liquid. The divinity's arms, bare to the elbows, were in reddish-brown rubber gloves and the slippery, unfeeling fingers poked amongst the convolutions. Sometimes the divinity armed himself with a small shining knife

and carefully cut through the rubbery yellow brains.

"*To the sacred shores of the Nile,*" the divinity hummed quietly to himself, biting his lip and recalling the golden interior of the Bolshoi theatre.

At this time the radiators were at their hottest. The warmth they gave off rose to the ceiling from which it spread down again through the room and brought to life in the dog's coat the last doomed flea to have escaped Philip Philipovich's careful combing. The carpets muffled all sound in the flat. Then, from far away, the front door clanged.

Zina's gone to the cinema, thought the dog, and when she gets back we'll be having supper, I suppose. Today I have reason to believe it will be veal chops!

*

On that terrible day Sharik was troubled from morning by some kind of premonition. As a result he suddenly felt miserable and ate his breakfast, half a cup of porridge and a mutton-bone left over

from yesterday, without any enjoyment. He wandered dully into the reception room and gave a little whine at his own reflection. Yet by the afternoon, after Zina had taken him for a walk along the boulevard, the day seemed to have passed as usual. There had been no reception that morning because, as everyone knows, there is no reception on Tuesdays, but the divinity sat in his study with some heavy books with brightly-coloured pictures open on the table in front of him. They were waiting for dinner. The dog was slightly encouraged by the thought that for the second course, as he had already established in the kitchen, there would be turkey. On his way along the corridor, the dog heard how, in Philip Philipovich's study, the telephone gave a sudden, unpleasant ring. Philip Philipovich took the receiver, listened and suddenly became all excited.

"Excellent," came his voice. "Bring it at once, at once!"

He fussed round, rang the bell and as Zina came in to answer it ordered her to bring in the dinner at once.

"Dinner! Dinner! Dinner!"

There was an immediate clatter of plates from the dining room, Zina bustled from the kitchen, you could hear Darya Petrovna grumbling that the turkey was not ready. The dog again began to feel disturbed.

I don't like disorder in the flat, he thought... And no sooner had he thought this, than the disorder took on a still more unpleasant character. And first and foremost because of the appearance of that Dr. Bormental he had once bitten. He brought with him an evil-smelling suitcase and, without even pausing to take off his coat, hurried down the corridor with it to the consulting room. Philip Philipovich abandoned his cup of coffee half-drunk, something he had never done before, and ran out to meet Bormental, also something quite unprecedented.

"When did he die?" he called.

"Three hours ago," answered Bormental, undoing the suitcase without even taking off his snow-covered hat.

Who died? thought the dog gloomily and crossly, and proceeded to push in under everybody's feet. I hate people milling around.

"Get out from under my feet, you devil! Hurry, hurry, hurry!" yelled Philip Philipovich and began to ring every bell in the flat, or so it seemed to the dog. Zina came running. "Zina! Ask Darya Petrovna to go to the telephone, take messages, I'm not receiving anyone! You'll be needed here. Dr. Bormental, I implore you—hurry, hurry, hurry!"

I don't like this, I don't like it at all, the dog glowered sulkily and began to wander round the flat, but all the hassle was going on in the consulting room. Zina appeared unexpectedly in a white overall more like a shroud and began to run from the consulting room to the kitchen and back.

Maybe I'll go and see what there is to eat? To hell with them all, the dog decided and immediately received a rude shock.

"Sharik is not to have anything to eat," the command was thundered from the consulting room.

"Can't keep an eye on him all the time."

"Lock him up!"

And Sharik was lured into the bathroom and locked up.

Cheek, thought Sharik, sitting in the half-dark bathroom. Simply stupid...

And he spent about quarter of an hour in the bathroom in a curious frame of mind — now resentful, now in some kind of heavy depression. Everything was miserable, muddling...

All right, you can say goodbye to your galoshes tomorrow, much respected Philip Philipovich, he thought. You've already had to buy two new pairs and now you'll have to buy another. That'll teach you to lock up dogs.

But suddenly his furious thoughts took a different turn. Quite vividly he remembered a moment from his earliest youth: a huge sunlit courtyard at the end of the Preobrazhenka Street, splinters of sun in bottles, broken bricks, free, stray dogs.

No, what's the use, there's no leaving a place like this for any amount of freedom, thought the dog sniffing dismally, I've got used to it. I'm a gentleman's dog, an intelligent being, acquired a taste for the good things of life. And what is freedom? Smoke, mirage, fiction ... the raving of those unhappy-democrats...

Then the half-dark of the bathroom became frightening, he howled, flung himself at the door, began to scratch at it.

"Oo-oo-oo!" his voice resounded through the flat as through a barrel.

I'll tear up that owl again, he thought, furiously but helplessly. Then he weakened, lay down for a while and, when he got up, the hair along his spine bristled because in the bath he thought he saw a repulsive pair of wolves' eyes.

In the midst of all this torment the door opened. The dog came out, shook himself and would have headed grumpily for the kitchen had not Zina grasped him by the collar and pulled him firmly towards the consulting room. A chill fear stabbed the dog just beneath the heart.

What do they want me for? he thought suspiciously. My flank's healed — I don't understand a thing.

His paws slid along the slippery parquet and so he was brought to the consulting room. Here he was astonished at the terribly bright light. A white bulb screwed into the ceiling shone so brightly it hurt the eyes. The high priest stood haloed in shining white and sung through his teeth about the sacred shores of the Nile. Only thanks to a confused aroma could one tell that this was Philip Philipovich. His short grey hair was hidden under a white cap

reminiscent of the patriarchal cowl; the divinity was all in white and above the whiteness, like a stole, was suspended a narrow rubber apron. His hands were in black gloves.

The bitten man had on a cowl too. The long table was extended to the maximum and next to it they had pushed up a small square table on one shining leg.

More than for anything else here, the dog conceived a hatred for the man he had bitten and most of all for the way his eyes were today. Usually bold and straight, today they looked everywhere but at the dog. They were cautious, false, and in their depths lurked the intent to play some nasty, dirty trick, if not to commit an actual crime. The dog looked at him glumly and retired gloomily into the corner.

"Take off the collar, *Zina*," said Philip Philipovich quietly. "Only don't excite him."

Zina's eyes immediately became every bit as repellent as those of the bitten man. She went up and stroked the dog with palpable duplicity. Sharik gave her a look of profound unease and heartfelt contempt.

Well then, you're three to one. You can take it if you want. Only you should be ashamed. If only I'd known what you'd do to me...

Zina took off the collar, the dog shook his head and snorted. The bitten man appeared before him, giving off a foul, sickening smell.

Ugh, what a filthy thing... Why do I feel so sick, so scared... thought the dog and backed away from the bitten man.

"Hurry, Doctor," said Philip Philipovich impatiently.

The air was filled with a pungent, sweet smell. The bitten man, never taking his worthless eyes off the dog, brought his right hand out from behind his back and quickly smothered the dog's nose with a wad of damp cotton wool. Sharik was taken by surprise, his head spun slightly but he managed to jump back. The bitten man was after him like a shot and this time clapped the wad of cotton wool over his whole face. Immediately he found himself unable to breathe but once again he tore away. The villain... the thought flashed through his mind. What have I done? And once again he was being smothered. Then, all of a sudden, it

seemed to him as though a lake had opened out in the middle of the consulting room and over its surface on little boats floated the happy ghosts of unheard-of, rose-coloured dogs. His bones turned soft and his legs buckled under him.

"Onto the table!" a voice cried merrily and the words of Philip Philipovich dissolved in orange beams of light. The horror vanished and gave way to joy. For a second or two the dog loved the bitten man. Then the world turned upside down but he could still feel a cold but pleasant hand under his stomach. Then—nothing.

4

On the narrow operating table the dog Sharik lay outstretched and his head beat helplessly against the oil-cloth pillow. His stomach had been shaved and now Dr. Bormental, breathing heavily and hurrying, eating away the hair with his clippers, was clipping Sharik's head. Philip Philipovich, his palms propped on the edge of the table, was observing this procedure with eyes as glittering as the

golden rim of his spectacles, and saying excitedly:

"Ivan Arnoldovich, the most important moment will be when I enter the sella turcica. The instant that happens, I implore you, hand me the processus and immediately after that put in the stitches. If we get bleeding at that point we'll lose time and we'll lose the dog. Not that there's any chance for him, anyway." He fell silent for a moment, then he narrowed his eyes, looked at the half-shut eyes of the dog which seemed to express something like irony and added:

"Do you know, I shall miss him. Imagine, I've got quite fond of him."

He raised his hands as he said this as though bestowing a blessing on the unfortunate dog Sharik at the commencement of some arduous adventure. He was taking care that not one speck of dust should settle on the black rubber.

From beneath the clipped coat gleamed the dog's whitish skin. Bormental threw away the clippers and armed himself with a razor. He soaped the small, defenceless head and began to shave it. The razor scraped loudly; here and there spots of

blood appeared. Having shaved the head, the bitten man wiped it with a swab soaked in spirit, then stretched out the naked stomach of the dog and pronounced, panting: "Ready."

Zina turned on the basin tap and Bormental dashed to wash his hands. Zina doused them with spirit from a glass jar.

"May I go now, Philip Philipovich?" she asked, glancing nervously at the dog's shaven head.

"You may."

Zina went. Bormental continued to bustle around. He applied gauze swabs to Sharik's head and there materialised on the table a bald dog's skull no one had ever seen before and a strange, bearded mug.

At this point the high priest went into action. He straightened up, fixed his eyes on the dog's skull and said:

"Well, so help us, God. The knife."

Bormental extracted a small, curved knife from the glittering pile on the little table and handed it to the high priest. Then he vested himself in the same kind of black gloves.

"Is he properly out?" asked Philip Philipovich.

"Yes."

Philip Philipovich clenched his teeth, his eyes took on a sharp, piercing sparkle and, raising the small knife, he made a long, precise incision in Sharik's stomach. The skin immediately parted and blood spurted in all directions. Bormental pounced like a predator and began pressing on Sharik's wound with swabs of gauze, then, using small pincers not unlike sugar tongs, pressed the edges together and it dried up. Bormental's forehead came out in beads of sweat. Philip Philipovich made a second incision and together the two of them began to excavate Sharik's body with little hooks, scissors and some kind of clamps. Layers of pink and yellow tissue, weeping a dew of blood, were exposed. Philip Philipovich turned the knife in the body and cried: "Scissors!"

The instrument flashed for a moment in the bitten man's hand, then vanished like a conjuring trick. Philip Philipovich felt his way deeper in and in several swivelling movements tore out Sharik's reproductive organs together with a few dangling ends. Bormental, soaking with effort and excitement, dashed for the glass jar and took from it another wet, dangling

scrotum. Short, damp tendrils danced and curled in the hands of the Professor and his assistant. Crooked needles emitted staccato clicks in the grip of the pincers, the organ was stitched in the place of Sharik's. The high priest fell back from the wound, pressed a swab of gauze into it and ordered:

"Put in stitches, Doctor, this instant." Then he glanced over his shoulder at the round clock on the wall.

"Took us 14 minutes," Bormental muttered through clenched teeth and dug the crooked needle into the flaccid skin. Then both were seized with excitement like assassins in a hurry.

"The knife!" cried Philip Philipovich.

The knife leapt into his hand as if of its own accord, after which Philip Philipovich's face took on a terrifying expression. He bared the porcelain and golden crowns on his teeth and in one stroke drew a red brow-band across Shank's forehead. The shaven skin flew back like a scalp.

The bone of the skull was laid bare. Philip Philipovich cried:

"Trepan!"

Bormental handed him a shining bone-drilling brace. Biting his lip, Philip Philipovich began to drive home the brace and drill out small holes in Sharik's skull about one centimetre apart right round the skull. On each he spent no more than five seconds. Then with a curiously-shaped saw, the tail of which he inserted into the first hole, he began to saw... The skull creaked quietly and shook. Roughly three minutes later the top of Sharik's skull had been removed.

Then the dome of Sharik's brain was revealed—grey with bluish veins and reddish spots. Philip Philipovich inserted the scissors into the membrane and opened it up. There was one slender spurt of blood which almost hit the Professor in the eye and sprayed his cap. Bormental pounced like a tiger with his artery forceps to stop the gush and it ceased. Sweat was streaming from him in torrents and his face had become all raw and patchy. His eyes flickered from the Professor's hand to the plate on the instrument table. As to Philip Philipovich, he had become quite terrible to behold. His breath was harsh, his teeth were bared to the gums. He stripped the

membrane from the brain and went in deep, easing the hemispheres of the brain from the cup of the skull. At this moment Bormental began to turn pale, put one hand over Sharik's chest and said hoarsely:

"The pulse-rate is falling sharply..." Philip Philipovich shot him a ferocious look, mumbled something and cut deeper. Bormental broke a glass ampoule with a snap, sucked out the syringe and inserted it somewhere close to Sharik's heart.

"I'm going for the sella turcica," snarled Philip Philipovich and, inserting his slippery, bloody gloves beneath Sharik's greyish-yellow brain, lifted it from his head. For one second he let his eyes flicker to Sharik's face and Bormental immediately broke another ampoule containing a yellow fluid and filled a long syringe.

"In the heart?" he asked timidly.

"Why ask?" yelled the Professor furiously. "He's died on your hands at least five times already. Inject! Inconceivable!" As he spoke his face took on the expression of an inspired brigand.

The doctor drew back his hand and easily plunged the needle into the heart of the dog.

"He's alive, but only just," he whispered timidly.

"No time to discuss whether or not he's alive," hissed the terrifying Philip Philipovich. "I'm in the sella. He'll die anyway. Ah ... the dev... *To the sacred shores of the Nile...* Give me the appendage."

Bormental handed him a phial in which a white lump attached to a thread was suspended in liquid. With one hand ("There's no one to equal him in all Europe," thought Bormental hazily.) he fished out the bobbing lump and, wielding the scissors with the other, cut out a similar lump from the depths of the dissected hemispheres. Sharik's lump he threw out onto a dish and inserted the new one, together with the thread, into the brain and, with the short fingers, now by some miracle long and supple, dexterously attached it, winding it about with the amber-coloured thread. After that he threw out of the head various raspatories and forceps, put the brain

back in the bone cup, stood back and asked in a calmer voice:

"He's dead, of course?"

"A thread of a pulse," answered Bormental.

"More adrenaline!"

The Professor cast the membranes back over the brain, refitted the sawn off skull like something made to measure, pulled on the scalp and roared: "Stitch!"

It took Bormental all of five minutes to stitch the skull back in place, breaking three needles.

And on the blood-bespattered pillow there again appeared the all but extinguished face of Sharik with a ring-like wound on his head. At this stage Philip Philipovich finally dropped back, like a sated vampire, ripped off one glove, shaking out a cloud of sweaty talc, tore the other to pieces, flung it on the floor and rang the bell, pressing the button into the wall. Zina appeared at the door, averting her eyes so as not to see Sharik all covered with blood. The high priest removed his blood-stained cowl with chalky hands and yelled:

"A cigarette for me this instant, Zina, a bath and a change of linen!"

He rested his chin on the edge of the table and with two fingers raised the dog's right lid, looked into the clearly agonising eye and pronounced:

"There you are, believe it or not. He hasn't died. He will, though. Eh, Dr. Bormental, I'm sorry to lose that dog, he was an affectionate brute, even if he did have his little ways."

From the Diary of Dr. Bormental

A thin exercise book such as children use to learn to write, all in the hand of Bormental. On the first two pages the writing is neat, well spaced and clear but after that it becomes bold and scrawling and there are many blots.

22 December 1924, Monday. Case Notes.

The laboratory dog is about 2 years old. Male. Breed— mongrel. Name—Sharik. Coat sparse, bushy, greyish brown, darker in some places. Tail—brownish cream. On the right flank are traces of a totally healed burn. Diet before being taken in by the Professor—poor; after a week—extremely well-nourished. Weight 8 kilograms (exclamation mark). Heart, lungs, stomach, temperature...

23 December. At 8.30 in the evening a pioneering operation performed according to the method of Professor

Preobrazhensky, the first of its kind in Europe: under chloroform Sharik's scrotum was removed and replaced by human testes with seminal vesicles and vasa, taken from a man aged 28, who had died 4 hours and 4 minutes before the operation, and preserved in sterilised isotonic saline according to Professor Preobrazhensky's method.

Immediately after this, the brain-appendage, the hypophysis was removed after trepanation of the top of the skull and replaced by the human equivalent from the same man.

8 cubes of chloroform were introduced, 1 camphor injection, 2 injections of adrenaline to the heart.

The aim of the operation: the mounting of an experiment by Preobrazhensky of a combined transplant of the hypophysis and the testes to explore the acceptability of hypophysis transplant and its potential for the rejuvenation of the human organism.

The operation was performed by Prof. P. P. Preobrazhensky assisted by Dr. I. A. Bormental.

During the night after the operation: repeated, dangerous weakening of the

pulse. Expectation of fatal outcome. Massive doses of camphor according to the Preobrazhensky method.

24 December. Some improvement in the morning. Respiratory rate twice above normal. Temperature 42. Camphor subcutaneous. Caffeine injection.

25 December. Relapse. Pulse scarcely perceptible, extremities grow cold, unreacting pupils. Adrenaline to the heart, camphor according to the Preobrazhensky method, intravenous injection of saline.

26 December. Some improvement. Pulse 180, respiratory rate 92, temperature 41. Camphor, enteral feeding by suppository.

27 December. Pulse 152, respiratory rate 50, temperature 39.8, pupils react. Subcutaneous camphor.

28 December. Significant improvement. At midday a sudden bout of heavy perspiration. Temperature 37°. The operational wounds are as they were. Changed dressing. Appetite returns. Fluids by mouth.

29 December. Sudden heavy moult of hair from the forehead and sides of the trunk. Called in for consultation: Professor Vasily Vasilievich Bundarev who heads the Chair of the Department of Skin Diseases and the Director of the Model Moscow Veterinary Institute. Both declare that there is no record of such a case in specialist literature. No diagnosis was agreed. Temperature—normal.

(Note in pencil)

In the evening came the first bark (8.15 p. m.) Noteworthy is the sharp change in timbre and lowering of tone. The bark, instead of "woo-uff-woo-uff" on the syllables "woo" and "uff", is in expression faintly reminiscent of a groan.

30 December. The moult is taking on the character of total loss of hair. Unexpected result of weight-check; weight is now

30 kg owing to growth (lengthening) of bones. The dog is lying prone as before.

31 December. Enormous appetite. (A blot appears in the exercise book. After

the blot is a hasty scrawl.) At 12 minutes past 12 the dog clearly barked "A-b-yr".

(At this point there is a blank space in the exercise book after which there appears a mistake clearly made in a state of agitation.)

1 December (*crossed out and corrected*), 1 January 1925. Photographed this morning. Distinctly barks "Abyr", repeating the word loudly and, it would seem, joyously. At 3 o'clock this afternoon (*in large letters*) it laughed, sending the maid Zina into a dead faint. This evening pronounced 8 times running the word "Abyralg", "Abyr".

(In slanting writing in pencil): The Professor has decoded the word "Abyrvalg", it means "Glavryba". Something monstr...

2nd January. Photographed smiling by magnesium flash. Got out of bed and stood confidently for half an hour on his hind legs. Almost my height.

(A loose leaf inserted into the exercise book.)

Russian science has narrowly escaped an irreparable loss.

Case notes on the illness of Professor P. P. Preobrazhensky.

At 1hr 13 mins.—Professor Preobrazhensky went off in a deep faint. As he fell he bumped his head on the leg of a chair. Tinctura of valerian.

In the presence of myself and Zina, the dog (if he can be called a dog, of course) swore at Professor Preobrazhensky, using obscene four-letter words.

(A break in the notes.)

6 January (in a mixture of pencil and violet ink).

Today, after his tail fell off, he quite clearly pronounced the word "pub". The phonograph is working. God knows what is going on.

I am at a loss.

The Professor has cancelled reception. Beginning from 5 o'clock, from the consulting room, where that creature is pacing up and down, you can hear a stream of vulgar oaths and the words "a couple more".

7 *January*. He can say a great many words: "Cabby"; "There's no seats"; "Evening paper"; "The best present for children" and all the swearwords in the Russian lexicon. His appearance is strange. Hair remains on the head only, on the chin and the chest. Otherwise he is bald with flaccid skin. His sexual organs are those of an adolescent male. His skull has become considerably more capacious. The forehead is slanting and low.

I really am going mad.

Philip Philipovich still feels unwell. Most of the observations are made by me (phonograph, photographs).

Rumours are spreading about the town.

The consequences are incalculable. In the afternoon today all our alley was choc-a-bloc with old women and idlers of various kinds. The curious are still hanging around under the windows. A startling piece appeared in the morning paper: "The rumours concerning a man from Mars in Obukhov Alley are quite unfounded. They have been put about by traders from the Sukharevka Market, who will be strictly punished." What man from Mars, damn it? This is becoming a nightmare.

Still better in the *Evening Post* which reported that a child had been born able to play the violin. On the same page there is an illustration: a violin and my photograph, subtitled *Professor Preobrazhensky had performed a Caesarean operation on the mother*. It is indescribable ... he now says a new word: "Militiaman".

It appears that Darya Petrovna was in love with me and pinched the photograph from Philip Philipovich's album. After we had chased out the reporters one of them slipped into the kitchen, etc...

The chaos during reception hours! There were 82 calls today. The telephone is disconnected. Childless women have gone crazed and keep coming...

The entire house committee called with Shvonder at their head: what for they don't know themselves.

8 January. Late this evening the diagnosis was made. Philip Philipovich, like a true scholar, admitted his mistake: the transplant of the hypophysis gives not rejuvenation but total humanisation (*underlined three times*). This in no way detracts from the amazing, staggering nature of his discovery.

For the first time today Sharik took a stroll about the flat. Laughed in the corridor at the sight of the electric lamp. Then, accompanied by Philip Philipovich

and myself, he proceeded to the study. He stands firmly on his hind paws (*crossed out*) legs and looks like a small, ill-formed man.

In the study he laughed. His smile is unpleasant and appears artificial. Then he scratched the back of his head, looked round and I noted a new, quite distinctly pronounced word: "Bourgeois". He swore. His cursing is methodical, non-stop, and, it would appear, quite devoid of meaning. There is something almost phonographic about it; as though the creature had heard swearwords somewhere earlier on and had automatically, subconsciously recorded them in his mind and was now belching them up in wads. But as to that, I'm not a psychiatrist, damn it.

The cursing has a surprisingly depressing effect on Philip Philipovich. There are moments when he seems to lose the cool detachment of the scientist observing new phenomena and, as it were, loses patience. So, during the cursing he suddenly nervously yelled out:

"Stop!"

This had no effect whatsoever.

After a walk about the study Sharik was brought back by our combined efforts to the consulting room.

After this Philip Philipovich and I held a consultation. I have to admit here that now, for the first time, I saw that assured and strikingly brilliant man at a loss. Humming to himself, as is his habit, he asked: "And what are we to do now?" and answered his own question literally as follows: "Moskvoshveya... *From Seville up to Granada*. Moskvoshveya, dear Doctor." I understood nothing. He explained:

"I am asking you, Ivan Arnoldovich, to go to the Moscow Clothes Shop and to buy him underclothes, trousers and a jacket."

9 January. From this morning his vocabulary has been increasing at the rate of one new word every five minutes (on average), and by whole new phrases. It is as though, having been deep frozen in his consciousness, they are now thawing out and emerging. Once out, the new word remains in use. Since yesterday evening the phonograph has recorded: "Don't shove", "Scoundrel", "Get off that tram step", "I'll teach you", "The recognition of America", "Primus".

10 January. Today for the first time he was dressed. He accepted the vest willingly, even laughing merrily. The underpants he rejected, expressing protest with hoarse cries of "Stand in line, you sons of bitches, stand in line!" We succeeded in putting the clothes on. The socks are too big for him.

(At this point there are some schematic drawings, apparently showing stages of the gradual transformation of a dog's paw into a human foot.)

The back half of the skeleton of the arch (planta) grows longer. The toes become elongated. Claws.

Repeated systematic training in the use of the lavatory. The servants are quite crushed.

But one should note the creature's quick understanding. Things are going better.

11 January. Has become completely resigned to the trousers. Today pronounced the long, merry sentence:

"You there, Mister, with the swell pin-stripe. Spare a bit of baccy for me pipe?"

The hair on his head is light and silky—easy to take for human hair. But traces of dark brown strands remain on the very top. Today the last fluff from the ears went. Colossal appetite. Enjoys salt herring.

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon an important event took place; for the first time the words pronounced by the creature were not unrelated to surrounding objects, but were a reaction to them. To be precise, when the Professor ordered him not to throw the left-overs on the floor he unexpectedly replied:

"Get off my back, you wimp."

Philip Philipovich was astonished, then recovered and said:

"If you permit yourself ever again to swear at me or the doctor, you'll be in trouble."

I photographed Sharik at that moment. I am ready to go bail he understood what the Professor said. A gloomy shadow fell on his face. He glowered from beneath his brows with considerable irritation but fell silent.

Hoorah, he understands!

12 January. Puts his hands in his trouser pockets. We are teaching him not to swear. Whistled the popular tune *Oho, the apple-oh!* Can sustain a conversation.

I cannot restrain myself from venturing a few hypotheses: to hell with rejuvenation for the moment. This other thing is infinitely more important: Professor Preobrazhensky's amazing experiment has opened up one of the secrets of the human brain. From now on the mysterious function of the hypophysis, or brain-appendage, has become clear. It predetermines the human image. We may say that the hormones it contains are the most important in the whole organism — image-defining hormones. A whole new sphere of science is being opened up. Homunculus has been created without the help of so much as Faust's retort! The surgeon's scalpel has called into being a new human entity. Professor Preobrazhensky, you are a creator. (*Blot.*)

But I wander from my theme... So, he can maintain a conversation. What I suggest happened is this: the hypophysis, having been accepted by the organism after the operation, opened up the speech-

centres in the dog's brain, and words came flooding out in a rush. In my opinion, we are dealing with a revived and developing, not with a newly-created brain. Oh, what a divine confirmation of the theory of evolution! Oh, great chain of life from a stray dog to Mendelejev the chemist! ⁽⁴⁾ Another hypothesis: Sharik's brain, during his period as a dog, collected a mass of information. All the words with which he first began to operate are street words, he had heard them and they had been conserved in his mind. Now as I walk along the street I look with secret horror upon every dog I meet. God knows what is stored away in their brains.

Sharik knew how to read. To read (3 exclamation marks). It was I who guessed this. From "Glavryba". He had read it backwards. And I even knew where to look for the solution to this riddle: in the interruption in a dog's optic nerves.

What is going on in Moscow is inconceivable to the mind of man. Seven traders from the Sukharevka Market have

already been arrested for spreading rumours about the end of the world to be brought upon us by the Bolsheviks. Darya Petrovna said so and even named the day: the 28 November 1925, on the day of the Holy Martyr Steven, the world will crash into a heavenly axis ... some knaves are already giving lectures. We've created such chaos with this hypophysis that the flat is becoming uninhabitable. I have moved in to live here at Professor Preobrazhensky's request and sleep in the reception room with Sharik. The consulting room now serves as a reception room. Shvonder was quite right. The house committee is delighted at our discomfort. There is not one single whole pane of glass left in the cupboards because at first he would jump at them. It was all we could do to teach him not to.

Something odd is happening to Philip. When I told him of my hypotheses and of my hope of turning Sharik into a highly developed psychic individual, he laughed ironically and replied: "You think so?" His tone was dire. Could I be mistaken? The old boy is on to something. While I write

up this case-history he pores over the story of the man from whom we took the hypophysis.

(A loose leaf inserted in the exercise book.)

Klim Grigoryevich Chugunkin, 25 years old, [*The inconsistency (cf. p. 242) appears in the original text.-Ed*] single. Non-Party member, sympathiser. Brought before the court 3 times and found not guilty the first time for lack of proof; the second time saved by his social origins; the third given a suspended sentence of 15 years forced labour. Thefts. Profession—playing the balalaika in pubs.

Small, ill-made. Enlarged liver (alcohol). Cause of death—struck in the heart by a knife in a pub (The Stop Signal at the Preobrazhensky Gate).

The old man is totally absorbed in the case of Klim Chugunkin. He muttered something about not having had the wit to examine Chugunkin's whole body in the pathology laboratory. What it is all about I

do not understand. Is it not all the same whose hypophysis?

17 January. Have not made any entries for several days: went down with flu. In the course of this time the image has taken on final form.

(a) the body has become completely human

(b) weight is about 108 lbs

(c) height — short

(d) head — small

(e) has begun to smoke

(f) eats human food

(g) can dress himself

(h) can converse smoothly

There's the hypophysis for you! (*Blot.*)

With this I end this case history. Before us is a new organism; it must be observed from the beginning.

Supplement: stenograms of speech; phonograph recordings; photographs.

Signed by Professor Preobrazhensky's assistant Doctor Bormental.

It was a winter evening. The end of January. The time before dinner, before reception. On the lintel of the door into the reception room hung a white sheet of paper on which was written in the hand of Professor Preobrazhensky:

"I forbid the eating of sunflower seeds in the flat.

P. Preobrazhensky."

and in blue pencil, in letters large as cream cakes, in the hand of Bormental:

"Playing musical instruments between 5 in the evening and 7 in the morning is forbidden."

Then, in the hand of Zina:

"When you get back, tell Philip Philipovich: I don't know where he's gone. Fyodor said he was with Shvonder."

In the hand of Preobrazhensky:

"Must I wait a hundred years for the glazier?"

In Darya Petrovna's hand (printed letters):

"Zina has gone to the shop, said she would bring him."

In the dining room everything combined to suggest late evening, thanks to the lamp with the silken shade. The light from the sideboard fell in two distinct patches because the mirror glass was stuck over by a diagonal cross from one corner to the other. Philip Philipovich, bending over the table, was absorbed in a huge, outspread newspaper. Lightning distorted his face and from his clenched teeth came a sprinkling of choked-back, foreshortened, gurgling words. He was reading a report:

"There can be no doubt whatsoever that this is his 'illegitimate' (as they used to say in rotten bourgeois society) son. Now we know how the pseudo-scientific bourgeoisie take their pleasures! Anyone can occupy seven rooms until such time as the shining sword of justice gleams red above their heads. Shv...r."

Insistently, the sound of a balalaika played with virtuoso skill penetrated through two dividing walls, and ornate variations on *The Moon Is Shining* got all confused in Philip Philipovich's head with the words of the newspaper report in a detestable mix-up. Having read to the end,

he made a play of spitting over his shoulder and automatically began to sing under his breath:

"The moon is shi-i-ning—shi-i-ning ... the moon is ... shi-ning... got to my brain, that accursed tune!"

He rang the bell. Zina's face appeared through the curtains.

"Tell him that it's five o'clock, time to stop, and call him in here, please."

Philip Philipovich sat at the table in his armchair. Between the fingers of his left hand projected the brown end of a cigar. By the door-curtain, lounging against the lintel, legs crossed, stood a small man of unprepossessing appearance. The hair on his head grew in harsh outcroppings like bushes on an uprooted field and his face was covered by an unshaven downy stubble. The brow was startlingly low. Almost immediately above the thick, black, unkempt brows rose the brush-like hair of the head.

The jacket with the tear under the left armpit had wisps of straw sticking to it, the striped trousers were torn on the right knee and stained lilac on the left. Knotted round the man's neck was an electric blue tie speared into place by an artificial ruby

pin. The colour of this tie was so loud that Philip Philipovich, from time to time closing his weary eyes, seemed to see against a background of total darkness, now on the ceiling and now on the wall, a blazing torch with a pale blue halo. Opening his eyes, he was at once blinded again because, showering out a fan of light from the floor, a pair of patent leather shoes topped by white spats immediately took and held the eye.

As if he were wearing galoshes, Philip Philipovich thought with a feeling of repulsion, sighed, sniffed, and began to fiddle with his extinguished cigar. The man at the door stood smoking a cigarette, scattering the ash over his shirt-front, and shooting the odd glance at the Professor from dull eyes.

The clock on the wall with the wooden partridge struck five times. Inside it, something continued to groan as Philip Philipovich opened the conversation.

"I believe I have already twice requested you not to use the high bunk in the kitchen for sleeping, especially in the day-time?"

The man coughed hoarsely, as though he were choking on a small bone, and replied:

"The air suits us better in the kitchen."

His voice was strange, rather muffled, yet at the same time resonant, as though it came from inside a small barrel.

Philip Philipovich shook his head and asked:

"Where did that repulsive object come from? I refer to the tie."

Eyes following the finger, the fellow squinted over his pouting lip to gaze fondly at the tie.

"What's repulsive about it?" the man said. "It's a smart tie. Darya Petrovna gave it me."

"Darya Petrovna gave you an abomination, only exceeded by the style of those shoes. What sort of glittering trash are they made of? Where did you get them? What did I ask you to do? Get some respectable shoes; and what do you appear in? Surely Doctor Bormental did not choose those?"

"I told him to get patent leather. Am I worse than other people? Just take a walk down the Kuznetsky ⁽⁵⁾ — they're all wearing patents."

Philip Philipovich turned his head and said with emphasis:

"Sleeping in the kitchen must stop. Do you understand? It is an impertinence! You are in the way there. There are women."

The man's face grew dark and he pouted:

"Huh — women! Hoity-toity! Fine ladies! An ordinary servant she is and puts on enough side for a commissar's wife. It's all that slut Zina telling tales."

Philip Philipovich gave him a quelling glance:

"Do not dare to call Zina a slut! Do you understand?"

Silence.

"Do you understand, I ask you?"

"I understand."

"Take that obscenity off your neck. You ... ought ... you just take a look at yourself in the mirror and see what kind of figure you cut! Some sort of clown. And don't throw your cigarette butts on the floor — for the hundredth time. I don't want to hear one more swearword in this flat — ever! Don't spit! There is the spittoon. Don't make a mess in the lavatory. Do not even talk to Zina any more. She complains that you wait for her

in dark corners. You be careful! Who answered a patient's inquiry The devil alone knows!?' Where do you think you are, in some kind of low dive?"

"Why are you so strict with me, Dad," the man suddenly burst out in a tearful whine.

Philip Philipovich blushed, his spectacles glittered.

"Who are you calling Dad? What do you mean by such familiarity? I never want to hear that word again. You are to address me by my name and patronymic."

A cheeky expression flared up in the man's face.

"Why are you like that all the time... Don't spit, don't smoke, don't go there ... what is all this, I'd like to know? There's as many rules as for passengers on the tram. Why do you make my life a misery? And as for my calling you 'Dad' — you've no call to object to that. Did I ask to have that operation?" The man's voice rose to an indignant bark. "A fine business! They go and grab hold of an animal, slit his head open with a knife, and then they can't face up to the result. Perhaps I didn't give my permission for the operation. And by the same token (the man looked up at

the ceiling as though recalling some kind of formula) and by the same token, neither did my next of kin. I may well have the right to sue you."

Philip Philipovich's eyes grew completely round, the cigar dropped from his hand. What a type! flashed through his head.

"You wish to complain that you have been turned into a man?" he demanded, eyes narrowing. "Perhaps you prefer to scavenge amongst the rubbish heaps? To freeze under the gateways? Now if I had known that!.."

"Why do you keep on at me! Rubbish heaps, rubbish heaps. I was making an honest living. And if I'd died under your knife? What have you to say to that, comrade?"

"Philip Philipovich!" Philip Philipovich exclaimed irritably. "I am no comrade of yours! This is monstrous!" A nightmare! A nightmare! the thought came unbidden to his mind.

"Well yes, of course, how else..." the man said ironically and victoriously. "We understand. Of course we are no comrade of yours! How could we be? We never had the benefit of being taught at universities,

we never lived in flats with 15 rooms and bathrooms. Only now the time has come to leave all that behind you. At the present time everybody has their rights."

Blanching, Philip Philipovich listened to the man's reasoning. The latter paused in his tirade and demonstratively headed for the ashtray with a chewed cigarette-end in his hand. His walk was ungainly. He took a long time squashing the stub into the shell with an expression that clearly said: "Garn! Take that!" Having put out the cigarette, on his way back to the door he suddenly snapped his teeth and buried his nose in his armpit.

"Use your fingers to catch fleas! Your fingers!" yelled Philip Philipovich furiously. "I cannot conceive where you get them from."

"Well, you don't think I breed them specially, do you?" the man said in injured tones. "Fleas like me, that's all there is to it," whereupon he searched the lining of his sleeve with his finger and released a puff of light orangey-red cotton wool into the air.

Philip Philipovich raised his eyes to the garlands on the ceiling and began to drum on the table with his fingers. Having

executed the flea, the man went to sit down. When he was seated he raised his hands and relaxed the wrists, letting them drop along the lapels of his jacket. His eyes appeared glued to the pattern of the parquet. He was surveying his shoes, which gave him great pleasure. Philip Philipovich glanced in the direction of the brilliantly twinkling stumpy toes and said:

"What else did you want to see me about?"

"What else? Simple enough. Documents. I need a document, Philip Philipovich."

Philip Philipovich twitched slightly.

"Hm ... the devil! A document! Yes indeed... Hm ... but perhaps, somehow or other, it might be possible..." His voice sounded uncertain and doomed.

"Where's your common sense?" replied the man with confidence. "How can one live without a document? That is—I beg pardon. But you know yourself a person without a document is strictly forbidden to exist. In the first place, the house committee..."

"What has the house committee to do with it?"

"What do you mean, what? They happened to run into me and they asked:

When are you going to register as an inhabitant of this house?"

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Philip Philipovich miserably. "They happened to run into you', 'they asked'. I can imagine what you told them. I forbade you to go slinking around on the stairs."

"What do you think I am, a convict?" the man demanded on a note of surprise, and even the red pin at his throat glowed up with the awareness of injured innocence. "What do you mean by 'go slinking around'? I take exception to such words. I walk, like everybody else."

As he spoke he stamped his lacquered feet on the parquet.

Philip Philipovich fell silent. His eyes wandered. Self-control, he thought. One must, after all, control oneself. He made for the sideboard and downed a glass of water in one gulp.

"Excellent," he said more calmly. "We won't argue over words. So, what has your charming house committee to say for itself?"

"What do you suppose it says? Anyway, there's no call to go branding them as charming. They defend people's interests."

"Whose interests, may one ask?"

"Everyone knows that. The working class element's."

Philip Philipovich's eyes bulged.

"Why, pray, should you consider yourself a *worker!*"

"That's obvious. I'm no Nepman. ⁽⁶⁾

"Right then, let that pass. And so, what precisely does it require of me in defence of your revolutionary interests?"

"That's obvious—you ought to register me. They say—whoever heard of anyone living in Moscow without being properly registered? That's for starters. Then the most important thing is to have a record card. I don't want to be taken for a deserter. Then again there's the Union, the Labour Exchange..." ⁽⁷⁾

"And how, pray, am I to go about registering you? — On the basis of this table-cloth, perhaps, or of my own passport? One must, after all, make allowances for the situation. Don't forget that you are—uh—hmm—you see, you are, so to speak—an unexpected development, a being that originated in the laboratory," Philip Philipovich spoke with ever-decreasing assurance.

The man preserved a triumphant silence.

"Excellent. What, in the last analysis, do we need in order to arrange everything to the satisfaction of that house committee of yours? You have neither name nor surname."

"I can't be blamed for that. All I have to do is to choose a name for myself. I announce it in the newspaper, and that's it."

"And what do you wish to be called?"

The man straightened his tie and replied:

"Polygraph Polygraphovich."

"Don't play the fool," frowned Philip Philipovich. "I am speaking seriously."

A sarcastic smile curled the man's meagre moustache.

"There's one thing I don't understand," he said gleefully and with emphasis. "I mustn't swear, I mustn't spit—but all I ever hear from you is ' Fool, fool.' I see that in the RSFSR swearing must be for Professors only."

Philip Philipovich flushed heavily, poured himself out a glass of water and smashed it. Having recruited his forces from another glass he thought: If he goes on this way he'll be telling me how I

should behave, and he'll be absolutely right. I am losing my self-control.

He half turned in his chair, bowing slightly from the waist with exaggerated courtesy and with iron resolve forced out:

"I beg your par-don. My nerves are playing me up. Your choice of name seemed curious to me. Where, I would be interested to know, did you dig it up?"

"The house committee advised me. We looked through the calendar and they said to me: what do you fancy? So I chose that one."

"There could not possibly be anything of the sort in any calendar."

"Now you do surprise me," the man smiled sarcastically. "Considering it's hanging in your consulting room."

Philip Philipovich, without getting up from his chair, lent over to the bell on the wall. Zina answered his ring.

"The calendar from the consulting room."

There was a pause. Zina returned with the calendar. Philip Philipovich asked:

"Where?"

"His day is celebrated on 4 March."

"Show me... Hm... Damn it... Into the stove with it, Zina, this moment."

Zina, eyes popping with fright, went off with the calendar and the man shook his head reproachfully.

"And may I know your surname?"

"I am prepared to accept my hereditary surname."

"What's that? Hereditary? And that is..."

"Sharikov."

Before the desk in the study stood the chairman of the house committee Shvonder wearing a leather jacket. Bormental sat in the armchair. The rosy cheeks of the doctor (he had just come in out of the frost) wore the same lost expression as was to be seen on the face of Philip Philipovich, who was sitting next to him.

"What should I write?" he asked impatiently.

"Well," said Shvonder, "there's nothing complicated about it. Write an attestation, Citizen Professor: that for this, that or the other reason, you know the person presenting the aforesaid to be in actual fact Sharikov, Polygraph Polygraphovich, who was, hm, born here in your flat."

Bormental made a bewildered movement in his chair. Philip Philipovich tugged at his moustache.

"Hm ... what a devilish situation! You can't imagine anything more idiotic. There can be no question of his having been born, he simply ... well, er..."

"It is for you to decide," remarked Shvonder with quiet malice. "Whether or not he was born ... taken by and large, it was your experiment, Professor! You are the creator of Citizen Sharikov."

"As simple as that," barked Sharikov from the bookcase. He was gazing at the reflection of his tie mirrored in the depths of the glass.

"I would be most grateful," Philip Philipovich retorted, "if you would keep out of this conversation. You have no grounds for saying it was simple... It was very far from simple."

"Why should I keep out of it," mumbled Sharikov, taking offence.

Shvonder immediately supported him.

"Forgive me, Professor, Citizen Sharikov is quite right. It is his right to take part in any discussion about his own fate and more especially as we are speaking of

documents. One's document is the most important thing in the world."

At that moment a deafening ringing above their heads interrupted the conversation. Philip Philipovich said, "Yes" into the receiver, flushed and shouted:

"Pray do not disturb me on matters of no importance! What business is it of yours?" And hung up with some violence.

Pure joy spread over Shvonder's face.

Philip Philipovich, scarlet in the face, cried out:

"In a word, let us get this over and done with!"

He tore a piece of paper from the block and wrote down a few words, then read aloud in an exasperated voice:

"I hereby certify ... the devil alone knows what this is all about... huhhm ... that the person presenting this paper is a human being obtained during a laboratory experiment on the brain, who requires documents... Dammit! In general I am against obtaining these idiotic documents. Signature—Professor Preobrazhensky."

"Rather curious, Professor," said Shvonder in an injured voice, "how can you say documents are idiotic? I cannot give permission for any person without

documents to reside in this house, particularly one not registered for the reserve with the militia. What if all of a sudden there was a war against the imperialist predators?"

"I'm not going to war, not for anyone!" Sharikov yelled, frowning into the bookcase.

Shvonder was taken aback, but recovered immediately and remarked politely to Sharikov:

"You, Citizen Sharikov, are speaking in a very irresponsible manner. It is essential to register for the reserve."

"I'll register for the reserve all right, but as to going to war — you can stuff that one," replied Sharikov, straightening his tie.

It was Shvonder's turn to be embarrassed. Preobrazhensky exchanged malicious but anguished glances with Bormental. There is a moral to be drawn, don't you think? Bormental nodded significantly.

"I was severely wounded in the course of the operation," whined Sharikov. "Look what they did to me," and he pointed to his head. Around the forehead ran the scar from the operation, still very fresh.

"Are you an anarchist-individualist?" asked Shvonder, raising his brows.

"I ought to have exemption on medical grounds," Sharikov replied to this one " — a white ticket."

"Well, we'll see, that is not the matter at issue," replied Shvonder in some confusion. "The fact remains that we shall send the Professor's attestation to the militia and you will get your document."

"Here, listen," Philip Philipovich suddenly interrupted him, clearly tormented by some secret thought. "You don't happen to have a spare room somewhere in this house, do you? I would agree to buy it from you."

Yellow sparks appeared in Shvonder's brown eyes. "No, Professor, I deeply regret, I have no spare room. And I won't have."

Philip Philipovich pursed his lips and said nothing. Again the telephone rang out shrilly. Philip Philipovich, without answering, silently tipped the receiver off the hook so that it hung suspended on the pale-blue cord. They all jumped. The old man's feeling the strain, thought Bormental, and Shvonder, eyes flashing, nodded and left.

Sharikov, the soles of his shoes squeaking, followed him.

The Professor was left alone with Bormental. After a short silence Philip Philipovich gave his head a little shake and said:

"This is a nightmare, upon my word. Do you see what is going on? I swear to you, my dear Doctor, that I am more exhausted as a result of the last two weeks than from the whole of the last fourteen years. What a type! And let me tell you..." Somewhere far away there was a muffled sound of cracking glass, then a suppressed female squeal, almost immediately extinguished. Something went zigzagging wildly along the corridor wall-paper in the direction of the consulting room where there was a sound of a heavy fall, immediately after which the thing came flying back. There was a banging of doors and from the kitchen a deep bellow from Darya Petrovna. Then a howl from Sharikov.

"Good God, now what's happened!" cried Philip Philipovich, charging for the door.

"A cat," Bormental realised and darted out after him. They dashed along the corridor into the hall, burst into it and

turned from there into the corridor towards the lavatory and bathroom. Zina leapt out from the kitchen straight into the arms of Philip Philipovich.

"How many times have I ordered that there should be no cats!" yelled Philip Philipovich, quite beside himself. "Where is it? Ivan Arnoldovich, for God's sake go and reassure the patients in reception."

"In the bathroom, the devil, he's sitting in the bathroom!" cried Zina, quite out of breath.

Philip Philipovich put his shoulder to the bathroom door, but it would not open.

"Open up — this instant!"

In answer something leapt around the bathroom walls, bowls were scattered and Sharikov's wild voice sounded in a muffled roar from behind the door:

"I'll get you, I'll have your guts..."

There was a sound of water running along the pipes, then pouring out. Philip Philipovich put all his weight on the door and began to force it. Darya Petrovna, all dishevelled and steamy, her face distorted, appeared on the threshold of the kitchen. Then the high-up pane of glass right up against the ceiling between the bathroom and the kitchen cracked right across in a

snaky line, two fragments of glass came tumbling down and after them crashed a tiger-coloured fierce cat of vast size with a pale-blue ribbon round its neck and a distinct resemblance to a militiaman. It landed plump on the table in the middle of a large oval dish which cracked from end to end, leapt from the dish onto the floor, performed a pirouette on three legs, waving the fourth as if in a ballet, and promptly filtered itself through the narrow opening onto the back stairs. The gap grew wider and in place of the cat the face of an old woman in a headscarf peered in at the door: the old woman's billowing skirt scattered with white polka dots followed her head into the kitchen. Rubbing her sunken mouth with index finger and thumb, she took in the kitchen with one glance of her sharp, swollen eyes and pronounced with undisguised curiosity:

"Oh, Lord Jesus Christ!"

White-faced, Philip Philipovich strode across the kitchen and asked the old woman on a note of menace:

"What do you want?"

"I'm curious to see the talking dog," answered the old woman placatingly and crossed herself.

Philip Philipovich turned paler still, went right up to the old woman and whispered in a breathless voice:

"Out, out of the kitchen this minute!"

The old woman backed away to the door and said in injured tones:

"That's very rude of you, Professor."

"Out, I say!" repeated Philip Philipovich and his eyes grew round as an owl's. He slammed the back door behind the old woman with his own hand. "Darya Petrovna, I especially asked you!"

"Philip Philipovich," replied Darya Petrovna, doubling her bare hands into fists. "What can I do? There are people trying to get in all day long, I've no time for my own work."

The water in the bathroom continued to roar, a muffled menace, but there was no further sound of voices. Doctor Bormental came into the kitchen.

"Ivan Arnoldovich, I beg you ... hm... How many patients have you got out there?"

"Eleven."

"Let them all go, I shall cancel reception for today."

Philip Philipovich rapped on the door of the bathroom with his knuckles:

"Come out this instant! Why have you locked yourself in?"

"Woo-hoo!" answered Sharikov's voice dully and pitifully.

"What the hell!.. I can't hear, turn off the water."

"Wuff! Wuff!"

"Turn off the water, I said! What's he done, I don't understand!" cried Philip Philipovich, losing all self-control.

Zina and Darya Petrovna opened the door and peered out from the kitchen. Philip Philipovich battered on the door with his fist once again.

"There he is!" yelled Darya Petrovna from the kitchen.

Philip Philipovich rushed to her side. From the broken window under the ceiling had appeared and was now protruding the face of Polygraph Polygraphovich. It was all awry, the eyes brimming with tears and a freshly bleeding scratch flaming the length of the nose.

"Have you lost your wits?" asked Philip Philipovich. "Why don't you come out?"

Sharikov, himself thoroughly upset and frightened, looked round and replied:

"I've locked myself in."

"Draw back the bolt. What's the matter with you, you've seen a bolt before, haven't you?"

"The damned thing won't open!" answered Sharikov in some alarm.

"Oh, heavens! He's put it on double lock!" cried Zina and threw up her hands.

"There is a button there!" yelled Philip Philipovich, trying to make his voice heard above the running water. "Press it down ... down! Press it down!"

Sharikov disappeared and a moment later reappeared at the window.

"I can't see my paw before my face!" he yapped.

"Turn on the light. He's run mad!"

"That filthy great torn smashed the bulb," replied Sharikov, "and when I tried to seize the blighter by the legs I pulled out the tap and now I can't find it."

All three threw up their hands and froze where they stood.

Five minutes later Bormental, Zina and Darya Petrovna were sitting in a row on a wet carpet rolled up against the bottom of the bathroom door, pressing it against the

crack with their behinds, and the porter Fyodor was clambering up a wooden ladder to the high window, holding a lighted wax candle with a white bow, a memento of Darya Petrovna's wedding. His bottom, clad in bold grey check, stuck in the opening for a moment — then vanished.

"Do-hoo-hoo!" Sharikov's voice sounded through the rush of water.

Then Fyodor's:

"Philip Philipovich, we'll have to open the door anyway. Let it run out, we'll pump it from the kitchen."

"Open, then!" cried Philip Philipovich angrily.

The three sentries rose from the carpet, someone pushed the door from inside the bathroom and, immediately, the water flooded out into the small corridor. Here it divided into three streams: straight ahead into the lavatory opposite, to the right into the kitchen and to the left into the hall. Paddling and jumping, Zina reached the door and closed it. Fyodor emerged ankle deep in water and, for some reason, with a broad grin on his face. He was all wet, like a seaman in his oilcloth.

"Only just managed to get the tap back in, the pressure's very strong," he explained.

"Where's that...?" Philip Philipovich raised one leg with a curse.

"Afraid to come out," explained Fyodor with a stupid grin.

"You going to beat me, Dad?" came Sharikov's tearful whine from the bathroom.

"Idiot!" responded Philip Philipovich succinctly.

Zina and Darya Petrovna, their skirts tucked up to the knees and bare-legged, Sharikov and the porter both with rolled up trousers and bare feet, worked away mopping up the kitchen with sopping rags, wringing them out into dirty buckets or the basin. The abandoned oven hummed. The water seeped away under the door onto the echoing staircase and plunged into the stairwell, right down to the basement.

Bormental stood on tiptoe in a deep puddle on the parquet and conversed with someone through a crack in the front door from which he had not unlatched the chain.

"There will be no reception today. The Professor is unwell. Be so kind as to move away from the door, we've had a burst pipe."

"But when is the reception?" the voice behind the door insisted. "I would only take up one minute..."

"I can't," Bormental rocked from toes to heels. "The Professor is in bed and we have a burst pipe. I'll try to arrange it for tomorrow. Zina! My dear! Come and mop the water up from here or it will run out onto the front stairs."

"The rags aren't absorbing."

"We'll bail it out with mugs," came Fyodor's voice. "Coming."

People kept ringing at the door and Bormental was already standing with the soles of his shoes in the water.

"When will the operation take place?" a voice insisted and someone tried to insert himself into the crack.

"We've had a burst pipe..."

"I'd be all right in galoshes..."

Bluish silhouettes appeared beyond the door.

"No, please come tomorrow."

"But I have an appointment."

"Tomorrow. There's been an accident with the water system."

Fyodor, at the doctor's feet, was floundering about in the hall scraping with a mug, but the scratched Sharikov had thought up a new method. He had made a roll out of a huge rag, lay on his stomach in the water and swished it back before the roll into the lavatory.

"Why are you spreading it all over the flat, you hobgoblin," scolded Darya Petrovna. "Pour it down the sink."

"No time for the sink," replied Sharikov, scooping up the cloudy water with his hands. "It'll get out into the front staircase."

A small bench slid out from the corridor with a rasping sound. Very erect and superbly balanced, Philip Philipovich propelled it along, his feet clad in blue striped socks.

"Ivan Arnoldovich, there's no need to answer the door. Go to the bedroom. I'll give you a pair of slippers."

"Don't bother, Philip Philipovich, it's not worth troubling your head."

"Then put on galoshes."

"It doesn't matter, honestly. My feet are wet anyway."

"Oh dear me!" Philip Philipovich was upset.

"What a nasty animal!" Sharikov unexpectedly chimed in and hopped out in a squatting position with a soup bowl in one hand.

Bormental slammed the door, unable to contain himself any longer, and burst out laughing. Philip Philipovich's nostrils expanded and his spectacles glinted.

"Who are you speaking of?" he asked Sharikov from his superior height. "If I may ask."

"I'm talking about the cat. Filthy brute," said Sharikov, failing to meet the Professor's eye.

"You know, Sharikov," remarked Philip Philipovich, taking a deep breath, "I have never seen a more brazen creature than you."

Bormental giggled.

"You," continued Philip Philipovich, "are an insolent fellow. How dare you say such a thing? You are the cause of all this and you ... but no! It's beyond everything!"

"Sharikov, tell me, please," said Bormental, "how long are you going to go on chasing cats? You should be ashamed

of yourself! It's a disgrace! You're a barbarian!"

"Why am I a barbarian?" muttered Sharikov sulkily. "I'm no barbarian. There's no bearing with him in the flat. Always on the lookout for something to steal. He ate all Darya's mince. I wanted to give him a good hiding."

"It's you who should be given a good hiding," said Philip Philipovich. "Just look at your face in the mirror."

"He almost scratched my eyes out," Sharikov responded glumly, dabbing at his eye with a wet, dirty hand.

By the time the parquet, which had turned black from the damp, had dried out somewhat, and all the mirrors were covered with a veil of steam, the doorbell had ceased to ring. Philip Philipovich, in red Morocco slippers, stood in the hall.

"There you are, Fyodor."

"Many thanks."

"Go and get changed at once. Ah, I know: go and ask Darya Petrovna to pour you a glass of vodka."

"Thank you very much indeed," Fyodor hesitated, then said: "There's another thing, Philip Philipovich. I do beg pardon, I feel it's really a shame to trouble you —

only — for a pane of glass in flat No. 7... Citizen Sharikov threw stones."

"At the cat?" asked Philip Philipovich, frowning like a thundercloud.

"That's the trouble — at the owner of the flat. He's threatened to go to law."

"The devil!"

"Sharikov was cuddling his cook, so he chased him. And they had an argument."

"For goodness sake always tell me about such things at once. How much?"

"One and a half."

Philip Philipovich produced three shiny 50 kopeck pieces and handed them to Fyodor.

"Fancy paying one and a half roubles for such a filthy swine," a hollow voice sounded from the door. "He himself..."

Philip Philipovich swung round, bit his lip and silently bore down on Sharikov, pressing him into the reception room where he immediately turned the key on him. From inside Sharikov immediately started banging on the door with his fists.

"Don't you *dare!*" exclaimed Philip Philipovich in a clearly sick voice.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all," remarked Fyodor significantly. "Never in all my born

days have I seen such an impertinent brute."

Bormental appeared as if from under the earth.

"Philip Philipovich, please don't upset yourself."

The energetic young doctor opened the door into the hall and from there you could hear his voice:

"Where do you think you are? In a pub, or what?"

"That's the way," the decisive Fyodor added. "That's the way ... and a clip over the ear..."

"Ah, Fyodor, how can you say such things?" muttered Philip Philipovich gruffly.

"But I'm sorry for you, Philip Philipovich."

7

"No, no and no!" said Bormental insistently. "Be so good as to tuck in your napkin."

"What's wrong now, for God's sake," growled Sharikov crossly.

"Thank you, Doctor," said Philip Philipovich gratefully. "I'm tired of making critical remarks."

"I will not allow you to eat till you tuck it in. Zina, take the mayonnaise from Sharikov."

"What do you mean 'take'?" Sharikov was upset. "I'm tucking it in."

With his left hand he hid the dish from Zina and with his right put the napkin into his collar which at once made him look like a client at the barber's.

"And please use your fork," added Bormental.

Sharikov gave a long sigh and began to fish for pieces of sturgeon in the thick sauce.

"Another glass of vodka?" he announced on a tentative note.

"Don't you think you've had enough?" asked Bormental. "You've been making rather free with the vodka lately."

"Do you grudge it?" Sharikov inquired, darting a glance at him from under his brows.

"Nonsense..." declared the austere Philip Philipovich, but Bormental interrupted.

"Don't trouble yourself, Philip Philipovich. Leave it to me. You, Sharikov, are talking rubbish and what is particularly tiresome is that you do so with complete assurance, as though what you say admitted no argument. Of course I don't grudge the vodka, all the more as it belongs to Philip Philipovich. Simply — it's bad for you. That's in the first place and, in the second, your behaviour leaves much to be desired even without vodka."

Bormental pointed to the strips glued over the glass of the sideboard.

"Zina, give me some more fish, please," pronounced the Professor.

Sharikov, in the meantime, had stretched out for the decanter and, casting a sidelong look at Bormental, had poured himself a small glass.

"And then you should offer it to other people," said Bormental. "And in this order. First Philip Philipovich, then me, then yourself."

Sharikov's mouth curved into a scarcely distinguishable satirical smile and he poured out a glass of vodka all round.

"Everything here's like on parade," he said, "the napkin here, the tie there, and 'excuse me', and 'please-merci', and

nothing natural, you torment yourselves as though you were still under the tsar."

"And what is 'natural', may I ask?"

Sharikov did not volunteer any answer to Philip Philipovich but raised his glass and pronounced:

"Well, I wish you all..."

"And the same to you," responded Bormental, not without irony.

Sharikov downed the content of his glass, made a face, raised a piece of bread to his nose, sniffed it, then swallowed it, during which procedure his eyes filled with tears.

"An old hand," remarked Philip Philipovich, apropos of nothing in particular, as if in a deep reverie.

Bormental glanced at him in surprise.

"I beg your pardon..."

"An old hand!" repeated Philip Philipovich and shook his head bitterly. "There's nothing to be done about it — Klim."

Bormental's eyes met Philip Philipovich's with acute interest.

"You think, Philip Philipovich?"

"I don't think, I am quite convinced." "Surely," began Bormental and checked

himself, glancing at Sharikov, who was frowning suspiciously.

"*Spater,*" said Philip Philipovich quietly in German. "*Gut,*" replied the assistant.

Zina brought in the turkey. Bormental poured Philip Philipovich some red wine and offered it to Sharikov.

"I don't want that. I'd rather have another vodka." His face had become shiny, there was sweat on his forehead and he seemed in better spirits. Even Philip Philipovich was rather more kindly disposed after the wine. His eyes cleared, he looked upon Sharikov, whose black head sat squatly on the napkin like a fly in sour-cream, with more benevolence.

Bormental, however, having taken refreshment, felt a desire for action.

"Well now, what shall you and I do this evening?" he asked Sharikov.

The latter blinked and said:

"Go to the circus, I like that best."

"Every day to the circus," remarked Philip Philipovich good-naturedly. "That must be rather boring, I should think. In your place I would go to the theatre at least once."

"I won't go to the theatre," snarled Sharikov with animosity and made the sign of the cross over his mouth.

"Belching at table spoils other people's appetite," remarked Bormental automatically. "But forgive me ... why, in fact, do you dislike the theatre?"

Sharikov put his empty vodka glass to his eye as though it were a pair of binoculars, thought and pouted.

"Well, it's all a lot of playing the fool... talk, talk, talk ... pure counter-revolution."

Philip Philipovich tilted back his gothic chair and laughed so much that the golden stockade in his mouth gleamed and sparkled. Bormental only shook his head.

"You really ought to read something," he said, "or else, don't you know..."

"I do read, I read a lot," replied Sharikov and suddenly, with predatory speed poured himself half a glass of vodka.

"Zina," called Philip Philipovich anxiously. "Clear away the vodka, child. We won't be needing it any more. What are you reading?"

Before his mind's eye arose a picture of a desert island, a palm tree, a man in skins and a cap. "You should try Robinson..."

"That ... what do they call it ... correspondence between Engels and ... what's the blighter's name ... Kautsky."

Bormental's fork stopped half way to his mouth with a piece of white meat on the end of it. Philip Philipovich spilt some wine. Sharikov, meanwhile, took advantage of the situation to knock back his vodka.

Philip Philipovich, elbows on table, gazed at Sharikov attentively and asked:

"I would be interested to hear what you have to say about what you have read?"

Sharikov shrugged his shoulders.

"I disagree."

"With whom? With Engels or with Kautsky?"

"With both."

"This is quite remarkable, by God. *Everyone who says that another ...* and what would you suggest for your part?"

"What's the use of suggesting? As it is they write and they write ... congress, various Germans... Fills your head with a lot of wind. The thing to do is to take everything, then divide it equally."

"That's just what I thought!" exclaimed Philip Philipovich, slapping the table with

the palm of his hand. "That's just what I supposed."

"How would you set about it?" asked Bormental, intrigued.

"How I'd set about it?" Sharikov was eager to talk after the vodka. "That's easy. What you've got now, for instance: one person has settled into seven rooms and has forty pairs of trousers while another is a homeless tramp looking for his food in rubbish bins."

"When you speak of seven rooms you are, of course, referring to me?" Philip Philipovich narrowed his eyes proudly.

Sharikov drew his head in between his shoulders and said nothing.

"Well, that's fine then, I'm not against a fair division. How many people did you turn away yesterday, Doctor?"

"39," answered Bormental promptly.

"Hm, 390 roubles. Well, if the three men take the sin on themselves (we won't count the ladies: Zina and Darya Petrovna) that will be 130 roubles from you, Sharikov. Be so good as to make your contribution."

"That's a fast one," replied Sharikov, taking fright. "What's that for?"

"For the tap and for the cat," snapped Philip Philipovich, emerging from his state of ironic detachment.

"Philip Philipovich!" exclaimed Bormental anxiously.

"Wait. For the chaos you created and for making it impossible for me to attend to my reception. It is intolerable. A human being goes leaping round the flat like something just down from the trees, tearing out taps. Who killed Madame Polasukher's cat? Who..."

"And, Sharikov, two days ago you bit a lady on the stairs," added Bormental.

"You stand..." roared Philip Philipovich.

"But she slapped my face," squealed Sharikov. "My face isn't public property."

"Because you had pinched her bosom!" cried Bormental, upsetting his glass. "You stand..."

"You stand on the lowest rung of evolution!" Philip Philipovich shouted at him. "You are a being just beginning to take form, still weak from the intellectual point of view, all your actions are purely bestial, and in the presence of two people with university education you dare to let yourself go in the most unforgivable manner and offer advice of a positively

cosmic nature with positively cosmic stupidity about how everything should be divided up ... and at the same time you do things like eating the tooth powder..."

"The day before yesterday," Bormental backed him up.

"So, Sir, I am forced to rub your nose (and why, by the way, have you rubbed the zinc ointment off it?), I am forced to rub your nose in the fact that your business is to keep quiet and listen to what you're told, to learn and try to become a reasonably acceptable member of the community. Besides which, what scoundrel was it who gave you that book?"

"Everyone's a scoundrel to you," answered Sharikov nervously, confounded by the attack from both flanks.

"I can guess!" exclaimed Philip Philipovich red with anger.

"Well, and what if he did? Well, Shvonder gave it to me. He's not a scoundrel ... it's to develop my mind..."

"I can see how it's been developing after Kautsky!" Philip Philipovich cried shrilly, turning yellow. At this point he furiously pressed the bell on the wall. "What happened today is the best possible proof of that. Zina!"

"Zina!" called Bormental.

"Zina!" yelled the frightened Sharikov.

Zina came running palefaced.

"Zina, in the reception room, there ... is it in the reception room?"

"In the reception room," answered Sharikov meekly. "Green as venom."

"A green book..."

"Now you'll go and burn it!" Sharikov exclaimed in despair. "It's public property, from the library."

"The *Correspondence*, it's called, between what's his name ... er ... Engels and that other devil... into the fire with it!"

Zina sped away.

"I would hang that Shvonder from the first dry branch, I give you my word!" cried Philip Philipovich, attacking the wing of his turkey. "The poisonous fellow sits in the house like a boil. Quite apart from the fact that he writes all kinds of libellous gossip for the newspapers..."

Sharik began to steal the odd malicious, ironic glances at the Professor. Philip Philipovich glanced across at him in his turn and fell silent.

Oh, nothing good will come of us three being in this flat, thought Bormental prophetically.

Zina brought in on a round plate a rumbaba, russet on the right side and rosy on the left, and the coffee pot.

"I'll not eat that," announced Sharikov with defiant repulsion.

"Nobody's asking you. Behave. Doctor, may I?"

The meal was finished in silence.

Sharikov produced a squashed cigarette from his pocket and began puffing smoke. Having finished his coffee, Philip Philipovich looked at his watch, pressed the repeater, and it tenderly chimed quarter past eight. Philip Philipovich tilted back his gothic chair and reached for the newspaper on the side-table.

"Doctor, I beg you, go to the circus with him. Only check carefully through the programme and make sure there are no cats."

"How can they let such trash into a circus?" remarked Sharikov darkly, shaking his head.

"They let in all sorts," retorted Philip Philipovich ambiguously. "What's on there tonight?"

"Solomonsky has four ... things called Yussems ⁽⁸⁾ and a spinning man," Bormental began to read out.

"What are Yussems?" inquired Philip Philipovich suspiciously.

"Goodness knows. I've never met the word before."

"In that case you'd better look through the Nikitins'. One must have things clear."

"The Nikitins, the Nikitins ... hm ... have elephants and the ultimate in human dexterity."

"Right. What have you to say to elephants, dear Sharikov?" Philip Philipovich asked Sharikov mistrustfully.

He took offence.

"You may think I don't understand, but I do," Sharikov replied. "Cats are different. Elephants are useful animals."

"Well then, that's settled. If they are useful, then go and take a look at them. Do as Ivan Arnoldovich tells you. And don't get talking with strangers in the buffet. Ivan Arnoldovich, please do not treat Sharikov to beer."

Ten minutes later Ivan Arnoldovich and Sharikov, dressed in a cap with a duck-bill peak and a cloth coat with raised collar, left for the circus. In the flat there was silence. Philip Philipovich was in his study. He lit the lamp under the heavy green shade, from which it immediately became

very peaceful in the huge study, and began to pace the room. The end of his cigar glowed long and hot with a pale green fire. The Professor's hands were thrust deep into his trouser pockets and unhappy thoughts tormented his learned brow with the smoothly combed sparse hair. He made little chucking sounds, singing between his teeth: "*To the sacred shores of the Nile...*" and muttering something. Finally, he laid the cigar across the ash-tray, went to a cupboard entirely made of glass and lit the whole study with three extremely powerful projector lamps on the ceiling. From the cupboard, from the third glass shelf, Philip Philipovich pulled out a narrow jar and began to examine it, frowning in the light of the lamps. In the transparent, viscose liquid swam suspended, not touching the bottom, a small white lump — extracted from the depth of Sharik's brain. Shrugging his shoulders, his lips twisted in an ironic smile, Philip Philipovich devoured it with his eyes, as though he wanted to discover from the unsinkable white lump the mainspring of the startling events which had turned upside down the whole course of life in the Prechistenka flat.

It is quite possible that the great scholar did in fact make such a discovery. At least, having looked his fill at the brain appendage, he put the jar away in the cupboard, locked it with a key, slipped the key into his waistcoat pocket and flung himself, hunching his shoulders and thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket, onto the leather sofa. For a long time he puffed away at his second cigar, chewing the end quite to pieces and finally, in total solitude, glowing green like a silver-haired Faust, he exclaimed:

"As God is my witness, I believe I'll take the risk."

To that, no one made any reply. All sound ceased in the flat. In Obukhov Alley, as everyone knows, all traffic falls silent after 11 o'clock. Very occasionally came the sound of the distant footsteps of some belated passer-by, they pattered past somewhere behind the thick curtains and died away. In the study Philip Philipovich's repeater watch chimed softly beneath his finger from the small pocket... The Professor impatiently awaited the return of Dr. Bormental and Sharikov.

There is no telling precisely what risk Philip Philipovich had decided to take. He took no further action for the rest of the week and, possibly as a result of this passivity, life in the flat became excessively eventful.

About six days after the business with the water and the cat, the young man who had turned out to be a woman from the house committee came to see Sharikov and presented him with his documents. Sharikov promptly pocketed them and immediately thereafter called Dr. Bormental: "Bormental!"

"Oh, no, you don't. Please address me by my name and patronymic!" replied Bormental, his face changing.

It must be said that, in the course of the six days that had elapsed, the surgeon had quarrelled at least eight times with his protege. The atmosphere in the Obukhov rooms was tense.

"In that case you call me by my name and patronymic!" replied Sharikov with every justification.

"No!" roared Philip Philipovich from the doorway. "I cannot have you called by a name and patronymic like that in my flat. If you wish that we should address you with less familiarity and stop calling you Sharikov, we will call you 'Mister Sharikov'."

"I'm no mister, all the misters are in Paris!" Sharikov barked.

"Shvonder's work!" cried Philip Philipovich. "All right then, I'll get even with that villain. There will be no one but misters and masters in my flat for as long as I live here! If not — either I shall leave this place, or you will, and most probably it will be you. I shall put a notice in the newspaper today and I am sure we shall soon find a room for you."

"I'm not such a fool as to leave this place," Sharikov answered quite distinctly.

"What!" Philip Philipovich gasped and his face changed to such a degree that Bormental flew to his side and tenderly and anxiously took him by the sleeve.

"None of your cheek now, Monsieur Sharikov!" Bormental raised his voice threateningly. Sharikov stepped back and pulled from his pocket three papers: one

green, one yellow and one white and, poking his fingers at them, said:

"There you are. I am a member of the accommodation cooperative and I have the indisputable right to 13 square yards of space in flat No. 5, the tenant responsible for which is Professor Preobrazhensky." Sharikov thought for a moment and added a phrase which Bormental's mind mechanically registered as new:

"With your kind permission."

Philip Philipovich caught his lip in his teeth and uncautiously remarked through it:

"I swear I'll shoot that Shvonder before I've finished with him."

Sharikov was onto the words most attentively and it was clear from his eyes that they had made a sharp impact.

"Philip Philipovich, *vorsichtig...*" Bormental began warningly.

"Well, but you know... Such a dirty trick!" cried Philip Philipovich. "You bear in mind, Sharikov ... mister, that I, if you permit yourself one more impertinence, I shall give you no more dinners or any other food in my house. 13 square yards — that is charming, but after all there is

nothing in that frog-coloured paper that obliges me to feed you."

Here Sharikov took fright and his mouth fell open.

"I can't do without proper nourishment," he mumbled. "Where'll I get my grub?"

"In that case behave yourself!" chorused the two esculapians in one voice.

Sharikov became significantly quieter and on that particular day did no further harm to anyone other than himself: making full use of the short space of time Bormental had to leave the house, he got hold of his razor and cut open his own cheekbone so effectively that Philip Philipovich and Dr. Bormental had to sew him up, after which Sharikov continued to howl and weep for a long time.

The following night in the green semi-darkness of the study two men were sitting: Philip Philipovich and his faithful, devoted assistant Bormental. Everyone in the house was asleep. Philip Philipovich was in his azure dressing-gown and red slippers, Bormental in his shirt-sleeves and blue braces. On the round table between the doctors next to a plump album stood a bottle of cognac, a saucer

with slices of lemon and a cigar-box. The scholars, having filled the room with smoke, were hotly discussing the latest event: that evening Sharikov had appropriated two ten-rouble notes that had been lying under a paper-weight, disappeared from the flat and returned late and stone-drunk. But this was not all. With him had appeared two persons unknown who had made an unseemly din on the front stairs and declared their intention of spending the night as Sharikov's guests. The aforesaid persons had only taken their departure after Fyodor, who had been present at the spectacle in a light autumn coat thrown over his underwear, had rung up the forty-fifth department of the militia. The two persons took their departure instantly, as soon as Fyodor had put down the telephone. After they had gone it was discovered that the malachite ash-tray from the shelf beneath the mirror in the hall had vanished, no one knew where, and likewise Philip Philipovich's beaver hat and his cane, on which was inscribed in flowing gold letters: "To dear and respected Philip Philipovich from his

grateful graduates on the day..." and then, in Roman figures, the number XXV.

"Who are they?" Philip Philipovich advanced on Sharikov with clenched fists.

Swaying and shrinking back amongst the fur coats, Sharikov declared that the persons were unknown to him, that they were not just any old sons of bitches, but good people.

"The most extraordinary thing is that they were both drunk. How did they manage it?" asked Philip Philipovich in amazement, gazing at the place on the rack where the souvenir of the anniversary had once stood.

"Professionals," explained Fyodor, heading back to bed with a rouble in his pocket.

Sharikov categorically denied taking the two ten-rouble notes and in doing so dropped dark hints as to the fact that he was not the only one in the flat.

"Aha, then possibly it was Doctor Bormental who pinched the notes?" inquired Philip Philipovich in a quiet voice tinged with menace.

Sharikov rocked on his feet, opened totally glazed eyes and suggested:

"Perhaps that slut Zina took them..."

"What's that?" screamed Zina, materialising in the doorway like an apparition, and clasping her unbuttoned blouse to her breast with the palm of her hand. "How could he..."

Philip Philipovich's neck was suffused with crimson.

"Calm yourself, Zina dear," he pronounced, holding out his hand to her. "Don't worry, we will deal with this."

Zina promptly burst into tears, her mouth going right down at the corners, and the little hand jumping on her collar bone.

"There, there, Zina, you should be ashamed of yourself! Who could possibly think such a thing! Fie, what a disgrace!" Bormental broke out, at a loss.

"Well, Zina, you are a fool, God forgive me," Philip Philipovich began saying. But at that moment Zina's lament stopped of its own accord and they all fell silent. Sharikov was clearly unwell. Knocking his head against the wall he emitted a sound, something between "ee" and "eh" — something like "eh-ee-eh!" — his face turned pale, and his jaw began to work in spasms.

"A bucket, bring the scoundrel the bucket from the consulting room."

And they all rushed round ministering to Sharikov in his sickness. When he was led off to bed, staggering along, supported by Bormental, he cursed very tenderly and melodiously, struggling to get his tongue round the ugly words.

All this had happened in the small hours at about one o'clock and now it was around three, but the two in the study were still wide awake, stimulated by the cognac and lemon. They had so filled the room with smoke that it rose and fell in slow layers, not even wavering.

Doctor Bormental, pale-faced, the light of purpose in his eyes, raised his wasp-waisted glass.

"Philip Philipovich!" he exclaimed warmly. "I shall never forget how I first came to make your acquaintance as a half-starved student and how you gave me a place at the faculty. Believe me, Philip Philipovich, you are much more to me than a professor, a teacher... My respect for you is unbounded... Permit me to embrace you, dear Philip Philipovich."

"Yes, my dear fellow," Philip Philipovich murmured in embarrassment and rose to

meet him. Bormental embraced him and planted a kiss on the downy moustaches, now thoroughly impregnated with cigar smoke.

"Honestly, Philip Phili..."

"So touched, so touched — thank you," said Philip Philipovich. "Dear boy, I shout at you sometimes during operations. You must forgive an old man's peppery nature. In fact, I am very lonely, you see... *From Seville to Granada...*"

"Philip Philipovich, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried out the fiery Bormental. "If you don't want to offend me, never say such things to me again."

"Well, thank you... *To the sacred shores of the Nile...* Thank you ... and I have come to love you as a most capable doctor."

"Philip Philipovich, let me tell you!" exclaimed Bormental with passion, leapt up from his chair and tightly closed the door leading into the corridor, then, having returned to his place, continued in a whisper: "That is — the only way out! It is not for me, of course, give you advice, Philip Philipovich, but just take a look at yourself. You are completely exhausted, you can't continue to work in these circumstances!"

"Quite impossible," admitted Philip Philipovich with a sigh.

"Well, and that is unthinkable," whispered Bormental. "Last time you said you were afraid for my sake, and I was so touched, if only you knew how touched, dear Professor. But I am not a child, after all, and I am well aware what terrible consequences there could be. But it is my firm opinion that there is no other way out."

Philip Philipovich rose, made a gesture of rejection and exclaimed: "Do not tempt me, do not even talk about it!" The Professor took a turn about the room, emitting waves of smoke. "I won't even listen. You must understand what would happen if we were discovered. Neither you nor I' given our social origins' will have the least chance of getting away with it, in spite of the fact that we should be first offenders. At least, I suppose your origins are not of the right sort, are they, dear boy?"

"What a hope! My father was a police investigator in Vilnius," replied Bormental bitterly, finishing off his cognac.

"Well, there you are then, what more could you ask? That is a bad heredity.

Hard to imagine anything more damaging. By the way, though, I'm wrong, mine is worse still. My father was a cathedral archpriest. *Merci. From Seville to Granada ... in the still of the night ...* there it is, damn it."

"Philip Philipovich, you are a great man, world famous, and just because of some son-of-a-bitch, if you'll excuse the expression... Surely they can't touch you, what are you saying?"

"All the more reason not to do it," retorted Philip Philipovich thoughtfully, pausing and looking round at the glass cupboard.

"But why?"

"Because *you* are not world famous."

"Well, of course."

"There you are, you see. And to desert a colleague in such a fix while remaining high and dry oneself on the pinnacle of one's own world fame, forgive me... I am a Moscow student, not a Sharikov."

Philip Philipovich raised his shoulders proudly which made him look like an ancient French king.

"Heigh-ho, Philip Philipovich," sighed Bormental sadly. "That means you will wait until we manage to make a 'real'

human being out of this hooligan? Is that it?"

Philip Philipovich stopped him with a gesture, poured himself some cognac, sipped, sucked a section of lemon and said:

"Ivan Arnoldovich, I would like your opinion: do I understand anything in the anatomy and physiology of, let us say, the hypophysis of the human brain. What do you think?"

"Philip Philipovich, how could you ask?" replied Bormental ardently, throwing out his hands.

"All right then. Without false modesty. I also consider that I am not the last specialist in that field here in Moscow."

"And I consider that you are the first — not only in Moscow but in London or Oxford!" Bormental broke in with ardour.

"Well, all right, let us assume that is so. Well then, future Professor Bormental: that is something no one could perform successfully. And there's an end to it. It's not worth considering. You can quote me. Preobrazhensky said: *Finita. Klim!*" Philip Philipovich cried out solemnly and the cupboard answered him with a clink. "Klim," he repeated. "There it is,

Bormental, you are the first follower of my school and, apart from that, as I realised today, you are my friend. And so I will tell you in secret and as a friend — of course, I know that you won't hold me up to ridicule — that Preobrazhensky, the old donkey, went into that operation as irresponsibly as a third-year student. It's true we made a discovery and you yourself are aware of what significance," here Philip Philipovich made a tragic gesture with both hands towards the window curtain as if embracing the whole of Moscow, "but just keep in mind, Ivan Arnoldovich, that the only result of this discovery will be that we shall all be fed up with this Sharikov to here," Preobrazhensky slapped his own full, apoplectic neck. "You may rest assured of that! If only someone," continued Philip Philipovich in an ecstasy of self-reproach, "would fling me down on the floor here and flog me, I'd pay him fifty roubles, I swear I could. *From Seville to Granada...* The devil take me... I sat there for five years digging the pituitaries out of brains. You know how much work I got through — I can hardly believe it myself. And now the question arises — why? In order one fine day to transform a most

likeable dog into such a nasty piece of work it makes the hair stand on end."

"Absolutely disgusting!"

"I quite agree with you. There you see, Doctor, what happens when a scholar, instead of advancing parallel to and feeling his way in step with nature, decides to force a question and raise the curtain: out pops a Sharikov and there you are, like him or lump him."

"Philip Philipovich, and if it had been Spinoza's brain?"

"Yes!" Philip Philipovich snapped. "Yes! If only the poor unfortunate dog doesn't die under the knife, and you've seen what kind of an operation it is. In a word, I, Philip Preobrazhensky, have never done anything more difficult in my life. It's possible to take the hypophysis of a Spinoza or any other creature you care to name and make a dog into something extremely high-standing. But why, why the hell? That's the question. Explain to me, please, why we should set about manufacturing artificial Spinozas, when any simple peasant woman can give birth to one at the drop of a hat. After all, Madame Lomonosova bore that famous son of hers in Kholmogory⁽⁹⁾ Doctor,

humanity-takes care of all that for us in her own good time and according to the order of evolution, and by distinguishing from the mass of the low and the lowly, she creates a few dozen exceptional geniuses to grace this earth of ours. Now you see, Doctor, why I faulted your conclusions on the case history of Sharik. My discovery, devil take it and swallow it whole, is of as much use as a sick headache. Don't argue with me, Ivan Arnoldovich. I've understood it all now. I never talk hot air, you know that. Theoretically it's interesting. All right, then! Physiologists will be in ecstasy. Moscow will go crazy... But, practically speaking, what will happen? Who do you see before you now?" Preobrazhensky pointed in the direction of the consulting room, where Sharikov was taking his rest.

"An exceptionally nasty bit of work."

"But who is he? Klim!" cried the professor. "Klim Chugunov. (Bormental's mouth fell open.) That's who he is: two criminal convictions, alcoholism, 'share out everything', the fur hat and two tenrouble notes gone. (At this point Philip Philipovich remembered the anniversary cane and turned crimson.) A lewd fellow

and a swine ... well, I'll find that cane. In a word, the hypophysis is a closed chamber which contains the blueprint for the individual human personality. The individual personality! *From Seville to Granada...*" Philip Philipovich cried out, his eyes flashing fiercely, "and not just general human traits. It is a miniature of the brain itself. And I have no use for it whatsoever, the devil take it. I was on the look-out for something absolutely different, for eugenics, for a way to improve human nature. And then I got on to rejuvenation. Surely you don't think that I just do these operations for money? I am a scholar, after all."

"You are a great scholar, and that's the truth!" uttered Bormental, sipping at his cognac. His eyes were bloodshot.

"I wanted to make a small experiment after I first obtained the extraction of the sexual hormone from the hypophysis two years ago. And what happened instead of that? Oh, my God! These hormones in the hypophysis, oh Lord... Doctor, all I see before me is dull despair and, I must confess, I have lost my way."

Bormental suddenly rolled up his sleeves and pronounced, squinting down his nose:

"Very well, then, dear teacher, if you don't want to I will feed him arsenic myself at my own risk. I don't care if Papa was a police investigator. After all, in the final analysis it is your own experimental creature."

Philip Philipovich had lost his fire, softened up, fallen back in the armchair, and said:

"No, I can't allow you to do that, dear boy. I am 60 years old and can give you some advice. Never commit a crime against anybody whatsoever. That's how you'll grow old with clean hands."

"But Philip Philipovich, for goodness sake. If that Shvonder gets working on him again, what will become of him! My God, I'm only just beginning to realise the potential of that Sharikov!"

"Aha! So you've understood now, have you? I understood it ten days after the operation. Shvonder, of course, is the biggest fool of all. He doesn't understand that Sharikov represents a greater threat to him than to me. At this stage he'll make every effort to sick him onto me not

realising that, if someone in their turn decides to sick Sharikov onto Shvonder, there'll be nothing left of him but a few flying feathers."

"Yes indeed. The cats alone are proof enough of that. A man with the heart of a dog."

"Ah no, no," Philip Philipovich said slowly in answer. "You, Doctor, are making a very great mistake, pray do not libel the dog. The cats are temporary... That is just a matter of discipline and two or three weeks. I assure you. In a month or two he will have stopped chasing them."

"And why not now?"

"Elementary, Ivan Arnoldovich... How can you ask? The hypophysis is not suspended in thin air. It is attached to the brain of a dog, after all. Give it time to adapt. At this stage Sharikov is exhibiting only residuary canine behavioural traits and, understand this, chasing cats is quite the best thing he does. You have to realise that the whole horror of the thing is that he already has not the heart of a dog but the heart of a man. And one of the most rotten in nature!"

Bormental, worked up to the last degree, clenched his strong thin hands

into fists, twitched his shoulders and announced firmly:

"That's it. I'll kill him!"

"I forbid it!" categorically replied Philip Philipovich.

"But for heaven's sake..."

Philip Philipovich suddenly raised his finger and listened tensely.

"Just a moment. I thought I heard footsteps."

Both listened but all was silent in the corridor.

"Must have imagined it," pronounced Philip Philipovich and went off into a tirade in German, punctuated by one Russian word *ugolovshchina* (criminal offence), pronounced more than once.

"Just a moment." It was Bormental this time, who gave the alert and moved towards the door. This time the steps were clearly to be heard approaching the study. Apart from this, there was a voice, muttering something. Bormental flung open the door and sprang back in amazement. Thunderstruck, Philip Philipovich froze in his armchair.

In the lighted quadrangle of the corridor, Darya Petrovna stood before them clad only in her nightslip, her face

flaming and militant. Both the doctor and the Professor were blinded by the abundance of her mighty and, as it seemed to them both from their first fright, totally naked body. In her powerful arms Darya Petrovna was dragging something, and that "something" was struggling and sitting on its rump and trying to dig its small legs covered with down into the parquet. The "something", of course, turned out to be Sharikov, totally confused, still rather drunk, unkempt and dressed only in his night-shirt.

Darya Petrovna, grandiose and naked, shook Sharikov like a sack of potatoes and pronounced the following words:

"Take a good look at him, Professor, Sir, at our visitor — Telegraph Telegraphovich. I'm a married woman, but Zina is an innocent girl. It's a good thing I was the one to wake up."

Having concluded this speech, Darya Petrovna was overcome by confusion, squealed, covered her breasts with her arms and ran.

"Darya Petrovna, pardon us, for goodness sake," the blushing Philip

Philipovich called after her, coming to himself.

Bormental rolled up his shirt-sleeves and advanced on Sharikov. Philip Philipovich took one look at his eyes and was horrified by what he saw there.

"Doctor, what are you doing? I forbid..."

Bormental took Sharikov by the collar and shook him so violently that the shirt front split.

Philip Philipovich waded in to separate them and began to extract skinny little Sharikov from those strong surgeon's hands.

"You have no right to hit me!" shouted the half-strangled Sharikov, sitting down and sobering up rapidly.

"Doctor!" thundered Philip Philipovich.

Bormental came to himself somewhat and let go of Sharikov.

"All right then," hissed Bormental, "we'll wait till morning. I'll deal with him when he's sober."

He then tucked Sharikov under one arm and hauled him off to the consulting room to sleep.

Sharikov made some attempt to resist but his legs would not obey him.

Philip Philipovich stood legs astride so that his azure dressing gown fell open, raised hands and eyes to the ceiling light in the corridor and remarked:

"Well, well..."

9

Doctor Bormental did not deal with Sharikov next morning as promised for the simple reason that Polygraph Polygraphovich had vanished from the house. Bormental was in a fury of despair, reproaching himself for having been ass enough not to hide the key of the front door, yelling that it was unforgivable, and concluding with the wish that Sharikov would run under a bus. Philip Philipovich sat in his study running his fingers through his hair and saying:

"I can well imagine what's going on out there, I can well imagine. *From Seville to Granada*, oh my God."

"He may still be with the house committee," Bormental ran off like one possessed.

In the house committee he had a stand up row with the chairman Shvonder till the latter, enraged, sat down and wrote a notice to the people's court of the Khamovniki district, shouting that he was not the keeper of Professor Preobrazhensky's protege, all the more so as that protege Polygraph had only yesterday shown himself to be a real cad, having taken 7 roubles from the house committee supposedly in order to buy textbooks from the cooperative.

Fyodor was paid three roubles to search the whole house from top to bottom, but nowhere was Sharikov to be found.

The only thing that did come to light was that Polygraph had made off at dawn in cap, scarf and coat, having supplied himself with a bottle of rowan-berry vodka from the sideboard, Doctor Bormental's gloves and all his own documents. Darya Petrovna and Zina made no attempt to disguise their demonstrative delight and hope that Sharikov would never return. The day before Sharikov had borrowed three roubles and fifty kopecks from Darya Petrovna.

"Serve you all right!" growled Philip Philipovich, shaking his fists. The

telephone rang all that day, and all the next. The doctors received a record number of patients and on the third day in the study they faced up to the question of the necessity of informing the militia about a missing person, whose duty it was to search out Sharikov in the deep waters of the Moscow underworld.

No sooner had the word "militia" been pronounced than the blessed quiet of Obukhov Alley was broken by the growl of a van and the windows of the house shook. After this there was a confident ring and in came Polygraph Polygraphovich with an air of exceptional dignity, quietly took off his cap, hung his coat on a peg and appeared in a new hypostasis. He was wearing a second-hand leather jacket, rubbed leather trousers and high English boots laced up to the knee. An incredibly powerful aroma of cats immediately billowed out to fill the whole hall. Preobrazhensky and Bormental, as if on command, folded their arms on their chests, planted themselves in the doorways and waited for Polygraph Polygraphovich to explain himself. He smoothed down his wiry hair, gave a little cough and looked round in such a way that

it became clear that he wished to hide a certain embarrassment beneath an air of jaunty insouciance.

"I, Philip Philipovich," he began at last, "have taken up an official post."

Both doctors uttered an indeterminate strangled sound in their throats and moved. Preobrazhensky, the first to come to himself, held out his hand and said:

"Give me the paper."

On it was printed: "The presenter of this, Comrade Polygraph Polygraphovich Sharikov, is truly employed as head of the sub-department for the control of stray animals (cats, etc.) in the precincts of the city of Moscow in the department of M. K. Kh." [*Moscow Communal Welfare.—Ed.*]

"So," pronounced Philip Philipovich glumly. "Who got you the job? But I suppose I can guess."

"Yes, of course, Shvonder," replied Sharikov.

"May I ask you — how comes it that you smell so singularly repulsive?"

Sharikov sniffed at his jacket with some anxiety.

"Well, what can you do about it? It does smell ... as everyone knows ... of the job."

Yesterday we were strangling cats, strangling 'em one after another..."

Philip Philipovich shuddered and glanced at Bormental. The latter's eyes were reminiscent of two black gun muzzles, focussed point-blank on Sharikov. Without any preliminaries he moved in on Sharikov and with easy confidence seized him by the throat.

"Help!" squealed Sharikov, turning pale.

"Doctor!"

"I shall not permit myself anything unethical, Philip Philipovich, don't worry," replied Bormental grimly and yelled: "Zina and Darya Petrovna!"

Both appeared in the hall.

"Now repeat," said Bormental and very slightly increased the pressure on Sharikov's throat, pushing back his neck against a fur coat: "Forgive me..."

"All right, I'll say it," the totally defeated Sharikov responded in hoarse tones, suddenly gasped for air, jerked away and tried to shout for help again, only the shout did not come out and his head disappeared completely into the fur.

"Doctor, I implore you..."

Sharikov nodded his head slightly as a sign that he submitted and would repeat:

"Forgive me, much respected Darya Petrovna and Zinaida?"

"Prokofievna," whispered the scared Zina.

"Oof, Prokofievna," said Sharikov, hoarse-voiced, "that I permitted myself..."

"Myself a revolting prank at night in a drunken state..."

"Drunken state..."

"And I will never do it again..."

"Let him go, let him go, Ivan Arnoldovich," begged both the women simultaneously. "You'll strangle him."

Bormental let go of Sharikov and said:

"The van is waiting for you?"

"No," replied Polygraph respectfully. "It just brought me home."

"Zina, tell the van it can go. Now, I want you to bear in mind the following: you have returned to Philip Philipovich's flat?"

"Where else should I go?" replied Sharikov timidly, his eyes wandering.

"Excellent. You will be good, quiet and humble. Otherwise, you will have me to reckon with. Do you understand?"

"I understand," said Sharikov.

Philip Philipovich throughout this violent action perpetrated against Sharikov had remained silent. He had

shrunk pitifully against the lintel and was biting his nails, his eyes fixed on the parquet floor. Then he suddenly raised them to Sharikov and asked dully, automatically:

"What do you do with them ... with the dead cats?"

"They'll go for coats," replied Sharikov. "They make squirrels out of them and sell them on workers' credit schemes." ⁽¹⁰⁾

After this there was calm and quiet in the flat and it lasted for two days and two nights. Polygraph Polygraphovich left in the morning in his van, reappeared in the evening, and quietly ate his dinner in the company of Philip Philipovich and Bormental.

In spite of the fact that Bormental and Sharikov slept in the same room, the reception room, they were not on speaking terms, so it was Bormental who became really uncomfortable.

Two days later a thin young girl in cream-coloured stockings with heavily made-up eyes appeared and was clearly overwhelmed at the sight of the splendid flat. In her shabby little coat she followed Sharikov into the hall and bumped into the Professor.

Taken aback, he stopped, narrowed his eyes and said:

"May I inquire?"

"We are going to get married, this is our typist, she's going to live with me. We'll have to put Bormental out of the reception room. He's got a flat of his own," explained Sharikov, frowning and with intense hostility.

Philip Philipovich thought a moment, looked at the embarrassed girl and said:

"May I ask you to step into my study for a moment?"

"I'll come with her," Sharikov said quickly and suspiciously.

At this moment Bormental surfaced as if from under the earth.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "The Professor will have a word with the lady, and you and I will remain here."

"Not if I can help it," Sharikov retorted furiously, trying to follow Philip Philipovich and the desperately embarrassed girl.

"Forgive me, no," Bormental took Sharikov by the wrist and led him into the consulting room.

For five minutes there was no sound from the study and then suddenly they could hear the muffled sobbing of the girl.

Philip Philipovich stood by the table and the girl wept into a crumpled lace handkerchief.

"He said, the scoundrel, that he'd been wounded in battle," the girl sobbed.

"He's lying," replied Philip Philipovich inexorably. He shook his head and went on: "I am sincerely sorry for you, but you know you should not go off with the first man you meet just because he has a steady job — my child, it is not right — there." He opened a drawer of his writing table and took out three thirty-rouble notes.

"I'll poison myself," wept the girl, "there's salt meat at the canteen every day, and he threatens ... says he's a Red commander, says he'll take me to live in a luxurious flat ... pineapples every day... I've a kind psyche, he says, it's only cats I hate. He took a ring from me as a keepsake."

"Well, well, well — a kind psyche. *From Seville to Granada*," muttered Philip Philipovich. "It will pass, you just have to

bear the pain a little time. You are still so young..."

"Surely not under that same gateway?.."

"Now, now, take the money when it's offered to you as a loan," Philip Philipovich concluded gruffly.

After this the door was solemnly opened and Bormental, at the invitation of Philip Philipovich, led in Sharikov. He was looking particularly shifty-eyed and his hair stood on end like a brush.

"Scoundrel," the girl scolded, her tear-reddened mascara-stained eyes and blotchily powdered nose flashing.

"Why have you a scar on your forehead? Be so good as to explain to this lady," asked Philip Philipovich insinuatingly.

Sharikov went the whole hog:

"I was wounded at the Kolchak front," he barked.

The girl rose to her feet and went out, crying bitterly.

"Stop!" Philip Philipovich called after her. "Wait. The ring, please," he said, turning to Sharikov.

Obediently, Sharikov took from his finger a hollow ring with an emerald.

"Right, then," he said with sudden anger. "I'll see you remember this.

Tomorrow I'll organise a few reductions of the office staff."

"Don't be afraid of him," Bormental called after her. "I won't let him do anything." He gave Sharikov a look which sent him backing away until he bumped the back of his head on a cupboard.

"What's her name?" Bormental asked him. "Her name," he roared and suddenly became wild and terrifying.

"Vasnetsova," replied Sharikov, looking round desperately for some line of retreat.

"Every day," said Bormental, holding the lapel of Sharikov's jacket, "I shall myself, personally, inquire at pest control whether or not Citizen Vasnetsova has been made redundant. And if you so much as ... if I find out that she has been made redundant ... I will shoot you with my own hands. Be careful, Sharikov — I am warning you in clear Russian."

Sharikov kept his eyes fixed firmly on Bormental's nose.

"I know where to lay hands on revolvers myself," muttered Sharikov, though in a very flat voice, then, with a sudden cunning twist, broke free and dived for the door.

"Take care!" Bormental's shout echoed after him.

The night and half the following day hung heavy as a cloud before the storm. There was a hush. Everyone was silent. But on the following day, when Polygraph Polygraphovich, who was troubled by a nagging presentiment from morning, had left gloomily with the van for his place of work, Professor Preobrazhensky received at a most unusual hour one of his ex-patients, a stout, tall man in military uniform. He had been most insistent on obtaining an appointment and had actually succeeded doing so. On entering the study he politely clicked his heels before the Professor.

"Are you having pain again, dear Sir?" asked the haggard Philip Philipovich. "Sit down, please."

"*Merci*. No, Professor," replied the guest, putting his hat down on the corner of the table. "I owe you a great debt ... but, er ... I came for another reason, Philip Philipovich, full of respect as I am ... hm ... to warn you. It's clearly nonsense. Simply he's a nasty bit of work." The patient fumbled about in his briefcase and

produced a paper. "It's a good thing the report came straight to me..."

Philip Philipovich saddled his nose with his pince-nez, which he put on over his glasses, and began to read. He took his time, mumbling to himself, the expression of his face changing from one moment to the next: "...Likewise threatening to kill the chairman of the house committee Comrade Shvonder from which it is clear that he is in possession of a gun. And he pronounces counter-revolutionary speeches and even orders his social servant Zinaida Prokofievna Bunina to burn Engels in the stove, which proves him a typical Menshevik together with his assistant Bormental, Ivan Arnoldovich, who secretly and without registration lives in his flat. Signature of the Head of the Sub-Department of Pest Control P. P. Sharikov witnessed by the Chairman of the House Committee Shvonder and the secretary Pestrukhin."

"May I keep this?" inquired Philip Philipovich, going all blotchy. "Or, forgive me, do you need it in furtherance of the process of law?"

"I beg your pardon, Professor," the patient was deeply insulted and his

nostrils dilated. "You really do hold us in great contempt, it seems. I..." And at this point he began to swell like a turkey-cock.

"Well then, excuse me, dear Sir, pray excuse me!" muttered Philip Philipovich. "Forgive me, I really had no intention of insulting you. My dear fellow, don't be angry with me, he's got on my nerves to such an extent."

"I should rather think he has," the patient was entirely mollified. "But what trash! It would be interesting to take a look at him. Moscow is buzzing with all sorts of legends about you..."

Philip Philipovich merely made a despairing gesture. At this point the guest noticed that the Professor had developed a stoop and even appeared to have gone somewhat greyer lately.

*

The crime had ripened and now, as so often happens, fell like a stone. Polygraph Polygraphovich returned that evening in the van troubled by some indefinable presentiment of disaster which simply

would not go away. Philip Philipovich's voice invited him into the consulting room. Surprised, Sharikov went and, with a vague stirring of fear, looked down the barrel of Bormental's face and then at Philip Philipovich. The assistant looked like thunder and his left hand with the cigarette trembled slightly on the arm of the gynaecological chair.

Philip Philipovich with most ominous calm said:

"Take your things this instant: trousers, coat, everything you need, and get out of this flat!"

"What the?.." Sharikov was sincerely taken aback.

"Out of the flat — today," Philip Philipovich repeated monotonously, examining his nails through narrowed eyes.

Some evil spirit took possession of Polygraph Polygraphovich: evidently death was already awaiting him and Doom stood at his elbow. He cast himself into the embrace of the inevitable and snapped angrily and abruptly:

"What do you think you're trying to do? Surely you don't think I don't know where to go to get you lot sorted out. I've a right

to my 13 square yards here, and here I'll stay."

"Get out of this flat," whispered Philip Philipovich on a note of intimate warning.

Sharikov invited his own death. He raised his left hand and, with scratched and bitten fingers which smelt unbearably of cats, made a vulgar gesture of defiance. Then, with his right hand, pulled a revolver from his pocket on the dangerous Bormental. Bormental's cigarette fell like a shooting star and a few seconds later Philip Philipovich, leaping over the broken glass, was dithering in horror between the cupboard and the couch. On the couch, flat on his back and struggling for breath, lay the head of the sub-department of Pest Control, and on his chest the surgeon Bormental was crouching and stifling him with a small, white cushion. A few minutes later an unrecognisable Doctor Bormental went through to the hall and hung out a notice: "There will be no reception today on account of the Professor's illness. Please do not disturb by ringing the bell." With a shiny penknife he cut the bell-wire, and looked into the mirror at his scratched, bleeding face and convulsively trembling

hands. Then he appeared in the door of the kitchen and said to the anxious Zina and Darya Petrovna:

"The Professor requests you not to leave the flat." "Very good, Sir," Zina and Darya Petrovna answered timidly.

"Permit me to lock the back door and keep the key," said Bormental hiding in the shadow behind the door and covering his face with his hand. "It is a temporary measure, not because we don't trust you. But someone might come and you might find it difficult to refuse them entry, and we must not be disturbed. We are busy." "Very good, Sir," replied the women and immediately turned pale. Bormental locked the back door, locked the front door, locked the door into the corridor, and his footsteps receded into the consulting room.

Silence enveloped the flat, crawling into every corner. Twilight infiltrated it, ill-omened, tense, in a word — murk. True, later on the neighbours on the other side of the courtyard said that in the windows of the consulting room, which overlooked the courtyard, all the lights were ablaze that night and they even glimpsed the white surgeon's cap of the Professor

himself... It is hard to check. It is true also that Zina, when it was all over, did say that by the fireplace in the study after Bormental and the Professor had left the consulting room, Ivan Arnoldovich had scared her almost to death. She said he was squatting down in front of the fire burning with his own hands a blue exercise book from the pile of case histories of the Professor's patients! The doctor's face appeared completely green and covered all over in scratches. As to Philip Philipovich, he was not himself at all that evening. She also said that ... however, maybe the innocent girl from the Prechistenka flat is just making it all up...

One thing is certain: throughout that evening the most complete and terrible silence reigned throughout the flat.

END OF STORY

EPILOGUE

On the night of the tenth day after the battle in the consulting room in the flat of

Professor Preobrazhensky in Obukhov Alley there was a sharp ring at the door.

"Militia here. Open up."

There was a sound of running footsteps, they began to knock, entered and, in the brilliantly lit entrance hall with all the cupboards newly glazed, a mass of people were suddenly foregathered. Two in militiaman's uniform, one in a dark coat with a briefcase, the chairman Shvonder, pale and bursting with malicious satisfaction, the youth-woman, the porter Fyodor, Zina, Darya Petrovna and the half-dressed Bormental, trying in embarrassment to cover his bare throat, having been caught without a tie.

The door from the study opened to admit Philip Philipovich. He emerged in the familiar azure dressing gown and there and then it became clear to them all that Philip Philipovich had much improved in health over the last week. It was the old commanding and energetic Philip Philipovich, full of dignity, who appeared before these nocturnal visitors and begged pardon that he was in his dressing gown.

"Don't let that worry you, Professor," said the man in plain clothes with deep embarrassment, hesitated for a moment,

then pronounced: "Very unpleasant business. We have a warrant to search your flat and," the man squinted at Philip Philipovich's moustaches and concluded, "and to make an arrest, depending on the results."

Philip Philipovich narrowed his eyes and asked:

"May I ask on what grounds and whom?"

The man scratched his cheek and began to read from a paper in his briefcase:

"Preobrazhensky, Bormental, Zinaida Bunina and Darya Ivanova are hereby arrested on suspicion of the murder of the head of the sub-department of Pest Control of M. K. Kh., Polygraph Polygraphovich Sharikov."

Zina's sobs drowned the end of his words. There was a general stir.

"Quite incomprehensible," replied Philip Philipovich with a lordly shrug of the shoulders.

"What Sharikov had you in mind? Ah, yes, I see, that dog of mine ... the one I operated on?"

"Beg pardon, Professor, not the dog, but when he was already human; that's what it's all about."

"You mean when he was able to speak?" asked Philip Philipovich. "That does not necessarily imply being human. However, that is not important. Sharik is still with us and most definitely no one has killed him."

"Professor!" the man in black exclaimed in great surprise, raising his eyebrows. "In that case he must be produced. It's ten days since he disappeared and the facts at our disposal, if you'll pardon my saying so, look very black indeed."

"Doctor Bormental, be so good as to produce Sharik for the inspector," ordered Philip Philipovich, taking the warrant.

Doctor Bormental, with a smile that went somewhat awry, made for the door.

When he returned and gave a whistle a curious-looking dog came prancing in after him. Parts of him were bald, on other parts the hair had already grown back. He made his entrance like a trained circus-dog on his hind legs, then sank down onto all fours and looked about him. A deathly hush froze the hall, setting like jelly. The ghoulish-looking dog with the crimson scar round his forehead again stood up on his hind legs and, with a smile, sat down in an armchair.

The second militiaman suddenly crossed himself in a sweeping peasant fashion and, stepping back, trod heavily on both Zina's feet.

The man in black without shutting his mouth pronounced:

"I can't believe it ... he worked for Pest Control."

"That was not my doing," replied Philip Philipovich. "It was Mr. Shvonder who recommended him, if I am not mistaken."

"It's beyond me," said the man in black at a loss, and turned to the first militiaman. "Is this he?"

"He it is," the first militiaman mouthed the words soundlessly. "He as ever was."

"That's him all right," Fyodor's voice made itself heard. "Only the villain's gone all hairy again."

"But he could talk ... hee ... hee..."

"And he still can, but less and less as time goes by, so now is the time to hear him, he'll soon be quite dumb again."

"But why?" asked the man in the black coat quietly.

Philip Philipovich shrugged his shoulders.

"Science has yet to discover ways of transforming beasts into human beings. I

had a try, but it was unsuccessful, as you see. He spoke for a while and then began to regress towards his original condition. Atavism."

"Do not use improper expressions," barked the dog suddenly and rose from his chair.

The man in black suddenly went very pale, dropped his briefcase and began to keel over sideways. A militiaman steadied him from the side and Fyodor from the back.

There was some confusion, through which most distinctly could be heard three phrases:

Philip Philipovich's: "Tincture of valerian. He's fainted."

Doctor Bormental's: "As to Shvonder I'll throw him down the stairs with my own hands if he ever again shows his face in Professor Preobrazhensky's flat."

And Shvonder's: "I request that those words be recorded in the protocol."

*

The grey accordion-shaped radiators were pleasantly warm. The long curtains hid the dark Prechistenka night with its single star. The higher being, the dignified benefactor of the canine breed, was sitting in his armchair and the dog Sharik, delectably relaxed, lay on the carpet beside the leather sofa. The March mists affected the dog with morning headaches which tormented him along the line of the scar round his head. But the warmth helped, and by evening they no longer troubled him. And now it was getting easier and the thoughts flowing through the dog's head were sweet and warm.

I was so lucky, so lucky, he thought, drifting off to sleep, indescribably lucky. I've really got settled into this flat. Now I'm quite certain there was something odd about my origins. A Newfoundland must have had a hand in it somewhere. My grandmother was a bit of a fly-by-night, God rest her soul, dear old thing. It's true they've made scars all over my head for some reason or other, but that'll mend. There's no call to count that against them.

There was a faint clink of phials from the distance. The bitten man was tidying up in the cupboards of the consulting room.

The grey-haired magician sat and hummed to himself:

"To the sacred shores of the Nile..."

The dog had seen terrible things. This important man would plunge his hands in slippery gloves into glass jars and fish out brains — a determined man, persistent, always trying for something, cutting, examining, narrowing his eyes and singing: *"To the sacred shores of the Nile."*

COMMENTARY

In September 1921, after a short period of about two years in Vladikavkaz with visits to Tiflis, Batum and Kiev and still weak from typhus, Mikhail Bulgakov arrived in Moscow. Life in the capital was very hard at that time, and the future writer was immediately confronted with the problems of finding accommodation and a way of earning a living. "This is the blackest period of my life. My wife and I are starving. Had to ask Uncle (the doctor N. M. Pokrovsky, the brother of Bulgakov's mother) for some flour, cooking oil and potatoes... Have been all over Moscow — no work," he wrote in his diary in early February 1922. By then the writer had already changed jobs several times, not of his own volition, of course. His two months in the Literary Department of the People's Commissariat for Education ended when the department was "disbanded". The private newspaper for which the future author of *The Master and Margarita* sold advertisement space "packed up".

In March 1922 Bulgakov started work as a reporter for the high-circulation daily

Rabochy (The Worker). During this period he wrote a great deal for the newspaper *Nakanune* (On the Eve), which published about thirty of his feuilletons, then contributed for four years to the newspaper *Gudok* (The Whistle), for which Yuri Olesha and Valentin Katayev wrote feuilletons at this time, as well as Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov at a later stage.

"It was not from a splendid distance that I studied the Moscow of 1921-1924," Bulgakov wrote. "Oh, no, I lived in it and tramped the length and breadth of the city..." He was repeating, as it were, the experience of the young Chekhov, working for all sorts of newspapers and periodicals and writing lots of sketches, humouresques and notices (mostly under pseudonyms).

Documentary evidence suggests that the autobiographical story *Notes Off the Cuff* was to have consisted of three parts. The full manuscript has not been found. During Bulgakov's lifetime Part One was published three times, in the newspaper *Nakanune*, then in the almanach *Vozrozhde-niye* (Rebirth) and, in part, in the newspaper *Bakinsky Rabochy* (The Baku Worker). Another part, without any

indication of which one, appeared in the journal *Rossiya* (Russia). We have made a composite text of Part One based on the three published versions, and this text has been translated for the present volume. Part Two corresponds to the original publication in the journal *Rossiya*. With regard to the hypothetical third part (which was actually intended to follow Part One), some specialists believe that the stories "The Unusual Adventures of a Doctor" and "The Bohemian" can be regarded as constituting this. It was this text (but without "The Unusual Adventures of a Doctor") which the magazine *Teatr* (Theatre) chose when it published *Notes Off the Cuff* in 1987 (No. 6).

During these years Bulgakov's pen eagerly recorded the rapidly changing, incredible and unique reality around him. ("Moscow is a cauldron, in which a new life is stewing. The trouble is that you get stewed too," he was to write in the sketch "The Capital in a Notebook".) Bulgakov produced many satirical sketches and articles based on workers' letters in the mid-1920s. A rich gallery of types, time-servers, *nouveau riches* and bureaucrats, thronged the pages of his "small prose". At

the same time he was working on a long novel, *The White Guard*.

In 1924-1925 the satirical novellas *Diaboliad* and *The Fateful Eggs* about contemporary Moscow life were published in the series of literary almanacs called *Nedra* (The Inner Depths). His attempts to get the third novella, *The Heart of a Dog*, published were unsuccessful. It did not come out in the Soviet Union until 1987.

These stories form a kind of satirical trilogy. It can be said of all three that they are "fantasy rooted in everyday life". Bulgakov's social satire is set against a carefully painted urban backcloth, and ordinary everyday life is closely interwoven with fantasy. In a series of sharp and merciless scenes the author satirises the "diaboliad" of bureaucracy, its lack of culture, its negligence, irresponsibility and aggressive ignorance.

Naturally the significance of Bulgakov's "fantastic" satires extends beyond these topical issues of his day. The writer's intention was, using the concrete background of Moscow in the 1920s, to present more important and far-reaching problems.

The Fateful Eggs is one of Bulgakov's finest works. In subject matter and artistic structure it is easily appreciated by the present-day reader. Experiments that interfere with nature, the misuse of scientific discoveries, the role of pure chance in what appear to be perfectly well-founded and carefully planned undertakings and the unpredictability of human behaviour—all this is portrayed with prophetic clarity. Critics who belonged to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers gave the novella a hostile reception. There were also reviews of a different tenor, however. Maxim Gorky praised *The Fateful Eggs* highly. True, as a great writer he evidently sensed that Bulgakov had not fully exploited the possibilities at the end of the story and drew attention to this. It is interesting that in the first draft the closing chapters of *The Fateful Eggs* were far less "optimistic". It ended with the evacuation of Moscow as hordes of giant boa constrictors advanced on the city. The final scene was of the dead capital with a huge snake wound round the Ivan the Great Bell-Tower. Either the writer himself decided against this ending, or the censor

objected to it, for it was changed in the final version. To quote a specialist on Bulgakov, this story "should be read aloud in all gene engineering laboratories and all offices responsible for the work of these laboratories". It is indeed full of prophetic ideas.

One of the main themes in *The Heart of a Dog* is that it is impossible to predict the outcome of an experiment involving the human psyche. The ideas of rejuvenation and eugenics, so fashionable in the 1920s, which seemed to open up incredible possibilities for "improving" and "correcting" imperfect human nature, have perhaps an even more topical ring today than sixty years ago. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the start of gene engineering and raised the much alarming question of possible abuses when people begin tinkering with the mechanism of the human mind. Bulgakov's story sounded this alarm as far back as the 1920s.

Another revelation by Bulgakov in this story is the figure of Sharikov. Obviously this was directed primarily against the anarchistic Lumpenproletariat who made capital out of their working-class

background and refused to recognise the most elementary rules of civilised behaviour. This powerful and thought-provoking story has by no means lost its relevance today.

NOTES

1. "Okhotny Ryad shops..." Trading booths in the middle of old Moscow for the sale of dead and live poultry, wild fowl, meat, fish, berries, mushrooms, etc.

2. Mosselprom — the Moscow association of industrial enterprises for processing agricultural produce.

3. "Eliseyev Bros., ex-owners." The owners of the largest food shop in pre-revolutionary Moscow.

4. "...Mendeleyev the chemist!" D. I. Mendeleev (1834-1907), Russian chemist and progressive public figure. Mendeleev discovered the periodic law of chemical elements, one of the basic laws of natural science.

5. "Just take a walk down the Kuznetsky..." Kuznetsky Most, one of the streets in the centre of Moscow.

6. Nepman — a private entrepreneur or trader in the 1920s, when the Soviet government introduced its New Economic Policy (NEP).

7. "Then again, there's the Union, the Labour Exchange..." The Union is a

reference to the trade union. In the 1920s in the Soviet Union labour exchanges performed certain mediatory operations on the labour market.

8. Yussems — a family of Spanish acrobats who gave guest performances at the Moscow circus during this period.

9. "After all, Madame Lomonosova bore that famous son of hers in Kholmogory..." M. V. Lomonosov (1711-1765), the first Russian natural scientist of world standing, also a poet, artist and historian. Kholmogory — a village in Archangel Province.

10. "They make squirrels out of them and sell them on workers' credit schemes." Articles of sham squirrel fur for sale on credit to members of the working class.

