

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV



*"A
rich, funny,
moving and
bitter novel...
Fast and
boisterous
entertainment."*

*—The
New York
Times*

*The
Master
and
Margarita*

Translated by Mirra Ginsburg

The MASTER
and
MARGARITA

Also by Mikhail Bulgakov

Published by Grove Press

The Heart of a Dog

The MASTER and MARGARITA

by Mikhail Bulgakov

*Translated from the Russian
by Mirra Ginsburg*



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Translator's Introduction

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940) was born in Kiev, the son of a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy. He graduated from the Medical College of Kiev University, but after two years of medical practice abandoned medicine for literature.

Playwright, novelist, and short story writer, Bulgakov belonged to that diverse and brilliant group of Russian writers who did not emigrate after the revolution, but became so-called Fellow Travelers, accepting the revolution without joining its active participants, but, above all, insisting on writing in their own way and on their own choice of subjects. This group included such writers as Zamyatin, Zoschenko, Vsevolod Ivanov, Valentin Kataev, Pilnyak, Fedin, and others.

After the extraordinary flowering of literature in a great variety of forms in the post-revolutionary decade, the end of the New Economic Policy and the introduction of the Five-Year Plans in the late 1920s brought about a tightening of the reins in literature and the arts as well. The party's instrument of pressure and coercion at that time was RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) under the leadership of the narrow and intolerant zealot Leopold Averbakh. And the persecution and pressures applied to writers to force them into the requisite mold succeeded in destroying all but a very small minority which resisted to the end. Many of the most famous authors be-

came silent or almost silent, either by their own choice, or because their works were barred from publication. The former included Isaac Babel and Olesha. The latter included Zamyatin, Bulgakov, Pilnyak. Some, like Pilnyak, were unable to withstand the pressure and broke down, rewriting their works according to the demands of the party critics and censors. Others, like Zamyatin and Bulgakov, refused to submit.

Bulgakov was one of the first writers to be hounded out of literature. His novel, *The White Guard*, the first part of which was serialized in a magazine in 1925, provoked a storm of criticism from party-line critics because it did not portray any Communist heroes, but dealt with the responses of Russian gentry intelligentsia and White officers to the upheavals sweeping the country and destroying all their old values and social norms. Much like Chekhov in an earlier generation, Bulgakov portrayed these people as impotent and doomed.

The White Guard was never published in full and never appeared in the Soviet Union in book form during the author's lifetime. Three small volumes of Bulgakov's stories were published in the mid-twenties. One of these, *Notes of a Young Doctor*, consisted of stories based on his medical practice. Another, *Diaboliad*, which contained the novella *The Fatal Eggs*,¹ was a collection of brilliant satires. It also provoked vicious criticism. Bulgakov was branded an "enemy," a "neo-bourgeois," and an "internal *émigré*." His novella, *Heart of a Dog*,² was rejected by the censors.

Nevertheless, in the relatively freer atmosphere of the 1920s it was still possible for the Moscow Art Theater to invite Bulgakov to dramatize *The White Guard*. Produced in

¹The novella is included in *The Fatal Eggs: Soviet Satire*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Grove Press, 1987).

²Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog*, translated by Mirra Ginsburg (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

1926 as *The Days of the Turbins*, the play was an instant and enormous success. After the usual barrage of vilification, it was banned by the Glavrepertcom (Chief Repertory Committee—the censorship organ). The intervention of Gorky and the appeal of the theater to Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Education, led to the lifting of the ban "for one year," with the play restricted to the Moscow Art Theater.

In 1928, three of Bulgakov's plays, *The Days of the Turbins*, *Zoyka's Apartment*, and *The Purple Island* (a satire on censorship), were being performed simultaneously in Moscow theaters, with invariable audience success. The attacks persisted. In 1929 all three were banned. *Flight*,³ already in rehearsal at the Moscow Art Theater, was banned earlier, in 1928, after Stalin characterized it as an "anti-Soviet phenomenon." The bans were greeted with loud jubilation in the press. The communist critics sang in chorus, "our theaters, our revolutionary country do not need the Bulgakovs."

Bulgakov often said that life outside literature was inconceivable to him. When asked whether he preferred the dramatic or the narrative form, he said that he needed both, as a pianist needs both his left and his right hand.

He now found himself completely barred from either publication or the theater. He wrote to the government, asking permission to go abroad with his wife "for as long as the government decides." The request was ignored.

In 1930, after the censors rejected his play, *The Cabal of the Hypocrites* (*Molière*), Bulgakov, ill and despairing, sent a long and remarkably courageous letter to Stalin. He pointed out that none of his writing was being published, and none of his plays produced. He wrote that in the ten years of his literary activity, 300 "reviews" of his work had appeared in the press, of which three were favorable, 298 hostile and abusive. The entire Soviet press and the agencies in control of repertory had throughout the years "unanimously and with extraordinary ferocity argued that

³Mikhail Bulgakov, *Flight and Bliss*, translated by Mirra Ginsburg (New York: New Directions, 1985).

Bulgakov's work cannot exist in the USSR. And I declare," he wrote, "that the Soviet press is *entirely right*."

He went on to enumerate the reasons why it was "right."

"It is my duty as a writer to fight against censorship, whatever its forms and under whatever government it exists, and to call for freedom of the press . . . Any writer who tries to prove that he has no need of this freedom is like a fish that publicly declares it needs no water."

"Alas, I have become a satirist precisely at a time when true satire (a satire that penetrates into forbidden areas) is absolutely impossible in the USSR."

"And, finally, in my murdered plays, *The Days of the Turbins* and *Flight*, and in my novel, *The White Guard*, the Russian intelligentsia is persistently portrayed as the best element in our country. . . . Such portrayal is entirely natural for a writer whose deepest ties are with the intelligentsia."

He wrote of the latest ban—on his play *The Cabal of the Hypocrites* (*Molière*). "I am annihilated. . . . Not only my past works have been destroyed, but all the present and all the future ones. I personally, with my own hands, threw into the stove the draft of my novel about the devil (an early version of *The Master and Margarita*—tr.), the draft of a comedy, and the beginning of a second novel, *Theater*."

"There is no hope for any of my works."

He went on to say that to him impossibility to write was tantamount to being buried alive, and begged the government to order him to leave the country without delay. "I appeal to the humanity of the Soviet government, and beg that I, a writer who cannot be useful in his homeland, be magnanimously set free and allowed to leave."

But if all he had written was not sufficiently convincing, and he was to be condemned to lifelong silence in the USSR, he begged to be assigned to work in the theater—as a director, pledging himself honestly and "without a tinge of wrecking" to produce whatever plays were entrusted to him, from Shakespeare to the moderns. If he could not become a director, he asked for work as an actor, or an extra, or a stagehand.

"If this, too, is impossible, I beg the Soviet government to do with me as it sees fit, but do something, because I, the author of five plays, known in the USSR and abroad, am faced at present with poverty, the street, the end.

"I beg you specifically to assign me, for no organization, not a single person replies to my letters."

A month later Stalin telephoned Bulgakov. For some odd reason he had taken a liking from the first to *The Days of the Turbins*, though with the cryptic comment that, "it is not the author's fault that the play is a success." He suggested that Bulgakov apply to the Moscow Art Theater, adding, "I think they will accept you." And so, at the dictator's whim, Bulgakov was permitted to work in the theater. He spent most of the last decade of his life as assistant director and literary consultant at the Moscow Art Theater, where his first task was to dramatize Gogol's *Dead Souls* and help direct the play, and later at the Bolshoi.

He was reprieved, to a decade of almost unrelieved martyrdom, with but a few brighter moments—usually preludes to further disappointments and rebuffs.

Reduced to dramatizing the works of others, writing opera librettos and film scripts, based, again, on other authors' books, confined to frustrating work that robbed him of time and energy, and living much of the time in poverty and despair, he nevertheless refused to be broken. With remarkable moral courage, he persisted with his own writing, working at night. His sharp satirical eye, his comic gift, his extraordinary reserves of creative drive never abandoned him. He wrote brilliant plays—*Adam and Eve*, *Bliss*,⁴ *The Last Days* (on the death of Pushkin), *Ivan Vasilievich*. Their fate was predetermined: the former three were rejected by the censors. *Molière*, banned in 1930, then accepted by the Moscow Art Theater in 1932, was years in preparation. It finally opened in 1936, was greeted enthusiastically by the audience—and closed after seven per-

⁴See footnote, p. vii.

performances, following a scathing attack in *Pravda*. *Ivan Vasilievich* was about to open at the Theater of Satire. The premiere was set and tickets sold. After the *Pravda* article the opening was canceled.

One of the few bright moments during this agonizing decade was the revival of *The Days of the Turbins* in 1932, evidently on Stalin's orders. In a letter to a friend, Bulgakov wrote that half of his life was returned to him.

So much for the best Russian playwright of the twentieth century. His prose suffered the same fate. One of Russia's greatest writers of our century, Bulgakov did not see a single line of his work published during his last thirteen years. *The Life of Monsieur de Molière*,⁵ a warm and moving biography of the French playwright with whom Bulgakov felt a great sense of affinity, was rejected in 1933 by the publishing house that had invited him to write it. In 1936, after resigning from The Moscow Art Theater, he began *The Theatrical Novel*, which was left unfinished.

The hounding, the unremitting attacks, the humiliations and disappointments took their toll. Yet, without hope of publication, often ill and suffering from nervous exhaustion, Bulgakov returned again and again to his great work, *The Master and Margarita*, endlessly developing his ideas, changing the plot lines and characters, adding, deleting, revising, condensing, and refining. In the materials preserved by his widow (since the 1960s in the archives of the Lenin Library), there are numerous early beginnings, fragments, notes, entire discarded chapters, and several extensive drafts in various stages of completion.

Bulgakov worked on the novel from 1928 to his death in 1940, continuing even in his final illness to dictate revisions to his wife. Although he did not live to prepare a final version for publication, and the novel is thus still, in a sense, a work in progress, with some threads and details not yet completely resolved, it stands, both thematically

⁵Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Life of Monsieur de Molière*, translated by Mirra Ginsburg (New York: New Directions, 1986).

and stylistically, as a masterpiece of extraordinary richness and complexity.

The novel is built essentially on two planes. On the transcendent, the towering figures of Yeshua, Satan, his retinue, even in its clownish incarnation, and, yes, Pilate are accorded the full dignity of their immortal being—of myth. On the earthly plane, few escape the author's satiric barbs. And even the tale of the Master and Margarita, who are perhaps of both worlds, being closest to myth, is tinged with irony.

The four principal strands in the novel's astonishing web—contemporary Moscow, the infernal visitors, the story of the Master and Margarita, and the events in Yershalayim—are each distinct in style. Each breathes in its own way, each has its own rhythm and music (and I sought, as far as possible, to preserve this in translation).

Ironist, satirist, a writer of infinite invention and antic wit, Bulgakov was able to combine his most serious concerns with high burlesque. The comic, the tragic, the absurd—he was at home in all. And equally at home in the somber poetry of the Yershalayim chapters and the magnificent pages describing the ride of the infernal powers, restored to their true grandeur, away from Moscow, to fulfill the allotted destinies of the heroes—forgiveness and the end of torment for Pilate, and a kind of peace (a nineteenth century romantic limbo—a final ironic touch) for the Master and his Margarita.

The philosophical, political, and literary problems implicit in the novel have been the subject of innumerable studies, essays, and commentaries in many languages since its appearance, many of them reminiscent of the blind men and the riddle of the elephant. But then, in the presence of a work of genius what mortal can be blamed for blindness, or partial blindness?

As in virtually all of Bulgakov's work, there is in *The Master and Margarita* a strong thread of contemporary, as well as autobiographical reference, marvelously transmuted. Another element is his lasting concern with the

relation of the artist, the creative individual, to state authority, and with the fate of the artist's work—the manuscript, the created word—which, he came to feel, must not, cannot be destroyed. As Satan says in his novel, "manuscripts don't burn." Alas, a metaphysical statement.

In ordinary, political reality, it was only thanks to the total dedication of his widow that a great and splendid legacy of Bulgakov's works was preserved for decades, until a relative shift in state policy made possible their gradual, and yet to be completed, release for publication.

The process of posthumous "rehabilitation" began with the publication in 1962 (twenty-two years after the author's death and almost thirty years after it was written) of *The Life of Monsieur de Molière* and a small collection of Bulgakov's plays, followed by a slightly expanded one in 1965. In 1963 the magazine *Moskva* published several of his early stories. In 1965 the magazine *Novy Mir* published *The Theatrical Novel*. In 1966 came a volume of selected prose. *The Master and Margarita* first appeared in *Moskva* in late 1966 and early 1967, and was included, with some portions added, in a collection of Bulgakov's three novels in 1973.

In a letter to a friend in 1937 Bulgakov wrote, "Some well-wishers have chosen a rather odd manner of consoling me. I have heard again and again suspiciously unctuous voices assuring me, 'No matter, after your death everything will be published.'" The prophecy, so bitter to his ears, is at last slowly being fulfilled.

—Mirra Ginsburg, New York, 1987

“Who art thou, then?”

*“Part of that Power which eternally wills
evil and eternally works good.”*

Goethe—Faust

BOOK ONE

Chapter 1

NEVER SPEAK TO STRANGERS

At the hour of sunset, on a hot spring day, two citizens appeared in the Patriarchs' Ponds Park. One, about forty, in a gray summer suit, was short, plump, dark-haired and partly bald. He carried his respectable pancake-shaped hat in his hand, and his clean-shaven face was adorned by a pair of supernaturally large eyeglasses in a black frame. The other was a broad-shouldered young man with a mop of shaggy red hair, in a plaid cap pushed well back on his head, a checked cowboy shirt, crumpled white trousers, and black sneakers.

The first was none other than Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz, editor of an important literary journal and chairman of the board of one of the largest literary associations in Moscow, known by its initials as MASSOLIT. His young companion was the poet Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyrev, who wrote under the pen name of Homeless.

When they had reached the shade of the linden trees, which were just turning green, the literary gentlemen hurried toward the brightly painted stall with the sign

BEER AND SOFT DRINKS

Oh, yes, we must take note of the first strange thing about that dreadful May evening. Not a soul was to be seen around—not only at the stall, but anywhere along the entire avenue, running parallel to Malaya Bronnaya. At that hour, when it no longer seemed possible to breathe, when the sun was tumbling in a dry haze somewhere behind Sadovoye Circle, leaving Moscow scorched and gasping, nobody came to cool off under the lindens, to sit down on a bench. The avenue was deserted.

"Give us some Narzan," said Berlioz.

"We have no Narzan," answered the woman behind the stall in an offended tone.

"Do you have beer?" Homeless inquired in a hoarse voice.

"They'll bring beer in the evening," said the woman.

"What do you have?" asked Berlioz.

"Apricot soda, but it's warm," said the woman.

"All right, let's have that. Let's have it!"

The apricot soda produced an abundant yellow foam, and the air began to smell of a barber shop. Drinking it down, the writers immediately began to hiccup, paid, and settled on a bench facing the pond, with their backs to Bronnaya.

And now came the second strange thing, which involved only Berlioz. He suddenly stopped hiccuping, his heart thumped and dropped somewhere for a second, then returned, but with a blunt needle stuck in it. Besides, Berlioz was gripped with fear, unreasonable but so strong that he had the impulse to rush out of the park without a backward glance.

He looked around anxiously, unable to understand what had frightened him. He turned pale, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, and thought, "What's wrong with me? This never happened before. My heart is playing up. . . . I'm overworked. . . . Perhaps I ought to drop everything and run down to Kislovodsk. . . ."

At this moment the fiery air before him condensed and spun itself into a transparent citizen of the strangest appearance. A jockey's cap on a tiny head, a checked jacket, much too short for him and also woven of air. . . . The citizen was seven feet tall, but narrow in the shoulders, incredibly lean, and, if you please, with a jeering expression on his physiognomy.

The life which Berlioz had led until that moment had not prepared him for extraordinary phenomena. Turning still paler, he stared with bulging eyes and thought with consternation, "This cannot be!"

But, alas, it was. And the elongated citizen that he

could see through swayed before his eyes, to left and right, without touching the ground.

Berlioz was so panic-stricken that he closed his eyes. And when he opened them again, he saw that everything was over, the apparition had dissolved, the checkered character had vanished, and with him, the needle had slipped out of his heart.

"What the devil!" the editor exclaimed. "You know, Ivan, I nearly had a heatstroke just now! There was even a kind of hallucination. . . ." He tried to smile, but anxiety still flickered in his eyes, and his hands trembled. Gradually, however, he recovered his composure, fanned himself with his handkerchief, and, saying quite briskly, "Well, then . . .," he continued the conversation interrupted by the drinking of the apricot soda.

This conversation, as we learned subsequently, was about Jesus Christ. The point is that the editor had commissioned the poet to write a long antireligious poem for the coming issue of his journal. Ivan Nikolayevich composed the poem, and quickly, too. Unfortunately, the editor was not at all pleased with it. Homeless had portrayed the principal character of his poem, Jesus, in very dark hues. Nevertheless, in the editor's opinion, the poem had to be rewritten. And so the editor was giving the poet something of a lecture on Jesus, in order to stress the poet's basic error.

It is difficult to say precisely what had tripped up Ivan Nikolayevich—his imaginative powers or complete unfamiliarity with the subject. But his Jesus turned out, well . . . altogether alive—the Jesus who had existed once upon a time, although invested, it is true, with a full range of negative characteristics.

Berlioz, on the other hand, wanted to prove to the poet that the main point was not whether Jesus had been good or bad, but that he had never existed as an individual, and that all the stories about him were mere inventions, simple myths.

It must be added that the editor was a well-read man; he skillfully interlarded his speech with references to

ancient historians, such as the famed Philo of Alexandria and the brilliantly learned Flavius Josephus, none of whom had ever mentioned the existence of Jesus. Showing his solid erudition, Mikhail Alexandrovich informed the poet, among other things, that the passage of Book Fifteen, Chapter 44 of Tacitus' famous *Annals*, which speaks of the execution of Jesus, was nothing but a later spurious insertion.

The poet, to whom everything the editor said was new, listened to Mikhail Alexandrovich attentively, staring at him with his slightly impudent green eyes, and merely hiccuped from time to time, damning the apricot soda under his breath.

"There is not a single Eastern religion," said Berlioz, "where you will not find an immaculate maiden giving birth to a god. And the Christians invented nothing new, but used a similar legend to create their Jesus, who in fact had never existed. And this is what needs to be stressed above all. . . ."

The editor's high tenor resounded in the deserted avenue. And, as he delved deeper and deeper into jungles where only a highly educated man could venture without risking his neck, the poet learned more and more fascinating and useful facts about the Egyptian Osiris, the beneficent god who was the son of Sky and Earth, and about the Phoenician god Marduk, and about Tammuz, and even about the more obscure god Huitzilopochtli, who had once been worshiped by the Aztecs in Mexico. And just at the moment when Mikhail Alexandrovich was telling the poet how the Aztecs had used dough to make figurines of Huitzilopochtli, the first stroller made an appearance in the avenue.

Afterward, when—frankly speaking—it was already too late, various official institutions filed reports describing this man. A comparison of these reports can only cause astonishment. Thus, the first says that the man was short, had gold teeth, and limped on the right foot. The second, that the man was of enormous height, had platinum crowns, and limped on the left foot. The third states

laconically that the man had no special distinguishing characteristics. We must discard all these reports as quite worthless.

To begin with, the man described did not limp on either foot, and was neither short nor enormous in height, but simply tall. As for his teeth, he had platinum crowns on the left side of his mouth, and gold ones on the right. He wore an expensive gray suit and foreign shoes of the same color. His gray beret was worn at a jaunty angle over his ear, and under his arm he carried a cane with a black handle in the form of a poodle's head. He appeared to be in his forties. His mouth was somehow twisted. He was smooth shaven. A brunet. His right eye was black; the left, for some strange reason, green. Black eyebrows, but one higher than the other. In short, a foreigner.

Passing the bench where the editor and the poet were sitting, the foreigner glanced at them out of the corner of his eye, stopped, and suddenly sat down on the next bench, two steps away from the friends.

"A German," thought Berlioz. "An Englishman," thought Homeless. "Doesn't he feel too warm in gloves?"

The foreigner's eyes ran over the tall buildings that formed a square, bordering the pond, and it was obvious that he was seeing this place for the first time and that it interested him. His glance stopped on the upper floors, where the windowpanes dazzlingly reflected the fragmented sun that was departing from Mikhail Alexandrovich forever, then slid down to where the panes were darkening with evening. He smiled condescendingly, screwed up his eyes, placed his hands on the cane handle, and his chin on his hands.

"You described such scenes as the birth of Christ, the Son of God, satirically and extremely well, Ivan," said Berlioz. "But the point is that a whole string of sons of god preceded Jesus—the Phoenician Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, the Persian Mithras. And, to make it short, none of them was born, and none existed, including Jesus. Instead of dwelling on the birth or the coming of the Magi, you must show how the preposterous rumors were spread

about this coming. Otherwise, as you tell the story, it appears that he was really born!"

Homeless tried to suppress the tormenting hiccups by holding his breath, which made him hiccup still more painfully and loudly, and at the same moment Berlioz broke off his oration because the foreigner suddenly got up and walked toward the writers. They looked at him with astonishment.

"Excuse me, please," the man began, speaking with a foreign accent, but in correct Russian, "for taking the liberty . . . although we have not met. . . But the topic of your learned discourse is so interesting that . . ."

He courteously removed his beret, and the friends had little choice but to raise themselves a little and bow.

"No, he's more like a Frenchman . . ." thought Berlioz.

"A Pole . . ." thought Homeless.

It must be added that the poet was repelled by the foreigner from his very first words, while Berlioz rather liked him. Well, perhaps it was not so much that he liked him, but, how shall I put it . . . was intrigued by him, I guess.

"May I join you?" the foreigner asked civilly, and the friends involuntarily moved apart. The foreigner slipped in between them and immediately entered the conversation. "If I heard correctly, you said that Jesus never existed?" he asked, turning his green left eye to Berlioz.

"You heard correctly," Berlioz answered courteously. "That was precisely what I said."

"Ah, how interesting!" exclaimed the foreigner.

"What the devil does he want?" Homeless thought, frowning.

"And did you agree with your friend?" inquired the stranger, turning right, toward Homeless.

"One hundred per cent!" said the poet, who liked fanciful and figurative expressions.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed the uninvited companion. Then, for some strange reason, he threw a furtive glance over his shoulder like a thief, and, hushing his low voice

still further, he said, "Forgive my importunity, but I understood that, in addition to all else, you don't believe in God either?" He opened his eyes wide with mock fright and added, "I swear I will not tell anyone!"

"No, we do not believe in God," Berlioz replied, smiling faintly at the tourist's fear. "But we can speak of it quite openly."

The foreigner threw himself back against the bench and asked, his voice rising almost to a squeal with curiosity, "You are atheists?"

"Yes, we are atheists," Berlioz answered, smiling, and Homeless thought angrily, "Latched onto us, the foreign goose!"

"Oh, how delightful!" cried the amazing foreigner, his head turning back and forth from one writer to the other.

"In our country atheism does not surprise anyone," Berlioz said with diplomatic courtesy. "Most of our population is intelligent and enlightened, and has long ceased to believe the fairy tales about God."

At this point the foreigner suddenly jumped up and pressed the astonished editor's hand, saying, "Permit me to thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

"What do you thank him for?" inquired Homeless, blinking.

"For a most important bit of information, which is of the highest interest to me as a traveler," the foreigner explained, raising his finger significantly.

The important information had evidently indeed produced a strong impression on the traveler, for his eyes made a frightened round of the buildings, as though expecting to see an atheist in every window.

"No, he is not an Englishman," thought Berlioz. And Homeless thought, frowning again, "I'd like to know where he picked up his Russian."

"But permit me to ask you," the foreign guest resumed after a troubled silence, "what about the proofs of God's existence? As we know, there are exactly five of them."

"Alas!" Berlioz answered with regret. "None of these

proofs is worth a thing, and humanity has long since scrapped them. You must agree that, in the realm of reason, there can be no proof of God's existence."

"Bravo!" cried the foreigner. "Bravo! These are exactly the words of the restless old Immanuel on this subject. But curiously enough, he demolished all five arguments and then, as if to mock himself, constructed his own sixth one."

"Kant's argument," the educated editor countered with a subtle smile, "is equally unconvincing. No wonder Schiller said that only slaves could find Kant's reasoning on this subject satisfactory. And Strauss simply laughed at his proof."

As Berlioz spoke, he thought to himself, "But still, who is he? And why does he speak Russian so well?"

"This Kant ought to be sent to Solovki for three years for such arguments!" Ivan Nikolayevich burst out suddenly.

"Ivan!" Berlioz whispered with embarrassment.

But the suggestion that Kant be sent to Solovki not only did not shock the foreigner, but pleased him immensely.

"Exactly, exactly," he cried, and his green left eye, turned to Berlioz, glittered. "That's just the place for him! I told him that day at breakfast, 'Say what you will, Professor, but you have thought up something that makes no sense. It may be clever, but it's altogether too abstruse. People will laugh at you.'"

Berlioz gaped at him. "At breakfast? . . . Told Kant? . . . What is he babbling about?" he wondered.

"No," continued the stranger, undeterred by the editor's astonishment and addressing the poet. "It is impossible to send him to Solovki for the simple reason that he has resided for the past hundred-odd years in places considerably more remote than Solovki, and, I assure you, it is quite impossible to get him out of there."

"A pity," the belligerent poet responded.

"Indeed, a pity, I say so too," the stranger agreed, his eye flashing. Then he went on, "But what troubles me is

this: if there is no God, then, you might ask, who governs the life of men and, generally, the entire situation here on earth?"

"Man himself governs it," Homeless angrily hastened to reply to this frankly rather unclear question.

"Sorry," the stranger responded mildly. "But in order to govern, it is, after all, necessary to have a definite plan for at least a fairly decent period of time. Allow me to ask you, then, how man can govern if he cannot plan for even so ridiculously short a span as a thousand years or so, if, in fact, he cannot guarantee his own next day?"

"And really," the stranger turned to Berlioz, "imagine yourself, for example, trying to govern, to manage both others and yourself, just getting into the swing of it, when suddenly you develop . . . hm, hm . . . cancer of the lung. . . ." The foreigner smiled sweetly, as though the idea of cancer of the lung gave him intense pleasure.

"Yes, cancer . . ." he relished the word, closing his eyes like a tom cat. "And all your management is done with!

"You are no longer interested in anyone's destiny but your own. Your relatives begin to lie to you. Sensing the end, you rush to doctors, then to charlatans, or even to fortunetellers, although you know yourself that all are equally useless. And everything ends tragically: he who had but recently believed that he was managing something, now lies stretched motionless in a wooden box, and those around him, realizing that he is no longer good for anything, incinerate him in an oven.

"Or it may be even worse. A man may plan to go to Kislovodsk," and the stranger squinted at Berlioz. "A trifling undertaking, one might think. But even this is not within his power to accomplish, for he may suddenly, for no known reason, slip and fall under a streetcar! Would you say that he had managed this himself? Would it not be more accurate to think that it was someone else entirely who had disposed of him?" And the stranger broke into an odd little laugh.

Berlioz listened to the unpleasant story about cancer and the streetcar with close attention, and vaguely anx-

ious feelings begin to stir in him. "He is not a foreigner . . . he is not a foreigner. . . ." he thought. "A most peculiar individual . . . but then, who can he be?"

"I see you'd like to smoke?" the stranger suddenly asked Homeless. "What brand do you prefer?"

"Why, do you carry different brands?" the poet, who had run out of cigarettes, asked scowling.

"Which do you prefer?" the stranger repeated.

"Well, Our Brand," Homeless replied crossly.

The stranger immediately drew a cigarette case from his pocket and offered it to him.

"Our Brand . . ."

Both the editor and the poet were struck by the cigarette case even more than by the fact that it contained precisely Our Brand. It was huge, made of red gold, and its lid, as it was being opened, flashed with the blue and white fire of a diamond triangle.

The literary gentlemen had different thoughts. Berlioz said to himself, "No, he is a foreigner!" And Homeless thought, "The devil . . . have you ever! . . ."

The poet and the owner of the cigarette case lighted up, while Berlioz, a nonsmoker, declined.

"My counterargument," decided Berlioz, "must be: 'Yes, man is mortal, no one questions that. But the point is . . .'"

But before he had time to utter the words, the foreigner resumed:

"Yes, man is mortal, but this is not the worst of it. What is bad is that he sometimes dies suddenly. That's the trouble! And, generally, he can never say what he will do that very same evening."

"What an absurd way of posing the problem," Berlioz thought, and retorted:

"Well, this is an exaggeration. I know more or less definitely what to expect this evening. Of course, if a brick should drop on my head on Bronnaya . . ."

"A brick," the stranger interrupted with a magisterial air, "will never drop on anyone's head just out of the

blue. And specifically, I can assure you that you are in no danger of it. You shall die another death."

"Do you happen to know which precisely?" Berlioz inquired with entirely natural irony, allowing himself to be drawn into a truly preposterous conversation. "And if so, would you mind telling me?"

"Willingly," responded the stranger. He looked Berlioz up and down as though measuring him for a new suit, and muttered through his teeth something that sounded like "One, two . . . Mercury in the second house . . . the Moon is gone . . . six—misfortune . . . evening— seven . . ." Then he announced loudly and gaily, "Your head will be cut off!"

Homeless stared with wild rage at the presumptuous stranger, and Berlioz asked with a crooked smile:

"And who precisely will do it? Enemies? Interventionists?"

"No," replied the stranger, "a Russian woman, a member of the Young Communist League."

"Hmm . . ." Berlioz grunted, irritated by the little joke. "This, if you will excuse me, is not very likely."

"I beg your pardon," the foreigner replied, "but it is so. Oh, yes, I meant to ask you: what do you expect to do this evening, if it is not a secret?"

"It is no secret. I shall now stop off at home, on Sadovaya, and later, at ten o'clock, there will be a meeting of MASSOLIT, at which I shall be chairman."

"No, it is impossible," the foreigner rejoined firmly.

"And why?"

"Because," replied the foreigner, squinting up at the sky where black birds darted silently in anticipation of the coolness of the evening, "because Annushka has already bought sunflower oil, and not only bought it, but spilled it too. So that the meeting will not take place."

At this point, as may well be understood, there was silence under the lindens.

"Forgive me," Berlioz spoke after a pause, glancing at the foreigner who was babbling such nonsense, "but what has sunflower oil to do with it? And who is Annushka?"

"Sunflower oil has nothing to do with anything," Homeless suddenly broke in, evidently deciding to declare war on their uninvited companion. "Have you ever, by any chance, been in a hospital for the mentally ill?"

"Ivan! . . ." Mikhail Alexandrovich exclaimed in a low voice.

But the foreigner was not in the least offended. He burst into gay laughter.

"Oh, yes, I have, many times!" he cried, laughing, but fixing the poet with his unsmiling eye. "Name a place I have not been to! It is a pity, though, I have never asked any of the professors the meaning of schizophrenia. So that you will have to ask this question yourself, Ivan Nikolayevich!"

"How do you know my name?"

"Why, is there anyone who does not know you, Ivan Nikolayevich?" The foreigner took from his pocket last night's *Literary Gazette*, and Ivan Nikolayevich saw his face and his own verse on the very first page. But this evidence of his fame and popularity, which had been such a source of joy to him the day before, now gave the poet no pleasure whatsoever.

"I am sorry," he said and his face darkened. "Can you excuse us a moment? I want to say a few words to my friend."

"Oh, certainly!" exclaimed the stranger. "It is so pleasant here under the lindens, and I am, incidentally, in no hurry to go anywhere."

"Listen, Misha," the poet whispered, drawing Berlioz aside. "He is no tourist, he's a spy. He is a Russian *émigré* who has wormed his way back here. Ask to see his documents before he goes away . . ."

"You think so?" Berlioz whispered with alarm, thinking, "He's right. . . ."

"Take my word," the poet hissed into his ear. "He is pretending to be a fool so he can get some information. You heard how he speaks Russian," the poet said, watching the stranger out of the corner of his eye lest he escape. "Come on, let's stop him before he makes off. . . ."

And the poet drew Berlioz by his hand back to the bench.

The stranger was no longer sitting, but standing near the bench. In his hands was a little notebook in a dark-gray binding, a thick envelope made of good paper, and a calling card.

"Excuse me for failing to introduce myself in the heat of our argument. Here is my card, my passport, and the invitation to visit Moscow for a consultation," he said impressively, with a penetrating look at the two literary gentlemen.

The friends were embarrassed. "Damn it, he heard everything. . . ." Berlioz thought, and gestured politely to indicate that there was no need to show documents. While the stranger held them out to the editor, the poet had time to catch the word "Professor" printed on the card in a foreign alphabet, and the first letter of his name—a "W."

"Very pleased," the editor mumbled in confusion, and the foreigner put the documents into his pocket.

Thus, relations were restored and all three sat down on the bench once more.

"Were you invited to our country as a consultant, Professor?" asked Berlioz.

"Yes, as a consultant."

"Are you German?" inquired Homeless.

"I?" asked the professor and suddenly fell into a reverie. "Yes, perhaps I am. . ." he said.

"You speak excellent Russian," remarked Homeless.

"Oh, I am generally polyglot, I know a great many languages," replied the professor.

"And what is your field?" asked Berlioz.

"I am a specialist in black magic."

"Now what!" flashed through the mind of Mikhail Alexandrovich.

"And . . . it was in this capacity that you were invited here?" he stuttered.

"Yes, in this capacity," confirmed the professor, and explained: "They have found in your State Library au-

thentic manuscripts by the tenth-century necromancer, Herbert d'Aurillac. And I was asked to decipher them. I am the only specialist in the world."

"Aah! You are a historian?" Berlioz asked respectfully, with great relief.

"I am a historian," confirmed the scholar, and added irrelevantly, "There will be a most interesting occurrence at the Patriarchs' Ponds this evening!"

Both the editor and the poet were extremely astonished again. The professor beckoned to them, and when they bent over closer, he whispered:

"And keep in mind that Jesus existed."

"You see, Professor," Berlioz answered with a strained smile, "we respect your great erudition, but we ourselves maintain a different view on this question."

"There is no need for points of view," replied the strange professor. "He simply existed, that is all."

"But there must be some proof. . . ." began Berlioz.

"There is no need for proof, either," answered the professor, and said in a low voice, suddenly without any accent: "Everything is very simple: In the early morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, wearing a white cloak with a blood-red lining and walking with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman. . . ."

Chapter 2

PONTIUS PILATE

In the early morning of the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan, wearing a white cloak with a blood-red lining and walking with the shuffling gait of a cavalryman, the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, came out into the covered colonnade between the two wings of the palace of Herod the Great.

More than anything in the world, the Procurator detested the smell of rose oil, and everything now promised a bad day, since this smell had pursued the Procurator since dawn.

It seemed to the Procurator that the cypresses and palms in the garden gave off the smell of roses, that the accursed whiff of roses was mingled with the odors of the convoy's leather gear and sweat.

A faint smoke reached the colonnade across the upper terrace of the garden from the outbuildings behind the palace where the First Cohort of the Twelfth Lightning-Swift Legion, which had come to Yershalayim with the Procurator, was billeted. And this slightly acrid smoke, which attested that the century cooks had begun to prepare dinner, was also mingled with the cloying rose smell.

"Gods, gods, why do you punish me? Yes, no doubt it is upon me again, again this terrible, invincible affliction . . . this hemicrania which grips half of the head with pain . . . without remedy, without escape . . . I must try not to move my head. . . ."

A chair stood waiting for him on the mosaic floor near the fountain, and the Procurator sat down in it without

looking at anyone and stretched his hand sideways. His secretary deferentially placed a sheet of parchment in his hand. Unable to suppress a pained grimace, the Procurator ran through the text out of the corner of his eye, returned the parchment to the secretary and said with an effort:

"The accused is from Galilee? Was the case sent to the Tetrarch?"

"Yes, Procurator," replied the secretary.

"What did he say?"

"He refused to give a decision in the case and ordered that the Sanhedrin's death sentence be submitted to you for confirmation," explained the secretary.

The Procurator's cheek twitched, and he said quietly: "Bring in the accused."

Two legionaries immediately led in a man of about twenty-seven from the garden onto the balcony under the columns, and brought him before the Procurator's chair. The man was dressed in an old and torn pale-blue chiton. His head was covered with a white headcloth, with a leather thong around his forehead. His hands were tied behind his back. Under his left eye there was a large, dark bruise, and the corner of his mouth was cut and caked with blood. The prisoner looked at the Procurator with anxious curiosity.

The latter was silent for a while, then he asked in a low voice in Aramaic:

"So it was you who incited the people to destroy the Temple of Yershalayim?"

The Procurator sat motionless like a figure of stone, and only his lips moved faintly as he spoke. The Procurator sat like a figure of stone because he was afraid to move his fiercely aching head.

The man with the bound hands leaned forward slightly and began to speak:

"Good man! Believe me. . ."

But the Procurator, still motionless and without raising his voice, interrupted him at once:

"Is it me that you call a good man? You are mistaken.

In Yershalayim everyone whispers about me that I am a vicious monster, and this is entirely true." And he added in the same monotonous voice: "Call Centurion Rat-Killer."

It seemed to everyone that the air on the balcony darkened when Mark, the centurion of the First Century, nicknamed Rat-Killer, presented himself to the Procurator. Rat-Killer was a head taller than the tallest legionary, and so broad in the shoulders that he entirely shut out the sun, which was still low in the sky.

The Procurator addressed the centurion in Latin:

"This criminal calls me 'good man.' Take him out of here for a moment and explain to him how he must address me. But do not maim him."

Everyone, except the motionless Procurator, followed Mark Rat-Killer with his eyes as the centurion motioned to the prisoner with his hand that he must come with him. Rat-Killer generally drew all eyes to himself wherever he appeared because of his height. And those who saw him for the first time looked at him also because the centurion's face was disfigured: his nose had once been broken by a blow of a German cudgel.

Mark's heavy boots clattered across the mosaic. The bound man followed him noiselessly, and complete silence fell under the colonnade. All that could be heard was the cooing of pigeons in the garden near the balcony, and the water singing a complicated, pleasant song in the fountain.

The Procurator would have liked to get up and let the water run over his temple, and stay so, motionless. But he knew that even this would not help.

Bringing the prisoner from the colonnade into the garden, Rat-Killer took a lash from the hands of a legionary standing at the foot of a bronze statue. Swinging lightly, he struck the prisoner across the shoulders. The centurion's movement was careless and easy, but the bound man instantly crashed to the ground as though someone had cut him down; he gasped for air, the color

drained out of his face, and his eyes became expressionless.

With his left hand, Mark lightly lifted up the fallen man as though he were an empty sack, set him on his feet, and spoke nasally, mispronouncing the Aramaic words:

"The Roman Procurator must be addressed as Hegemon. Speak no other words. Stand still. Do you understand me, or shall I hit you again?"

The prisoner swayed, but mastered himself. His color returned. He drew his breath and answered hoarsely:

"I understand you. Don't hit me."

A moment later he stood again before the Procurator. The flat, sick voice asked:

"Name?"

"Mine?" hastily asked the prisoner, expressing with all his being his readiness to answer clearly and provoke no further anger.

The Procurator said in a low voice:

"I know mine. Don't pretend to be more stupid than you are. Yours."

"Yeshua," the prisoner answered promptly.

"Any surname?"

"Ha-Nozri."

"Where are you from?"

"From the city of Gamala," the prisoner replied, indicating with his head that somewhere far away, to the right of him, in the north, there was a city called Gamala.

"Who are you by birth?"

"I do not know exactly," the prisoner answered quickly. "I don't remember my parents. I was told that my father was a Syrian. . . ."

"Where is your permanent home?"

"I have no permanent dwelling place," the prisoner answered shyly. "I travel from town to town."

"This can be put more briefly, in a single word—a vagrant," said the Procurator, and asked: "Any relatives?"

"None. I am alone in the world."

"Are you literate?"

"Yes."

"Do you know any language besides Aramaic?"

"Yes. Greek."

A swollen eyelid rose a little, and an eye blurred with suffering stared at the prisoner. The other eye remained shut.

Pilate spoke in Greek:

"So you intended to destroy the Temple and called upon the people to do it?"

The prisoner became animated again and his eyes lost their expression of fear. He answered in Greek:

"No, goo . . ." terror flashed in his eyes because he had almost made a slip. "No, Hegemon, I have never in my life intended to destroy the Temple and have never urged anyone to such senseless action."

Astonishment flickered in the face of the secretary, who sat huddled over a low table, writing down the testimony. He raised his head, but immediately bent it back to his parchment.

"Many people gather in this city for the holidays. Among them there are Magi, astrologers, diviners, and murderers," the Procurator spoke monotonously. "There are also liars. You are a liar. It is clearly written: Incited people to destroy the Temple. People testified to this."

"Those good people," the prisoner began, and added hastily, "Hegemon," then continued, "have no learning of any kind and have confused all that I said. I am beginning to fear that this confusion will continue for a very long time. And all because he writes things down incorrectly."

There was a silence. Now both sick eyes stared heavily at the prisoner.

"I repeat, but for the last time, stop pretending madness, rogue," Pilate said softly and monotonously. "Not much is written down, but enough is written to hang you."

"No, no, Hegemon," the prisoner spoke, all of his being straining in the effort to convince. "There is one who follows and follows me with a goatskin parchment, writing all the time. But once I glanced into this parch-

ment and was horrified. I never said a word of what was written there. I pleaded with him: 'Burn your parchment, I beg of you!' But he tore it from my hands and ran away."

"Who is he?" Pilate asked squeamishly and touched his hand to his temple.

"Matthu Levi," the prisoner explained willingly. "He was a tax collector, and I first met him on the road in Bethphage, where the fig orchard comes out at an angle, and talked with him. At first he treated me with enmity and even insulted me, or rather thought he was insulting me by calling me a dog." The prisoner smiled. "Personally, I see nothing bad in this animal to take offense at this word. . ."

The secretary stopped writing and stealthily threw an astonished glance—not at the prisoner, but at the Procurator.

". . . However, after listening to me, he began to soften," continued Yeshua. "And finally he threw his money away on the road and said that he would come wandering with me. . . ."

Pilate smiled wryly with one cheek, baring his yellow teeth, and said, turning his whole body to the secretary:

"O city of Yershalayim! What stories you will hear in it! A tax collector, throwing money on the road!"

The secretary, not knowing how to reply to this, chose to mimic Pilate's smile.

"He said that money had become hateful to him," Yeshua explained Matthu's strange behavior, and added, "And ever since that day he has been my traveling companion."

Still showing his teeth, the Procurator glanced at the prisoner, then at the sun which was relentlessly rising over the equestrian statues of the hippodrome that lay far below on the right. And suddenly, with unbearable distress, he thought that it would be simplest of all to get rid of this strange rascal by pronouncing two short words, "Hang him." To get rid of the convoy as well, to leave the colonnade and go to the interior of the palace, to

order the room to be darkened, to throw himself on the couch, demand cold water, call his dog Banga in a piteous voice and complain to him about the hemicrania. And the thought of poison suddenly flashed temptingly through the Procurator's sick head.

He looked at the prisoner with bleary eyes and sat in silence for a time, painfully trying to remember why this prisoner with a face maimed and bruised by blows was standing before him under the pitiless morning sun of Yershalayim, and what unnecessary questions he still had to ask the man.

"Matthu Levi?" the sick Procurator asked hoarsely and closed his eyes.

"Yes, Matthu Levi," he heard the high, tormenting voice.

"But what, after all, did you say about the Temple to the crowd in the market place?"

The answering voice seemed to stab at Pilate's temples, was unbearably painful as it spoke:

"I said, Hegemon, that the Temple of the old faith would fall and that a new temple of truth would arise. I said it in these words to make it easier to understand."

"But why did you disturb the people in the market place, wandering beggar, talking to them about the truth, of which you do not have any conception? What is truth?"

And the Procurator thought, "Oh, gods! I am asking him questions about things that have nothing to do with the trial . . . my mind does not serve me any more. . . ." And again he had a vision of a cup of dark liquid. "Poison, give me poison. . . ."

And once again he heard the voice:

"The truth is, first of all, that your head aches and aches so badly that you are giving yourself over to cowardly thoughts of death. It is not only more than you can bear to talk to me, but it is even difficult for you to look at me. And at this moment I am involuntarily your torturer, which grieves me. You cannot even think of anything, and you are dreaming only of being with your dog,

which is evidently the only creature you are attached to. But your suffering will be over soon, your headache will pass."

The secretary stared at the prisoner with bulging eyes and stopped writing in the middle of a word.

Pilate raised his tormented eyes to the prisoner and saw that the sun was already quite high over the hippodrome, that a ray had penetrated under the colonnade and was creeping up to Yeshua's worn sandals, and that he was trying to step out of the sun.

The Procurator rose from his chair, pressed his head with his hands, and his yellowish, shaven face expressed awe. But he immediately suppressed it by an effort of will and lowered himself into the chair again.

The prisoner, meantime, continued to speak, but the secretary recorded nothing more and merely drank in every word, stretching out his neck like a goose.

"Well, now it is over," said the prisoner, looking at Pilate with good will. "And I am very glad. I would advise you, Hegemon, to leave the palace for a while and take a stroll somewhere in the vicinity—perhaps in the gardens on Mount Eleon. The storm will break . . ." the prisoner turned and squinted at the sun, ". . . later, toward evening. A stroll would do you much good, and I would be pleased to accompany you. Some new thoughts have come to my mind, and I believe that they might interest you. I should be glad to share them with you, especially since you impress me as a very intelligent man."

The secretary turned deathly pale and dropped the scroll on the floor.

"The trouble," continued the bound prisoner without being stopped by anyone, "is that you keep to yourself too much and have lost all faith in men. After all, you must agree, a man cannot place all of his affection in a dog. Your life is too barren, Hegemon." And the speaker permitted himself to smile.

The secretary's mind was now on a single question: could he, or could he not believe his ears? He had no choice but to believe. Then he tried to imagine what

fantastic forms the wrath of the fiery-tempered Procurator would take at this unprecedented impertinence of the prisoner. But even this defied the secretary's imagination, although he knew the Procurator well.

Then came the cracked, husky voice of the Procurator, who said in Latin:

"Untie his hands."

One of the legionaries of the convoy clicked his spear, handed it to another, approached the prisoner and removed the rope. The secretary picked up the scroll and decided for the time being to write nothing down and to be surprised by nothing.

"Admit it," Pilate said in an undertone in Greek, "you are a great physician?"

"No, Procurator, I am not a physician," the prisoner answered, rubbing his crumpled, red and swollen wrist with obvious pleasure.

Frowning, Pilate drilled the prisoner with his eyes, which were no longer blurred but flashed with their well-known sparks.

"I did not ask you," said Pilate. "Do you know Latin?"

"Yes, I do," said the prisoner.

The color rose in Pilate's sallow cheeks, and he asked in Latin:

"How did you know I wanted to call my dog?"

"Very simply," the prisoner replied in Latin. "You moved your hand in the air," and he repeated Pilate's gesture, "as if you wanted to stroke, and your lips. . ."

"Yes," said Pilate.

They were silent a while. Then Pilate asked in Greek:

"So you are a physician?"

"No, no," the prisoner answered quickly. "Believe me, I am not a physician."

"Very well, if you wish to keep it secret, do. This has no direct bearing on the case. So you say that you did not urge anyone to destroy . . . or set fire to the Temple, or to demolish it in any other way?"

"I repeat, Hegemon, I have never urged anyone to do such things. Do I look like a half-wit?"

"Oh, no, you don't look like a half-wit," the Procurator said quietly and smiled a strange and terrible smile. "Swear to me, then, that this has never happened."

"What do you want me to swear by?" asked the unbound prisoner with animation.

"Well, let us say by your life," said the Procurator. "This is just the time to swear by it, for it hangs by a hair—you must know that."

"And is it your belief that you have hung it so, Hegemon?" asked the prisoner. "If so, you are very mistaken."

Pilate started and spoke through his teeth:

"I can cut this hair."

"There, too, you are mistaken," the prisoner said with a luminous smile, shielding himself from the sun with his hand. "You must agree that the hair can surely be cut only by him who had hung it?"

"Well, well," Pilate said, smiling. "Now I do not doubt that the idlers of Yershalayim followed your every step. I do not know who hung your tongue on its hinges, but it is hung well. Incidentally, tell me, is it true that you came to Yershalayim through the Susa Gate mounted on an ass and followed by a multitude crying welcome to you as to a prophet?" and the Procurator pointed to the parchment scroll.

The prisoner gave the Procurator a puzzled look.

"I have no ass, Hegemon," he said. "It is true that I came to Yershalayim through the Susa Gate, but I came on foot. My only companion was Matthu Levi, and nobody cried anything to me, for nobody knew me then in Yershalayim."

"And do you know these men," continued Pilate without taking his eyes away from the prisoner, "a certain Dismas, Gestas, and Bar-Rabban?"

"These good men I do not know," said the prisoner.

"Is this the truth?"

"It is the truth."

"And now tell me, why do you use the words 'good men' all the time? Do you call everyone that?"

"Everyone," answered the prisoner. "There are no bad people in the world."

"I hear this for the first time," said Pilate, with a wry smile. "But perhaps I know life too little! . . . You need not write any more," he turned to the secretary, although the latter was no longer writing down anything. Then he continued, addressing the prisoner: "Did you read this in some Greek book?"

"No, I came to it by myself."

"And you preach it?"

"Yes."

"And what about a man like the centurion Mark, who was nicknamed Rat-Killer. Is he good?"

"Yes," answered the prisoner. "But he is an unhappy man. Since good men maimed him, he has become cruel and hard. I should like to know who mutilated him."

"I shall be glad to tell you," responded Pilate, "for I witnessed it. The good men threw themselves upon him like dogs upon a bear. The Germans hung on his neck, his arms, his feet. Our infantry maniple was caught in a pocket, and if the cavalry turma, which I commanded, had not cut in, you would not have had your conversation with Rat-Killer, philosopher. This happened in the battle of Idistaviso, in the Valley of the Maidens."

"If I could have a talk with him," the prisoner said dreamily, "I am certain that he would change completely."

"I imagine," said Pilate, "that you would give the legate of the legion small reason to rejoice if you took it into your head to talk to any of his officers or soldiers. However, this will not happen, to our general relief. And the first who will see to it is I."

At this moment a swallow darted into the colonnade, described a circle under the golden ceiling, swept down, its wing almost brushing the face of the bronze statue in one of the niches, and disappeared behind the capital of the column. Perhaps it had decided to build a nest there.

While it was flying, a formula shaped itself in the now clear and light head of the Procurator. It was as follows:

the Hegemon had heard the case of the itinerant philosopher Yeshua, called Ha-Nozri, and found no evidence of crime. Specifically, he found no connection whatsoever between Yeshua's actions and the disorders which had recently occurred in Yershalayim. The itinerant philosopher turned out to be mentally deranged, and hence the Procurator did not confirm the death sentence passed upon Ha-Nozri by the Small Sanhedrin. However, since the mad utopian speeches of Ha-Nozri could cause unrest in Yershalayim, the Procurator exiled Yeshua from Yershalayim and sentenced him to confinement in Strato-Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea—that is, where the Procurator had his residence.

All that remained was to dictate this to the secretary.

The swallow's wings flicked over the Hegemon's head; the bird darted toward the bowl of the fountain, and escaped to freedom. The Procurator raised his eyes to the prisoner and saw that a column of dust had taken fire next to him.

"Is this all about him?" Pilate asked the secretary.

"Unfortunately, no," the secretary replied unexpectedly, and handed Pilate another sheet of parchment.

"What else now?" asked Pilate, frowning.

After he read the parchment, his face changed even more. Perhaps because the dark blood had risen to his neck and face, or for some other reason, but his skin lost its yellow tinge, turning purple, and his eyes seemed to have sunk into their sockets.

Again, this may have been the blood rushing up to his temples and throbbing there, but something happened to the Procurator's vision. It seemed to him that the prisoner's head had dissolved, and another appeared in its place. A golden crown with widely spaced points sat on this bald head. On its forehead was a round ulcer, eating away the skin and covered with a salve. It had a sunken, toothless mouth with a pendent, capricious lower lip. It seemed to Pilate that everything around him—the pink columns of the balcony, the roofs of Yershalayim in the distance below, beyond the garden—had disap-

peared, had drowned in the dense greenery of Capreaen gardens. Something strange had also happened to the Procurator's ears: it was as though he heard a distant, low, and menacing sound of trumpets, and a distinct, nasal voice haughtily drawled out the words, "The law concerning lese majesty. . ."

Short, incoherent and extraordinary thoughts rushed through Pilate's mind. "Lost!" Then, "We are lost!" And then an altogether absurd idea among the others, about some sort of immortality, and for some reason the thought of immortality gave him intolerable anguish.

With a great effort, Pilate drove out the apparition and his glance returned to the balcony. And once again the prisoner's eyes were before him.

"Listen, Ha-Nozri," the Procurator began, looking at Yeshua with a strange expression; the Procurator's face was glowering, but his eyes were troubled. "Did you ever say anything about the great Caesar? Answer me! Did you? Or . . . did you . . . not?" Pilate stretched out the word "not" somewhat more than was proper in court, and his glance sent Yeshua a thought that he seemed anxious to suggest to the prisoner.

"It is easy and pleasant to speak the truth," said the prisoner.

"I am not interested," Pilate spoke in a choked, angry voice, "whether you find it pleasant or unpleasant to speak the truth. You shall have to speak it. But as you do, weigh every word if you want to avoid not only an inevitable, but an agonizing death."

No one knows what had come over the Procurator of Judea, but he allowed himself to raise his hand as if to shut out the sun, and from behind this hand, as from behind a shield, to send the prisoner a message with his eyes.

"And so," he went on, "answer me whether you know a certain Yehudah of Kerioth. And tell me exactly what you said to him, if you did, about Caesar?"

"This is what happened," the prisoner spoke readily. "The evening before last I met a young man near the

Temple, who said that he was Yehudah of the town of Kerieth. He invited me to his house in the Lower City and treated me to. . .”

“A good man?” Pilate asked, with a diabolic spark in his eyes.

“A very good man,” nodded the prisoner, “and eager for knowledge. He showed the greatest interest in my thoughts and welcomed me warmly. . . .”

“He lit the lamps . . .” Pilate spoke through his teeth, echoing the prisoner’s tone, and his eyes glittered.

“Why, yes,” Yeshua continued, a bit surprised at the Procurator’s knowledge. “He asked me about my views concerning state authority. He was extremely interested in this question.”

“And what did you say?” asked Pilate. “Or will you tell me that you do not remember what you said?” Pilate’s tone was hopeless now.

“I said, among other things,” the prisoner answered, “that every form of authority means coercion over men, and that a time will come when there shall be neither Caesars, nor any other rulers. Man will come into the kingdom of truth and justice, where there will be no need for any authority.”

“And then?”

“Then there was nothing,” said the prisoner. “Men ran in and bound me and led me off to prison.”

The secretary, trying not to miss a word, rapidly inscribed the words on his parchment.

“There was not, is not, and shall never be any rule in the world greater and more beneficent to men than the rule of the Emperor Tiberius!” Pilate’s broken, sick voice rose and spread around him. The Procurator looked at his secretary and the convoy with hatred.

“And it is not for you, criminal madman, to talk about it! Let the convoy leave the balcony!” he cried suddenly, and added, turning to the secretary: “Leave me alone with the criminal. This is an affair of state!”

The soldiers of the convoy raised their spears and, clanking rhythmically with their metal-shod sandals, walked out into the garden. The secretary followed.

For a time the silence on the balcony was interrupted only by the song of the water in the fountain. Pilate saw the water swell over the bowl, breaking off after a while and running down in rivulets.

The prisoner spoke first.

"I see that some misfortune came of my talking to the young man of Kerioth. I have a premonition, Hegemon, that he will come to grief, and I am very sorry for him."

"I think," the Procurator answered with a strange grin, "that there is someone in the world who needs your pity more than Yehudah of Kerioth, and who will fare much worse than Yehudah! . . . So Mark Rat-Killer, a cold and confirmed hangman, the people," the Procurator pointed to Yeshua's mutilated face, "who beat you for your sermons, the outlaws Dismas and Gestas, who with their henchmen killed four soldiers, and, finally, the filthy informer Yehudah—all these are good men?"

"Yes," answered the prisoner.

"And the kingdom of truth will come?"

"It will come, Hegemon," Yeshua answered with conviction.

"It will never come!" Pilate cried suddenly in such a dreadful voice that Yeshua started back. In this voice, many years ago, Pilate had cried to his horsemen in the Valley of the Maidens, "Slash at them! Slash them! The giant Rat-Killer is trapped!"

He raised his voice, cracked from years of shouting commands, still higher, crying out the words so that they would be heard in the garden: "Criminal! Criminal! Criminal!" Then, lowering his voice, he asked, "Yeshua Ha-Nozri, do you believe in any gods?"

"There is one God," answered Yeshua. "And I believe in Him."

"Pray to him, then! Pray harder! However . . ." Pilate's voice dropped, "it will not help. You have no wife?" he asked with anguish, unable to understand what was happening to him.

"No, I am alone."

"Hateful city . . ." the Procurator muttered suddenly, and his shoulders twitched as if he were chilled. He

rubbed his hands as though washing them. "It would have been much better, really, if someone had cut your throat before you met Yehudah of Kerioth."

"Why don't you let me go, Hegemon," the prisoner asked suddenly, and his voice became anxious. "I see they want to kill me."

Pilate's face contorted with a spasm; he turned the inflamed, red-veined whites of his eyes to Yeshua and said:

"Do you suppose, wretched man, that the Roman Procurator will release a man who said what you have said? Oh, gods, gods! Or do you think I am prepared to take your place? I do not share your thoughts! And listen to me: from this moment on, if you will say a single word, if you address anyone at all, beware of me! I repeat to you—beware!"

"Hegemon . . ."

"Silence!" cried Pilate and with a furious glance followed the swallow which had again darted into the balcony. "Here!" he shouted.

And when the secretary and the convoy returned to their places, Pilate declared that he confirmed the death sentence passed by the Small Sanhedrin upon the criminal Yeshua Ha-Nozri. The secretary wrote down Pilate's words.

A moment later Mark Rat-Killer stood before the Procurator. He was ordered by the Procurator to turn the criminal over to the chief of the secret service, and to relay the Procurator's command that Yeshua Ha-Nozri be kept apart from the other condemned, and also that the soldiers of the secret service detachment be forbidden, under threat of severe punishment, to speak with Yeshua about anything, or to answer any of his questions.

At a sign from Mark, the convoy closed around Yeshua and led him from the balcony.

After that a handsome, fair-bearded man appeared before the Procurator. Eagle feathers crested his helmet, gold lion heads glittered on his chest, and golden spangles adorned the hilt of his sword, the laced knee-high footwear on triple soles, and the purple cloak thrown over

his left shoulder. He was the legate in command of the legion.

The Procurator asked him where the Sebastian cohort was at the moment. The legate reported that the Sebastians served as the cordon around the square before the hippodrome, where the sentences over the criminals were to be announced to the people.

The Procurator instructed the legate to select two centuries from the Roman cohort. One, under Rat-Killer's command, was to convoy the criminals, the carriages with the instruments of execution, and the executioners to Bald Mountain, and then to join the upper cordon on arrival there. The other century was to be sent immediately to Bald Mountain and set up a cordon without delay. The Procurator asked the legate to assign an auxiliary cavalry regiment—a Syrian ala—to the same task, that is, to guard the mountain.

When the legate had departed from the balcony, the Procurator commanded his secretary to summon to the palace the president of the Sanhedrin, two of its members, and the chief of the temple service of Yershalayim, but added that he wanted an opportunity to speak to the president alone before conferring with all those people.

The Procurator's command was carried out promptly and exactly. The sun, which was scorching Yershalayim during those days with extraordinary fury, had not yet reached its zenith when the Procurator and the president of the Sanhedrin, High Priest of the Hebrews, Yoseph Kaiyapha, met on the upper terrace of the garden, near the two white marble lions guarding the stairway.

The garden was silent. When the Procurator came out from under the colonnade onto the sun-flooded upper level of the garden with its palms on monstrous elephant feet, he could see, spread out before him, the entire hateful city of Yershalayim with its hanging bridges, fortresses, and, worst of all, that utterly indescribable hulk of marble with golden dragon scales instead of a roof—the Temple of Yershalayim. And now his sharp ears caught from far below, where the stone wall divided the

lower terraces of the palace garden form the city square, a low rumble, over which there rose from time to time faint, feeble sounds—either moans or cries.

The Procurator understood that a countless multitude of Yershalayim residents, agitated over the latest disorders, had already assembled there, and that this multitude was waiting impatiently for the proclamation of the sentences. The cries he heard came from the restless vendors who sold water.

The Procurator began by inviting the High Priest to the balcony, out of the merciless heat. But Kaiyapha politely excused himself, explaining that it was impossible for him to accept this invitation on the eve of the holiday. Pilate threw a hood over his head, which was beginning to go bald, and opened the conversation. This conversation took place in Greek.

Pilate said that he had looked into the case of Yeshua Ha-Nozri and had confirmed the death sentence.

Thus, three outlaws had been condemned to be executed that day—Dismas, Gestas and Bar-Rabban, and also this Yeshua Ha-Nozri. The former two, who had taken it into their heads to instigate the people to rebellion against Caesar, had been taken fighting by the Roman authorities; they were under the Procurator's jurisdiction and were not in question here. But the latter two, Bar-Rabban and Ha-Nozri, had been seized by the local authorities and sentenced by the Sanhedrin. According to the law, and according to custom, one of these two criminals would have to be released in honor of the great holiday of Passover that was about to begin that day. And so, the Procurator wished to know which of the two criminals the Sanhedrin intended to release: Bar-Rabban or Ha-Nozri?

Kaiyapha inclined his head to signify that the question was clear to him, and replied:

“The Sanhedrin begs to release Bar-Rabban.”

The Procurator knew very well that this would be the High Priest's answer, but it was his purpose to show that he was astonished at it.

Pilate did this with great skill. The eyebrows on the haughty face rose, and the Procurator looked with amazement straight into the High Priest's eyes.

"I confess, I am astounded by your answer," the Procurator spoke mildly. "I am afraid there may be some misunderstanding here."

Pilate explained himself. The Roman government had no wish whatsoever to interfere with the prerogatives of the local spiritual authorities. The High Priest surely knew this, but in this case there seemed to be an obvious error. And the Roman government was, of course, interested in correcting this error.

Indeed, the crimes of Bar-Rabban and Ha-Nozri were in no wise comparable in their gravity. If the latter, who was clearly a madman, was guilty of absurd utterances in Yershalayim and certain other places, the former bore the burden of far heavier guilt. Not only had he permitted himself direct appeals to rebellion, but he had also killed a soldier during the attempt to capture him. Bar-Rabban was far more dangerous than Ha-Nozri.

By virtue of the foregoing, the Procurator begged the High Priest to review the decision and liberate the less harmful of the two condemned, and that was unquestionably Ha-Nozri. And so? . . .

Kaiyapha replied in a low, but firm voice, that the Sanhedrin had made a careful study of the case, and hence he would repeat that he intended to free Bar-Rabban.

"Indeed? Even after my intercession? The intercession of him who speaks for Rome? High Priest, repeat it for the third time."

"I tell you for the third time that we shall release Bar-Rabban," Kaiyapha said quietly.

Everything was over; there was nothing more to be said. Ha-Nozri was departing forever, and there was no one any longer who could heal the Procurator's dreadful, cruel attacks of pain. There was no remedy against them, except death. But it was not this thought that troubled Pilate now. His whole being was pierced again by the in-

comprehensible anguish that had gripped him earlier on the balcony. He tried to explain it to himself, but the explanation was a strange one: the Procurator had the vague feeling that he had left something unsaid in his talk with the condemned, or perhaps that he had not heard him to the end.

Pilate drove the thought away, and it vanished as instantly as it had come. It vanished, and the anguish remained without explanation, for how could it be explained by the other fragment of thought that flashed like lightning and immediately went out—"Immortality . . . immortality has come. . . ." Whose immortality? The Procurator did not understand it, but the thought of this mysterious immortality made him turn cold in the blazing sun.

"Well," said Pilate, "so be it."

He glanced around him, at the visible world, and was astonished at the change. The rose bush weighted down by flowers was gone, as were the cypresses bordering the upper terrace, and the pomegranate tree, and the white statue within the greenery, and the greenery itself. Instead of all this, an opaque purple wave swam before him; strange water weeds swayed within it, floating away somewhere, and carrying Pilate with them. He was now swept away, burning and suffocating with the most terrible of wraths—the wrath of impotence.

"I cannot breathe," said Pilate, "I cannot breathe!"

He tore the buckle from the collar of his cloak with a cold, moist hand, and it fell onto the sand.

"It is sultry today, a storm is coming," answered Kaiyapha, never taking his eyes from the Procurator's flushed face and foreseeing all the ordeals still before him. "What a terrible month of Nisan we have this year!"

"No," said Pilate. "It is not because the day is sultry, but because you crowd me, Kaiyapha," and Pilate smiled, narrowing his eyes, and nodded, "Take heed of yourself, High Priest."

The High Priest's dark eyes flashed, and—no less skill-

fully than the Procurator some moments earlier—his face assumed an expression of astonishment.

“What do I hear, Procurator?” Kaiyapha replied with calm pride. “You threaten me after confirming the sentence yourself? Can this be? We are accustomed to see the Roman Procurator choose his words carefully before speaking. What if someone should hear us, Hegemon?”

Pilate looked at the High Priest with dead eyes. Then, baring his teeth, he showed a smile.

“What are you saying, High Priest? Who can hear us now in this place? Am I a boy, Kaiyapha? I know what I speak and where I speak it. The garden is surrounded by guards, and the palace is guarded so well that not a mouse could slip in through a crack. A mouse! Not even that one, whatever his name . . . of the town of Kerioth. By the way, do you know such a man, High Priest? Oh, yes . . . if such a man slipped in here, he would be bitterly sorry for himself. You will surely believe me when I say this, High Priest? Know, then, High Priest, that henceforth you shall have no peace! Neither you, nor your people,” and Pilate pointed to the distance on the right, where the Temple blazed on the hill. “These are my words to you, the words of Pontius Pilate, Rider of the Golden Spear!”

“I know, I know!” fearlessly replied black-bearded Kaiyapha, and his eyes glinted. He raised his hand to heaven and continued: “The people of Judea know that you hate them with a black hatred, and you will bring them much suffering, but you shall never destroy them utterly! God shall protect them! The mighty Caesar will hear us, he will hear us and shield us from the murderous Pilate!”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Pilate, and every word removed a weight from his heart. There was no longer any need for pretense, no need to choose his words. “You have complained to Caesar against me too much, and now my hour has come, Kaiyapha! Now word will fly from me—not to the Imperial Governor in Antioch, and not to Rome, but straight to Capreae, to the Emperor himself, word of how you shelter known rebels in Yershalayim from death.

And it is not water from Solomon's pond that I will bring to Yershalayim, as I had meant to do for your good, no, it is not water that shall flood your streets. Remember well how I had to take the shields with the Emperor's insignia down from the walls, how I had to move the troops, how—as you see—I had to come myself to look into what goes on here! Remember my word, High Priest: you shall see more than a single cohort in Yershalayim. No, the entire legion of Fulminatus will come to the walls of the city, the Arab horsemen will come, and you shall hear bitter weeping and moans! You shall then remember Bar-Rabban, whom you saved!"

The High Priest's face was covered with spots, his eyes burned. Like the Procurator, he smiled, showing his teeth, and said:

"Do you believe your own words, Procurator? No, you do not! You wanted to release him so that he might incite the populace, mock the faith, and bring the people under Roman swords! But while I, the High Priest of Judea, am alive, I will allow no profanation of the faith, I will protect the people! Do you hear, Pilate?" and Kaiyapha lifted his hand. "Listen, Procurator!"

Kaiyapha was silent, and the Procurator heard once again a sound like the noise of the sea, rolling up against the very walls of the garden of Herod the Great. The noise rose from below to the feet and the face of the Procurator. And behind his back, beyond the wings of the palace, he heard the trumpets blowing alarm signals, the heavy crunching of hundreds of feet, the clanking of iron. The Procurator understood that the Roman foot soldiers, in obedience to his command, were already streaming out to the death march, terrible for mutineers and brigands.

"Do you hear, Procurator?" the High Priest repeated in a low voice.

The Procurator wiped his cold, wet brow with the back of his hand, looked down at the ground, then squinted at the sky, and saw that the fiery sphere was almost overhead, and Kaiyapha's shadow had shrunk to

nothing by the lion's tail. And he said quietly and indifferently:

"It is almost noon. We have been carried away by our conversation, but we must proceed."

Excusing himself before the High Priest with exquisite courtesy, he invited him to sit down on a bench in the shade of the magnolia and wait until he called the others, whose presence was required at the final brief conference, and issued one last command bearing on the execution.

Kaiyapha bowed politely, his hand over his heart, and remained in the garden while Pilate returned to the balcony. There, he commanded the waiting secretary to invite into the garden the legate of the legion and the tribune of the cohort, as well as the two members of the Sanhedrin and the chief of the temple guard who were waiting for the summons on the lower terrace of the garden, in the round arbor with the fountain. Pilate added that he himself would come down directly, and withdrew to the interior of the palace.

While the secretary was assembling the conference, the Procurator spoke to a certain man in a room shaded against the sun with dark hangings. The man's face was half-concealed by his hood, although the sun's rays could not possibly disturb him in this room. This meeting was very brief. The Procurator quietly spoke a few words to the man, after which the latter left, and Pilate came into the garden through the colonnade.

There, in the presence of all he had asked to see, the Procurator solemnly and drily stated that he had confirmed the death sentence of Yeshua Ha-Nozri, and officially inquired of the members of the Sanhedrin whom among the criminals they wished to reprieve. When he heard the reply, naming Bar-Rabban, the Procurator said:

"Very well," and bade the secretary to enter this at once in the record. He gripped the buckle picked up by his secretary, and solemnly proclaimed, "It is time!"

All present started down the wide marble staircase between two walls of roses which were pouring out their numbing scent. They descended lower and lower, toward

the palace wall and the gates that led to the large, smoothly paved square, at the end of which could be seen the columns and statues of the Yershalayim hippodrome.

As soon as the group had come out of the garden into the square and mounted the stone dais that dominated the square, Pilate looked around through narrowed eyelids and assessed the situation.

The space he had just traversed, that is, the space between the palace wall and the dais, was empty. But ahead of him Pilate could no longer see the square: it was engulfed by the crowd. The crowd would have flooded the dais and the cleared space as well if it were not held off by the triple ranks of Sebastian soldiers on Pilate's left and the soldiers of the Itureian auxiliary cohort on his right.

And so, Pilate ascended the dais, mechanically crushing the unnecessary buckle in his hand and squinting. The Procurator did not squint because the sun dazzled him. No! For some reason, he did not want to see the group of condemned men who, as he well knew, were being escorted now behind him onto the platform.

As soon as the white cloak with the scarlet lining rose on the stone cliff over the edge of the human sea, the unseeing Pilate's ears were struck by a wave of sound, "Ha-a-a . . ." It began quietly, starting somewhere in the distance near the Hippodrome, then rose until it was like thunder. After several seconds, it began to subside.

"They've seen me," thought the Procurator. The wave had not yet reached its lowest ebb when suddenly it began to rise again. Swaying, it rose higher than the first, and over this second wave, like foam boiling up on the crest, there seethed up a whistling and, here and there, the outcries of women distinguishable through the thunder. "They were brought up onto the platform," thought Pilate. "And those were moans of women who were crushed as the crowd surged forward."

He waited for a time, knowing that no force could silence the crowd until it screamed out everything that had accumulated within it and quieted down by itself.

When this moment arrived, the Procurator threw up his right hand, and the last breath of sound was blown away.

Then Pilate inhaled as much of the fiery air as he could and shouted, his broken voice carrying over thousands of heads:

“In the name of Caesar Imperator! . . .”

His ears were assaulted by choppy iron shouts, repeated several times. Throwing up their spears and ensigns, the soldiers of the cohorts sent up a deafening cry:

“Long live Caesar!”

Pilate threw back his head and thrust it up directly at the sun. A green light flashed under his eyelids; it set his brain afire, and the hoarse Aramaic words flew over the crowd:

“Four criminals, arrested in Yershalayim for murder, incitement to rebellion, and mockery of the laws and faith, have been condemned to an ignominious death—by hanging from posts! This execution shall take place presently on Bald Mountain! The names of the malefactors are: Dismas, Gestas, Bar-Rabban, and Ha-Nozri. They are here before you!”

Pilate pointed with his right hand, without seeing any malefactors but knowing they were there, in the place where they had to be.

The crowd answered with a long rumbling sound, as of astonishment or relief. When it subsided, Pilate continued:

“But only three of them shall be hanged. For, according to law and custom, the all-generous Caesar Imperator shall, in honor of the holiday of Passover, bestow on one of the condemned—as chosen by the Small Sanhedrin and confirmed by the authority of Rome—the gift of his contemptible life!”

Pilate shouted the words and at the same time listened to the great silence following the wave of sound. Not a sigh or a whisper reached his ears now, until a moment came when Pilate felt as though everything around him had vanished utterly. The city he hated died, and he

alone stood there, scorched by the vertical rays, his face thrust up into the sky. Pilate clung to the silence for a moment, then cried out:

"The name of him who shall now, in your presence, be released. . . ."

He paused again, holding back the name, checking in his mind whether he had said everything that needed to be said, for he knew that the dead city would return to life after he uttered the name of the fortunate one, and no other words would be heard thereafter.

"All?" Pilate whispered soundlessly to himself. "All. The name!"

And, rolling the "r" over the silent city, he cried:
"Bar-Rabban!"

It seemed to him that the sun rang out and burst over his head and filled his ears with fire. Within this fire there was a storm of roars, screeches, moans, whistles, and laughter.

Pilate turned and walked across the dais back to the steps, looking at nothing except the varicolored tiles underfoot in order not to trip. He knew that a shower of bronze coins and dates was flying now behind his back onto the dais, that in the howling mob people climbed on their neighbors' shoulders, crushing one another, to behold with their own eyes the miracle of a man who had already been in the jaws of death, and yet escaped them! To see the legionaries remove the ropes that bound him, involuntarily causing him burning pain in the arms twisted during the interrogations; to see him, groaning and grimacing with pain, yet smiling a crazy, vacant smile.

Pilate knew that the convoy was already escorting three men with bound hands to the side stairs, to the road leading west, beyond the city, to Bald Mountain. It was not until he was behind the dais that Pilate opened his eyes, knowing that he was safe now—he could no longer see the condemned.

The vast moan of the crowd, which was beginning to subside, was now mingled with the piercing, clearly distinguishable voices of the criers repeating all that the

Procurator had shouted from the dais, some in Aramaic, others in Greek. The Procurator also heard the rapid clicking of approaching horses and the trumpet uttering a short, gay blast. These sounds were answered by the shrill whistles of the urchins on the rooftops along the street that led from the market place to the hippodrome square, and cries of "Look out!"

A soldier who stood alone in a cleared area of the square with an ensign in his hand, waved it anxiously, and the Procurator, the legate of the legion, the secretary, and the convoy halted.

The cavalry ala, speeding up its trot, flew out into the square to cross it at the edge, by-passing the crowd, and galloped to Bald Mountain by the shortest road, along the lane past the stone wall overgrown with vines.

As he passed Pilate, the commander of the ala, a Syrian, small as a boy and dark as a mulatto, uttered a cry in a high, thin voice, pulling his sword out of its sheath. His vicious, lathered, black horse shied and reared. Thrusting the sword back into its sheath, the commander lashed the horse across the neck, straightened it and galloped off into the lane. Behind him—three in a row—flew the horsemen in a cloud of dust. The tips of their light bamboo lances bobbed up and down. A stream of faces that seemed still darker under their white turbans dashed past the Procurator with gaily bared, glittering, white teeth.

Raising a towering pillar of dust, the ala burst into the lane, and the last to gallop past Pilate was a soldier with a trumpet on his back, flaming in the sun.

Shielding himself with his hand against the dust and wrinkling his face with displeasure, Pilate moved on toward the palace garden gate. The legate, the secretary, and the convoy followed him.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

Chapter 3

THE SEVENTH PROOF

"Yes, it was about ten o'clock in the morning, my most esteemed Ivan Nikolayevich," said the professor.

The poet passed his hand over his face, like a man who had just regained consciousness, and saw that it was evening at the Patriarchs' Ponds. The water in the pond had turned black, and a light boat was gliding over it. There was a splash of oars. A woman giggled. People had now appeared on the benches in the avenues, but again only along three sides of the square, and not where our companions sat.

The sky over Moscow seemed to have blanched. The full moon, not yet golden but white, was clearly visible above. It had become much easier to breathe, and the voices under the lindens sounded softer now, as voices do in the evening.

"But how is it I never noticed while he managed to spin out a whole tale?" thought Homeless with astonishment. "And suddenly it's evening! . . . Or perhaps it was not he who told the tale, perhaps I simply fell asleep and dreamed it all?"

But it must have been the professor, after all, who had told the tale, or one would have to assume that Berlioz had had the same dream, for he said, looking intently at the foreigner's face:

"Your story is extremely interesting, Professor, although it is entirely different from that of the Gospels."

"Oh, well," the professor responded with an indulgent smile. "You of all people should know that nothing that

is told in the Gospels has ever really happened, and if we begin to cite the Gospels as a source of historical data . . ." he smiled again, and Berlioz stopped short, for he had said exactly the same thing to Homeless as they walked down Bronnaya toward the Patriarchs' Ponds.

"That is true," answered Berlioz. "But I am afraid no one can confirm to us that the things you spoke of really happened."

"Oh, no! This one can confirm!" the professor said with utmost assurance, but suddenly in broken Russian. And he mysteriously motioned the two friends to come nearer.

They bent toward him from either side, and he said, without any accent—which for some strange reason now appeared, now disappeared:

"The point is . . ." the professor threw an apprehensive look over his shoulder and began to whisper, "that I was personally present when all this took place. I was on Pontius Pilate's balcony, and in the garden, when he spoke with Kaiyapha, and on the dais. But I was there in secret, incognito, so to speak, and I must ask you not to say a word about it to anyone . . . it must be a total secret, tsss. . . ."

A silence fell, and Berlioz turned pale.

"You . . . how long have you been in Moscow?" he asked in a shaken voice.

"Oh, I have just arrived this very minute," the professor replied in confusion. And it was only now that the friends bethought themselves to take a good look at his eyes, and discovered that his green left eye was utterly insane, and his right eye was empty, black, and dead.

"Now everything's explained!" thought Berlioz, disconcerted. "A lunatic from Germany. Or maybe he has just gone mad here, at the Patriarchs' Ponds? What a business!"

And, indeed, now everything was clear: the most peculiar breakfast with the late philosopher Kant, the crazy talk about sunflower oil and Annushka, the pre-

diction that the editor's head would be cut off, and all the rest. The professor was a madman.

Berlioz immediately decided what he must do. Leaning back against the bench, he winked at Homeless behind the professor's back, as though to say, "Don't contradict him." But the bewildered poet did not understand these signals.

"Yes, yes, of course," Berlioz spoke nervously. "All this is possible . . . very possible . . . yes . . . Pontius Pilate, and the balcony, and the rest of it. . . . And did you come here alone, or with your wife?"

"Alone, alone, I am always alone," the professor answered bitterly.

"And where are your things, Professor?" Berlioz asked ingratiatingly. "At the Metropole? Where did you stop?"

"I? . . . Nowhere," the half-witted German answered, his green eye wandering wildly and with anguish over the Patriarchs' Ponds.

"Really? . . . But . . . but where will you live?"

"In your apartment," the madman suddenly answered familiarly and winked.

"I . . . I am very pleased . . ." Berlioz mumbled. "But, really, it will not be convenient for you . . . and at the Metropole there are excellent rooms, it is a first-rate hotel. . . ."

"And there's no devil either?" the sick man suddenly asked Ivan Nikolayevich gaily.

"No devil either. . . ."

"Don't contradict him," Berlioz whispered with his lips only, throwing himself behind the professor's back and grimacing.

"There is no devil!" Ivan Nikolayevich, confused by all this nonsense, exclaimed, saying the wrong thing altogether. "What the hell! Stop your crazy antics!"

At this point the madman burst into such a fit of laughter that a sparrow came darting out of the linden tree above them.

"Oh, but this is really interesting," the professor cried, shaking with laughter. "It seems, no matter what you

name here, it doesn't exist!" He stopped laughing abruptly and, as usual in mental illness, went from laughter to the other extreme. He became irritated and asked sternly, "So he does not exist at all, does he?"

"Calm down, calm down, calm down, Professor," Berlioz muttered, afraid to excite the sick man. "Just stay a moment here with Comrade Homeless, while I run around the corner to make a telephone call. Then we'll escort you wherever you wish to go. After all, you do not know the city. . . ."

We must admit that the editor's plan was quite reasonable: he wanted to hurry to the nearest public telephone and report to the department in charge of foreign visitors that a consultant from abroad was sitting in the Patriarchs' Ponds park in a clearly deranged condition. And hence that it was necessary to take the proper steps, for this was leading to an absurd and unpleasant situation.

"A telephone call? Very well, make your call," the patient consented sadly, and suddenly begged passionately: "But I implore you in parting, believe at least in the devil's existence! I will not ask you for more. Keep in mind that there is a seventh proof of this, and the most convincing of all! And it is just about to be presented to you!"

"Fine, fine," Berlioz said with feigned amiability. Then, with a wink to the disconcerted poet, who did not in the least relish the idea of guarding the crazy German, he hurried toward the exit from the Patriarchs' Ponds that opens on the corner of Bronnaya and Yermolayev Lane.

And the professor immediately seemed to brighten up and recover.

"Mikhail Alexandrovich!" he called after Berlioz.

Berlioz started and turned, but reassured himself with the thought that his name and patronymic were also known to the professor from some newspaper.

And the professor shouted through his folded hands as through a megaphone:

"Shall I send a telegram at once to your uncle in Kiev?"

Berlioz was shaken again. How did this madman know about the existence of his uncle in Kiev? This, surely, was never mentioned in any newspapers! Could Homeless have been right? What if the man's documents were forged? What a fantastic character. . . . But he must call, he must call without delay! They'll quickly get the facts about the man.

And, listening to nothing further, Berlioz ran on.

At the exit to Bronnaya, the very citizen who had earlier spun himself out of the dense heat in the sunlight rose from a bench to meet the editor. But now he was not made of air. He was of ordinary flesh and blood, and in the falling twilight Berlioz could clearly see that his mustache looked like chicken feathers, his eyes were small, ironic and half-drunk, and his tight trousers were of a checkered material and pulled up so high that they exposed the dirty white socks.

Mikhail Alexandrovich was so startled that he backed away, but instantly he reassured himself: it was a stupid coincidence, and he had no time to think about it at the moment anyway.

"Are you looking for a turnstile, citizen?" the checkered character inquired in a cracked tenor. "This way, if you please! Straight ahead, and you'll come out right. And how about a tip for pointing the way? . . . for a little drink, to repair the health of an ex-choirmaster! . . ." Clowning and grimacing, the beggar swept off his jockey's cap with a wide gesture.

Berlioz did not stop to listen to the choirmaster's begging and clowning; he ran toward the turnstile and put his hand on it. He turned it and was ready to step across the rails, when a burst of red and white light flashed into his face: the glass case lit up with a warning, "Look out for the streetcar!"

And all at once the streetcar careened around the corner of the newly-laid line from Yermolayev Lane to Bronnaya.

As it straightened out, the electric lights suddenly blazed inside it. It roared and put on speed.

Although the cautious Berlioz was standing in a safe place, he decided to return behind the gate and, shifting his hand, he took a backward step. But his hand lost its grip and slipped off, his foot slid without resistance, as though on ice, over the cobblestones that lined the slope leading down to the rails, his other foot shot up, and Berlioz was thrown onto the rails.

Trying to grasp at something, Berlioz sprawled on his back, his head lightly striking the cobblestones. He glimpsed the gilded moon above him, but he no longer knew whether the moon was on his left or on his right. All he had time for was to turn on his side, at the same moment convulsively pulling his knees up to his stomach, and, as he turned, to catch sight of the red armband and the utterly white, horrified face of the woman conductor rushing down upon him with irresistible force. Berlioz did not cry out, but the whole street around him was filled with women's desperate shrieks.

The conductor tore wildly at the electric brake, the nose of the car dug into the ground, then the car leaped up, and fragments of its windowpanes flew clattering and ringing in all directions. In Berlioz' brain someone cried out frantically, "Really? . . ." The moon flashed for the last time, already splintered into bits, and everything was dark.

The streetcar was over Berlioz, and a round dark object was thrown up the cobbled slope under the grating of the Patriarchs' Ponds avenue. Rolling down the slope, it bounced away along the cobbled pavement of the street.

It was the severed head of Berlioz.

Chapter 4

PURSUIT

The hysterical women's cries and the shrilling of the militia whistles had died down. Two ambulances had driven away—one, with the headless body and the severed head, to the morgue; the other, with the beautiful conductor, wounded by the flying glass. Janitors in white aprons removed the broken glass and scattered sand over the pools of blood. And Ivan Nikolayevich, who had dropped onto a bench before he reached the turnstile, stayed on it motionless. He had tried repeatedly to get up, but his feet refused to obey him: Homeless was stricken by something akin to paralysis.

The poet had rushed toward the turnstile at the first scream, and saw the bouncing head on the pavement. Crazed with horror, he dropped onto a bench and bit his own hand till it bled. He naturally forgot the insane German and tried to grasp one thing only: how could it be that he had just a moment earlier spoken to Berlioz, and now—his head . . .

Frantic people ran down the avenue past the poet, exclaiming something, but Ivan Nikolayevich did not understand what they said. Suddenly two women collided near him, and one of them, sharp-nosed and disheveled, shouted to the other, right over the poet's ears:

“. . . Annushka, our Annushka! From Sadovaya! It's her work. . . . She bought some sunflower oil at the store, and broke the bottle on the turnstile! She got it all over her skirt, and swore and swore! And that poor man, he slipped on it, and right down on the rails. . . .”

Of all the words the woman shouted, only one word stuck in the deranged brain of Ivan Nikolayevich, "Annushka". . . .

"Annushka . . . Annushka? . . ." the poet muttered, looking around him anxiously. "But wait, wait. . . ."

The word "Annushka" connected itself to the words "sunflower oil," and then, for some reason, to "Pontius Pilate." The poet rejected Pilate and began to weave a chain, beginning with "Annushka." The chain was linked very fast, and immediately led to the crazy professor.

"Wait! But he said that the meeting would not be held because Annushka had spilled the oil. And now, if you please, it won't be held! But that isn't all. He said to Berlioz directly that a woman would cut off his head! Yes, yes! And the conductor was a woman! But what can it mean?"

There was not a grain of doubt that the mysterious consultant had exact foreknowledge of the entire picture of the editor's horrible death. And two thoughts pierced the poet's mind. The first was: "He is not a madman, that's nonsense!" And the second: "Could he have planned it all himself?"

"But how, if you allow me to ask? Oh, no, we must find out!"

Making a great effort, Ivan Nikolayevich rose from the bench, and rushed back to where he had spoken to the professor. And, fortunately, he found that the latter had not yet gone.

The street lights were already on along Bronnaya, and a golden moon shone over the Patriarchs' Ponds. And in the light of the moon, always deceptive, it seemed to Ivan Nikolayevich that the man stood, holding under his arm not a cane, but a sword.

The importunate ex-choirmaster sat where Ivan Nikolayevich himself had sat a little while before. Now the choirmaster saddled his nose with an obviously unnecessary pair of pince-nez, in which one lens was entirely absent, and the other cracked. This made the checkered citizen

even more repulsive than when he had directed Berlioz to the rails.

With a chill in his heart, Ivan approached the professor and, glancing into his face, he found that it did not bear and had, indeed, never borne any marks of madness.

"Confess to me, who are you?" Ivan asked in a hollow voice.

The foreigner scowled, looked up as though he was seeing the poet for the first time, and answered in a hostile tone, "No understand . . . no speak Russian. . . ."

"The gentleman does not understand," the choirmaster intruded into the conversation from his bench, although no one had asked him to interpret the foreigner's words.

"Stop pretending," Ivan said threateningly, and felt a chill at the pit of his stomach. "You have just been speaking excellent Russian. You are no German, and no professor! You are a murderer and a spy! . . . Your documents!" Ivan cried in a rage.

The mysterious professor squeamishly twisted his crooked mouth and shrugged his shoulders.

"Citizen," the vile choirmaster broke in again. "Why are you upsetting the tourist? You'll answer for it, remember!"

And the suspicious professor made a haughty face, turned and walked away from Ivan. Ivan felt that he was losing his grip. Suffocating, he turned to the choirmaster:

"Hey, citizen, help me catch the criminal! You must do it!"

The choirmaster jumped up with extraordinary animation and shouted:

"Which criminal? Where is he? A foreign criminal?" His little eyes shone with glee. "That one? If he is a criminal, the first thing we must do is shout 'Help!' or he will get away. Come on, together now!" and the choirmaster opened his maw.

In his confusion, Ivan obeyed the prankster-choirmaster and shouted, "Help!" But the choirmaster had tricked him and did not shout anything.

The solitary, hoarse cry sent up by Ivan brought no

desired results. Two young ladies shied away from him, and he heard the word "drunk."

"Ah, so you are in with him?" Ivan cried, bursting into fury. "Making a fool of me? Get out of my way!"

Ivan rushed right, and the choirmaster did the same. Ivan rushed left, and the scoundrel followed.

"Getting into my way on purpose?" Ivan cried, choking with rage. "I'll turn you over to the militia too!"

Ivan tried to catch the rogue by the sleeve, but missed and caught exactly nothing: the choirmaster seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Ivan gasped, looked up and saw the hateful stranger in the distance. He was already at the exit to Patriarchs' Lane, and he was not alone. The more than dubious choirmaster had already managed to join him. But this was not all. There was a third member of this company, who had appeared from heaven knows where: a tom cat, huge as a hog, black as pitch or a crow, and with a huge mustache, for all the world like a rakish cavalryman's. The trio marched off into Patriarchs' Lane, the tom cat walking on his hind legs.

Ivan hurried after the malefactors, but he saw at once that it would be difficult to catch up with them.

The trio dashed through the lane in an instant and was emerging on Spiridonovka. No matter how much Ivan increased his pace, the distance between him and those he pursued never diminished. Before he knew it, he was out of the quiet Spiridonovka and at the Nikitsky Gate. And here the milling crowds made his position still more hopeless. Besides, the criminal band resorted to the favorite stratagem of thieves, and scattered.

The choirmaster nimbly whirled himself into a bus speeding toward Arbat Square and disappeared. Having lost one of the gang, Ivan concentrated his attention on the tom cat and saw how this strange tom walked over to the boarding step of an "A" streetcar waiting at the stop, brazenly elbowed aside a woman who squealed as she saw him, grasped the hand rails and even attempted

to give the conductor a coin through the window, which was open because of the heat.

The tom's behavior struck Ivan with such amazement that he stopped transfixed near the grocery store on the corner. And now he was struck again, even more forcibly, by the behavior of the woman conductor. As soon as she saw the tom trying to climb into the streetcar, she screamed, trembling with rage:

"No cats allowed here! Nobody with cats allowed! Scram! Get off, or I'll call the militia!"

Neither the conductor, nor the passengers were as astounded by the situation itself—a cat climbing into a streetcar!—which would not have been half so bad, as by his wish to pay his fare!

The tom, it turned out, was not only a solvent, but also a disciplined beast. At the conductor's first cry, he ceased his advance, got down from the step, and sat down at the curb, rubbing his whisker with the coin. But as soon as the conductor pulled the cord and the cars started, the tom proceeded to do what anyone else would who had been expelled from a streetcar but must nevertheless get to his destination. Allowing all three cars to go by, the tom jumped up onto the rear of the last one, sank his claws into a rubber tube projecting from the wall, and rode away, thus saving himself the fare.

Preoccupied with the wretched tom, Ivan had nearly lost the principal offender—the professor. Luckily, he had not yet managed to escape. Ivan caught sight of the gray beret in the thick of the crowd at the opening into Bolshaya Nikitskaya or Herzen Street. In the twinkling of an eye Ivan was there. But his object eluded him. The poet tried to walk faster; he even broke into a trot, showing the other pedestrians. But he never got nearer the professor even by an inch.

Disturbed as he was, Ivan was nevertheless astonished by the unnatural speed of the chase. Twenty seconds had not elapsed when, after passing the Nikitsky Gate, Ivan Nikolayevich was already dazzled by the lights of Arbat Square. Another few seconds, and he was in some dark

alley with broken sidewalks, where he fell and hurt his knee. Another brightly lit thoroughfare—Kropotkin Street—then a lane, then Ostozhenka and yet another lane, dreary, filthy, and poorly lit. And it was here that Ivan Nikolayevich finally lost the man he was pursuing so desperately. The professor disappeared.

Ivan Nikolayevich was disconcerted, but not for long, because he suddenly knew that the professor must be in No. 13, and in no other apartment but 47.

Bursting into the entrance, Ivan Nikolayevich flew up to the second floor, immediately found this apartment and rang impatiently. He did not have to wait long. The door was opened by a little girl of about five who withdrew somewhere at once without asking the guest any questions.

In the huge, extremely ill-kept foyer, feebly lit by a tiny carbon lamp under the high dirty ceiling, there stood an enormous, iron-covered chest. On the wall hung a bicycle without tires. And on a shelf over the clothes rack lay a winter hat, its long earflaps hanging down. Behind one of the doors, a resonant man's voice angrily declaimed something in verse over a radio set.

Ivan Nikolayevich, not in the least confused by the unfamiliar surroundings, walked straight into the hallway, thinking to himself: "He naturally hid himself in the bathroom." The hallway was dark. Bumping into the wall a few times, Ivan finally discerned a faint streak of light under a door, felt for the handle, and pulled it. The hook flew off, and Ivan found himself precisely in the bathroom, thinking that he was in luck.

However, his luck was not quite what it should have been! A wave of moist heat came at Ivan, and, in the light of the coals glowing in the boiler, he saw large troughs hanging on the wall, and the bathtub, full of ugly black spots left by the chipped enamel. And in this bathtub stood a naked woman, all covered with soap and with a washrag in her hands. She squinted nearsightedly at the intruder and, evidently mistaking him

for someone else in the infernal light, said quietly and gaily:

"Kirushka! Stop your games! Have you lost your mind? . . . Fyodor Ivanych will be here any minute. Get out, get out right away!" and she swung her washrag at Ivan.

The misunderstanding was obvious, and, of course, it was all the fault of Ivan Nikolayevich. But he refused to admit it and cried out reproachfully, "Ah, you slut! . . ." and immediately found himself in the kitchen. The kitchen was empty. About a dozen unlit primus stoves stood on the oven in the dusk. A single moonbeam, peeping in through the dusty window that had not been washed for years, dimly lit up the corner where a forgotten icon hung in dust and cobwebs. Behind its case, Ivan could see the tips of two wedding candles. Under the large icon there was pinned a little one, made of paper.

Nobody knows what idea possessed Ivan at this point, but before running out to the back stairs he appropriated one of the candles and the paper icon. With these objects, he left the strange apartment, muttering something, embarrassed by his recent experience in the bathroom, involuntarily trying to guess the identity of that brazen Kirushka and wondering whether he was the owner of the disgusting hat with the earflaps.

In the dismal, empty alley the poet glanced around, looking for the fugitive. But he was nowhere to be seen. Then Ivan said to himself firmly, "But, of course, he is at the Moskva River! Onward!"

One might, perhaps, ask Ivan Nikolayevich why he assumed that the professor would be precisely near the Moskva River and not anywhere else. But the trouble is that there was no one to ask this. The foul alley was totally deserted.

After a short time, Ivan Nikolayevich could be seen on the granite steps of the amphitheater by the Moskva River.

Removing his clothes, Ivan left them in the care of a sympathetic bearded man who was smoking a hand-rolled cigarette as he sat near a torn white Tolstoy blouse

and a pair of unlaced worn shoes. Waving his arms to cool off, Ivan plunged into the water like a swallow. The water was so cold that it stopped his breath, and for a moment the thought flashed through his mind that he might not be able to surface. However, he succeeded in coming up and, blowing and snorting, his eyes bulging with terror, Ivan Nikolayevich began to swim in the black water that reeked of oil, between the broken zigzags of the lights along the bank.

When the wet Ivan came skipping up the stairs to where his clothing had been left under the protection of the bearded man, he found that not only the former, but the latter had been abducted. On the spot where there had been a pile of clothes, there were now only the striped underpants, the torn Tolstoy blouse, the candle, the icon, and a box of matches. Shaking his fist at someone in the distance with impotent fury, Ivan dressed himself in the remaining rags.

At this point he was gripped by two anxieties: first, that the MASSOLIT identification, with which he never parted, was gone; and, second—would he be able to cross Moscow unmolested in this outfit? After all, in underpants . . . True, whose business was it? And yet, there was a possibility that he might be halted and detained.

Ivan pulled the buttons off the underpants, where they fastened at the ankle, hoping that in this form they might be taken for summer slacks. Then he picked up the little icon, the candle and the matches, and started out, saying to himself.

“To Griboyedov! No question that he’s there.”

The city was already busy with its evening life. Clanking their chains, trucks flew through clouds of dust, and on their platforms, on sacks, men lay stretched out, with their stomachs up. All windows were open. In each window there was a lamp under an orange shade, and from all windows, all doors, all gateways, roofs and attics, cellars and courtyards, came the hoarse blasts of the polonaise from the opera *Yevgeny Onegin*.

The apprehensions of Ivan Nikolayevich were fully realized. Passers-by looked at him and turned to stare. Consequently, he resolved to leave the thoroughfares and make his way through back alleys, where people were not so importunate and were less likely to harass a barefoot man and worry him with questions about underpants that stubbornly refused to look like trousers.

Ivan plunged into the mysterious network of Arbat alleys and began to slink along walls, anxiously squinting, glancing over his shoulder, sometimes hiding in gateways, and avoiding crossings lit by street lights and the luxurious entrances of consular mansions.

And all along his difficult journey, he was inexpressibly tormented for some reason by the ubiquitous orchestra accompanying a heavy basso who sang of his love for Tatyana.

Chapter 5

THE AFFAIR AT GRIBOYEDOV'S

The old, two-story, cream-colored mansion was situated in a boulevard circle. It was set deep within a run-down garden, divided from the sidewalk by a wrought-iron fence. The small court before the building was paved with asphalt. In wintertime a pile of snow rose from it, surmounted by a shovel; in summer it turned into a most magnificent outdoor section of the restaurant under a canvas awning.

The building was called Griboyedov House, since it was said to have belonged at one time to an aunt of the writer Alexandre Sergeyeovich Griboyedov. Whether it did or did not belong to her we do not know. But if we remember rightly, it seems to us that Griboyedov had never had any such home-owning aunt. Nevertheless, this was what the building was called. In fact, a certain Moscow liar used to say that the famous writer read scenes from his *Woe from Wit* to this very aunt, who listened reclining on a sofa in the round hall with the columns, on the second floor. But what the devil, who knows, perhaps he did read to her. That's not the point, anyway!

The point is that currently the house belonged to that same MASSOLIT which had been headed, until his appearance at the Patriarchs' Ponds, by the unfortunate Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz.

The members of MASSOLIT never troubled to use the full name, Griboyedov House. They simply called it Griboyedov's.

"I spent two hours at Griboyedov's yesterday."

"How did it go?"

"Got myself a month in Yalta."

"Good work!"

Or else:

"Go and see Berlioz, he is receiving today from four to six at Griboyedov's."

And so on.

MASSOLIT made itself at home in Griboyedov's in the cosiest and most comfortable way imaginable. The visitor at Griboyedov's was greeted first of all by the announcements of a variety of sports clubs, and by the collective as well as individual photographs of members of MASSOLIT, which (photographs) covered the walls of the staircase leading to the upper floor.

On the door of the very first room upstairs there was a large sign, FISHING AND VACATION SECTION, which displayed a carp caught on a line.

On the door of room No. 2 there was a somewhat obscure inscription, ONE-DAY CREATIVE TRIPS. SEE M. V. PODLOZHNYAYA.

The next door bore a short but altogether cryptic sign, PERELYGINO. Next, the chance visitor at Griboyedov's was all but dizzied by the multitude of signs peppering the aunt's heavy walnut doors: REGISTER FOR PAPER WITH POKLEVKINA, PAY OFFICE, SKETCH WRITERS' PERSONAL ACCOUNTS . . .

Cutting across the longest queue, which stretched all the way down to the foyer, one could see the sign HOUSING QUESTION on a door that was constantly being assailed by a crowd of people.

Beyond the housing question a magnificent poster opened to view: a cliff, and riding on its crest, a horseman in a felt cloak, with a rifle behind his back. A little lower were some palms and a balcony, and, sitting on the balcony, a young man with a tidy tuft of hair over his forehead and a fountain pen in his hand, staring off somewhere into the heights with overconfident, overbold eyes. The legend read:

FULL-SCALE CREATIVE VACATIONS FROM TWO WEEKS (SHORT STORY) TO ONE YEAR (NOVEL, TRILOGY)—
YALTA, SUUK-SU, BOROVOYE, TSHIDZIRI, MAHIND-
ZHAURI, LENINGRAD (WINTER PALACE).

At this door there was also a line, but not an excessive one—about one hundred persons in all.

Next, obedient to the fanciful twists and turns, ascents and descents of the Griboyedov building, followed the "MASSOLIT EXECUTIVE BOARD, CHAIRMAN OF MASSOLIT, BILLIARD ROOM, a variety of auxiliary institutions and, finally, the hall with columns where the aunt had delighted in the comedy of her illustrious nephew.

Any visitor at Griboyedov's, unless, of course, he was a hopeless dunce, immediately realized how well those lucky chosen ones—the members of MASSOLIT—were living, and was attacked at once by the blackest envy. And began at once to send up bitter reproaches to heaven because it had not endowed him at birth with literary talent, without which one naturally could not even dream of coming into possession of a MASSOLIT membership card—brown, smelling of good leather, with a wide gilt edge—a card well-known throughout Moscow.

Who will say anything in defense of envy? It is a nasty emotion. Nevertheless, one should consider the visitor's position too. For what he had seen upstairs was not yet all; it was, in fact, quite far from all. The entire lower floor of the aunt's house was occupied by a restaurant, and what a restaurant! It was justly considered the best in Moscow. And not only because it was housed in two large rooms with vaulted ceilings, adorned by lilac horses with Assyrian manes; not only because on every table there was a lamp with a silk shawl draped around the shade; not only because it was impossible for the man in the street to gain admission to it; but also because, in the quality of its fare, Griboyedov's beat any restaurant in Moscow, and because this fare was served at the most moderate, most reasonable prices.

Hence there was nothing surprising in a conversation such as the following, which the author of these abso-

lutely authentic lines once heard near the wrought-iron fence of Griboyedov's:

"Where are you dining tonight, Amvrosy?"

"What a question—here, of course, my dear Fokal Archibald Archibaldovich dropped me a hint today that they'll be serving perch au naturel, cooked to order. A virtuoso dish!"

"Ah, you know how to live, Amvrosy!" sighed the lean, shabby Foka with a carbuncle on his neck to the red-lipped giant—the golden-haired, ruddy-cheeked poet Amvrosy.

"It takes no special skill," protested Amvrosy, "just an ordinary desire to live like a human being. You are trying to tell me, Foka, that perch can be had at the Coliseum as well? But at the Coliseum a portion of perch costs thirteen rubles and fifteen kopeks, and here it is five-fifty! Besides, at the Coliseum the perch is three days old. And moreover, at the Coliseum there's no guarantee that you won't get a bunch of grapes slapped in your face by some young hoodlum breaking in from Theater Drive. No, no, I categorically oppose the Coliseum," the gourmet Amvrosy thundered across the entire boulevard. "Don't try to persuade me, Fokal!"

"I'm not trying to persuade you, Amvrosy," squeaked Foka. "A man can dine at home too."

"Thanks a million," boomed Amvrosy. "I can imagine your wife trying to cook perch au naturel in a saucepan in the communal kitchen at home! He-he-he! . . . Au revoir, Fokal!" And, humming gaily, Amvrosy hurried off to the veranda under the awning.

Ah, yes . . . There was a time, there was, indeed! The old Moscow residents remember the famous Griboyedov's! You speak of perch cooked to order! A cheap trifle, my dear Amvrosy! What of the sterlet, the sterlet in a silvery dish, served sliced and interlarded with lobster tails and fresh roe? And eggs-cocotte with purée of mushrooms in individual ramekins? And what about the fillet of thrushes, was that bad? With truffles? And the quail Genoese? Nine-fifty! And the jazz, and the service! And

in July, when the family was away in the country and you were detained in the city by urgent literary business—the plate of soup printanier, glowing in the golden sunspot on the immaculate tablecloth on the veranda, in the shade of the climbing vine? Do you remember, Amvrosy? But why ask? I see by your lips that you do. Talk of whitefish, perch! And what about the partridge, the snipe, the woodcocks in season, the quail? The sparkling Narzan? But enough, you are digressing, reader! Follow me! . . .

At half-past ten in the evening, on the day when Berlioz perished at the Patriarchs' Ponds, there were lights in only one room upstairs at Griboyedov's, where twelve writers, assembled for a meeting, languished in expectation of Mikhail Alexandrovich.

They sat on chairs, on tables, and even on the two window sills in the office of the MASSOLIT Executive Board, suffering extremely from lack of air. Not a breath of freshness came through the open windows. Moscow was exuding the heat accumulated all day long in the asphalt, and it was obvious that the night would bring no relief. The smell of onions rose from the cellar of the aunt's house, where the restaurant kitchen was at work, and everybody was thirsty, everybody was nervous and irritated.

The novelist Beskudnikov—a quiet, neatly dressed man with attentive yet elusive eyes—took out his watch. The hand crept toward eleven. Beskudnikov tapped his finger on the face of the watch and showed it to his neighbor, the poet Dvubratsky, who sat on a table, miserably swinging his feet in yellow, rubber-soled shoes.

"Well," muttered Dvubratsky.

"The fellow must have gotten stuck on the Klyazma," responded the low contralto of Nastasya Lukinishna Nepremenova, an orphaned lady of Moscow merchant origin who had become a writer specializing in stories of sea battles under the pen name of Pilot George.

"If I may say so," boldly spoke up the author of popular sketches, Zagrivov, "I would much rather be sipping

tea on a balcony myself now, instead of broiling here. After all, the meeting was called for ten."

"It must be beautiful on the Klyazma," Pilot George egged on her colleagues, knowing that the vacation village of Perelygino on the Klyazma River was everybody's sore spot. "The nightingales must be singing already. Somehow, I always work better in the country, especially in spring."

"For the third year now I've paid in my good money to send my wife with her goiter to this paradise, but there's not a sail in sight," the short-story writer Ieronym Poprikhin said acridly.

"Some people are lucky," the critic Ababkov boomed from the window sill.

Gleeful lights flickered in the little eyes of Pilot George, and she said, softening her contralto:

"We must not be envious, comrades. There are only twenty-two houses in the village, and only seven more are being built—and there are three thousand of us in MAS-SOLIT."

"Three thousand, one hundred and eleven," someone put in from the corner.

"You see?" continued Pilot. "What can be done? It's only natural that the most talented among us were given summer homes there. . . ."

"The generals!" Glukharev the scenario writer broke into the chorus of complaints.

Beskudnikov pretended to yawn and walked out of the room.

"All by himself in five rooms in Perelygino," Glukharev said after him.

"Lavrovich has six to himself," cried Deniskin. "And his dining room is paneled in oak!"

"Ah, that's not the point now," boomed Ababkov. "The point is that it's half-past eleven."

The room became noisy. Everyone was on the verge of rebellion. They tried to telephone the hated Perelygino and got the wrong number. Instead of Berlioz, they were given Lavrovich and, told that Lavrovich was out on the

river, they lost their tempers altogether. They tried to call the Commission on Fine Literature at No. 930, and, naturally, found no one there.

"He could have called!" cried Deniskin, Glukharev, and Kvant.

Ah, but they cried unjustly. Mikhail Alexandrovich could not have called anywhere. Far, far from Griboyedov's, in a huge hall illuminated with thousand-watt lights, what had so recently been Mikhail Alexandrovich lay on three zinc tables.

On the first lay the naked body with the broken arm and crushed chest, caked with blood; on the other, the head, with the front teeth knocked out, with dim, open eyes untroubled by the sharpest light; on the third, a heap of blood-stiffened rags.

Near the beheaded body stood a professor of forensic medicine, a pathological anatomist and his dissector, representatives of the inquest office, and the writer Zheldybin, deputy chairman of MASSOLIT, who had been summoned by a telephone call.

A car had called for Zheldybin and took him first, together with the inquest officials (this was about midnight), to the dead man's apartment, where all his papers were sealed up. After that they went to the morgue.

And now the group around the body conferred on what was best: to sew the severed head back to the neck, or bring the body as it was to the Griboyedov hall, simply covering it to the chin with a black shawl?

No, Mikhail Alexandrovich could not have telephoned anywhere, and the indignant exclamations of Deniskin, Glukharev, Kvant, and Beskudnikov were quite unjust. Exactly at midnight all twelve writers left the upper floor and descended to the restaurant. Here each one again thought unkindly to himself of Mikhail Alexandrovich, for, naturally, all the tables on the veranda were occupied and they had no choice left but to dine in the beautiful but airless rooms.

And exactly at midnight something crashed, rang, scattered, and jumped in the first room. And all at once a

man's high voice shrieked desperately to the music, "Hallelujah!" Those were the opening notes of the famous Griboyedov jazz band. The faces of the diners, covered with perspiration, lit up, the painted horses on the ceiling seemed to come to life, the lights appeared to have brightened, and suddenly both rooms broke into dance, and with them the veranda.

Glukharev danced with the poetess Tamara Polumesyats. Kvant danced. Zhukopov the novelist danced with some movie actress in a yellow dress. Everyone danced: Dragunsky, Cherdakchi, the short Deniskin with the giant Pilot George, the beautiful architect Semeikina-Gall in the tight clutch of a stranger in white homespun trousers; members and invited guests, Moscovites and visitors from out of town, the writer Johann from Kronstadt, a certain Vitya Kuftik from Rostov with a purple patch over his whole cheek (I believe he was a movie director), the most eminent representatives of the MAS-SOLIT poetry section—Pavianov, Bogokhulsky, Sladky, Shpichkin and Adelphina Buzdyak; young men of unknown professions with crew cuts and padded shoulders; a very elderly man with a beard to which a bit of scallion still clung, his arms around a sickly girl devoured by anemia, in a crumpled orange silk dress.

Dripping with perspiration, the waiters carried sweating beer mugs high over their heads, shouting hoarsely and with hatred, "Sorry, citizen!" Somewhere in a loudspeaker a voice commanded: "Karsky shashlik, one! Zubrovka, two! Tripe polonais!" The thin high voice no longer sang but howled, "Hallelujah!" The clashing of the golden cymbals occasionally covered even the clatter of the dishes which the dishwashers were sending down the chute into the kitchen. In short, hell.

And at midnight there was a vision in hell. A dazzlingly handsome black-eyed man with a dagger-shaped beard, in a frock coat, came out on the veranda and cast a royal eye around his domain. It was said, it was said by mystics that there had been a time when the handsome man did not wear a frock coat, but a wide leather belt with re-

volvers tucked into it, and his raven hair was tied with scarlet silk, and he commanded a brig that sailed the Caribbean under a dead black flag bearing the sign of the skull.

But no, no! The seductive mystics are lying. There are no Caribbean Seas in the world, no reckless buccaneers are sailing them, and no corvettes are chasing them, no cannon smoke drifts low over the waves. There is nothing, and there never was! There is only a stunted linden tree out there, an iron fence, and the boulevard beyond it. . . . And ice melting in the bowl, and someone's bovine bloodshot eyes at the next table, and fear, fear . . . Oh, gods, gods, poison, give me poison! . . .

And suddenly the name "Berlioz" fluttered up over a table. Suddenly the jazz collapsed as though someone had crushed it with a fist. "What, what, what, what?" "Berlioz!" And everyone jumped up, everyone cried out.

Yes, a wave of grief rose at the terrible news about Mikhail Alexandrovich. Somebody ran and shouted that they must all, at once, without leaving the spot compose a collective telegram and send it off immediately.

But what telegram, we ask you, and where? And what would be the purpose in sending it? And, indeed, where? And what need of telegrams has he whose crumpled skull is now being squeezed together in the rubber gloves of the dissector, whose neck the professor is now piercing with curved needles? He is dead, and no longer has any need of telegrams. Everything is finished. Let us not trouble the telegraph office any more.

Yes, he is dead, dead . . . But we—we are alive!

Yes, a wave of grief had swept up, but it lasted a while and began to subside, and here and there someone has already gone back to his table, and, stealthily at first, then openly, taken a sip from his glass, then a chaser. And really, who can allow cutlets de volaille go to waste? Can we help Mikhail Alexandrovich? How? By going hungry? After all, we are alive!

Naturally, the piano was locked up, the jazz band went home, several journalists hurried off to their news-

papers to write obituaries. It was learned that Zheldybin had arrived from the morgue. He installed himself in the dead man's office upstairs and there was an instant rumor that he would take over the duties of Berlioz. Zheldybin summoned all twelve members of the Executive Board from the restaurant, and a meeting was immediately opened in Berlioz' office to discuss the urgent questions regarding the décor of the columned Griboyedov hall, the transfer of the body from the morgue to this hall, its placement on public view, and all the rest of the matters connected with the sad event.

And the restaurant resumed its customary life and would have gone on peacefully until closing time, at four o'clock in the morning, had it not been for an utterly unprecedented occurrence, which struck the guests far more than the news of Berlioz' death.

First to react were the coachmen waiting at the gates of the Griboyedov House. One of them, rising on his box, was heard to exclaim:

"Whew! Look at that!"

After that a little light flared up from out of nowhere near the wrought-iron fence and floated toward the veranda. The diners began to rise in their seats to peer at it, and noticed that a white ghost was moving toward the restaurant together with the light. When it approached the trellis, they sat petrified at the tables with pieces of sterlet on their forks, and goggled at it. The doorman, who had just stepped out of the restaurant coatroom into the yard to have a smoke, crushed the cigarette with his foot and started out toward the ghost with the patent aim of barring its access to the restaurant. For some reason, however, he did not carry out his intention and stopped with a vacuous smile.

And the ghost, entering the opening in the trellis, stepped unhindered on the veranda. At this point everybody realized that it was not a ghost at all, but Ivan Nikolayevich Homeless, the famous poet.

He was barefoot, in a tattered whitish Tolstoy blouse, with a paper icon depicting an unknown saint pinned to his chest with a diaper pin, and in striped, white under-

pants. In his hand, Ivan Nikolayevich carried a burning wedding candle. His right cheek had a fresh scratch. It would be difficult to measure the depth of the silence that fell over the veranda. One of the waiters let a beer mug hang slanting from his hand, and the beer dripped on the floor.

The poet raised the candle overhead and loudly pronounced:

"Hail, friends!"

After that he glanced under the nearest table and exclaimed despairingly, "No, he is not here!"

Two voices were heard. A basso said with pitiless finality:

"He's done for. Delirium tremens."

A second, frightened female voice said:

"But how did the militia allow him in the street in this condition?"

Ivan Nikolayevich heard this and answered:

"They tried to stop me twice, on Skatertny and here, on Bronnaya, but I swung over a fence, and, as you see, I got my cheek scratched!" Then Ivan Nikolayevich raised his candle again and cried: "Brethren in literature!" His hoarse voice became stronger and more fervent, "Hear me, one and all! He has appeared! Catch him at once, or he will work untold disasters!"

"What? What? What did he say? Who has appeared?" voices cried from all sides.

"The consultant," answered Ivan. "And this consultant has just murdered Misha Berlioz at the Patriarchs' Ponds."

Now people rushed from the inner rooms to the veranda and a crowd converged around Ivan's light.

"Excuse me, but tell us more precisely," a quiet and courteous voice spoke into Ivan's ear. "Tell us, how did he murder him? Who murdered him?"

"The foreign consultant, a professor and a spy," Ivan Nikolayevich answered, looking around.

"And what is his name?" the voice whispered.

"That's just the trouble—the name!" Ivan cried in anguish. "If I only knew the name! I didn't see it clearly

on his calling card . . . I remember only the first letter, 'W,' the name begins with 'W.' But what name begins with 'W?'" Ivan asked himself, clutching his forehead, and began to mutter: "W, W, We . . . Wa . . . Wo . . . Washner? Wagner? Weiner? Wegner? Winter?" The hair on Ivan's head began to stir with his effort to remember.

"Woolf?" a woman cried sympathetically.

Ivan turned angrily.

"Idiot!" he shouted, searching for the woman with his eyes. "What has Woolf to do with it? Woolf is not to blame! Wo, Wa . . . No, I can't remember! Well, now, citizens, the thing to do is to telephone at once to the militia. Let them send out five motorcycles with machine guns to hunt down the professor. And don't forget to tell them that he has two others with him: a stringy fellow, checkered, with a cracked pince-nez, and a tom cat, black, fat . . . And I will look around Griboyedov's, I have a feeling he's here!"

Ivan fell into a state of anxiety, pushed his way out of the crowd and began to swing the candle, spattering himself with wax, and to look under the tables. Someone's voice said, "a doctor!" And someone's ingratiating, fleshy face, plump and shaven, in horn-rimmed glasses, appeared before Ivan.

"Comrade Homeless," the face began in a oily voice, "calm down! You are shaken by the death of our beloved Mikhail Alexandrovich . . . no, of Misha Berlioz. We all understand it very well. You need rest. The comrades will help you get to bed now, and you will take a nap. . . ."

"You!" Ivan bared his teeth at him. "Don't you understand that the professor must be caught? And here you bother me with your nonsense! Cretin!"

"Comrade Homeless, pardon me! . . ." the face replied, flushing, backing away and already regretting that it had let itself be drawn into the affair.

"Oh, no, anyone else, but not you! You I will not pardon," Ivan Nikolayevich said with quiet hatred.

A spasm twisted his face, he quickly shifted the candle from the right hand to the left, swung widely and landed the sympathetic face a blow on the ear.

At this point the others bethought themselves to rush at Ivan—and they rushed. The candle went out, and the glasses which had been knocked off the helpful face were instantly trampled. Ivan let out a curdling battle cry, heard temptingly even on the boulevard, and began to defend himself. Dishes flew clattering to the floor, women screamed.

While the waiters were tying up the poet with towels, a conversation went on in the coatroom between the commander of the brig and the doorman.

“Did you see that he was in his underpants?” the pirate asked coldly.

“But, Archibald Archibaldovich,” the doorman answered, cowed, “how could I keep him out if he is a member of MASSOLIT?”

“Did you see that he was in his underpants?” the pirate repeated.

“But please, Archibald Archibaldovich,” the doorman said, turning purple. “What could I do? I understand myself that there are ladies on the veranda. . . .”

“Ladies have nothing to do with it, the ladies do not care,” the pirate answered, literally incinerating the doorman with his eyes. “But the militia does care! A man in underwear can walk through the streets of Moscow only if he is accompanied by the militia, and if he is on his way to one place only—the nearest militia precinct! And you, if you’re a doorman, ought to know that the moment you catch sight of such a man you must begin to whistle. Do you hear? Do you hear what is happening on the veranda?”

The half-crazed doorman heard a peculiar booming and grunting from the veranda, the sound of breaking dishes, women’s screams.

“Well, what shall I do to you for this?” asked the buccaneer.

The doorman’s face assumed the hue of a typhoid

patient's and his eyes stared with horror. It seemed to him that the black hair, neatly combed and parted, was suddenly covered with flaming silk. The dress shirt and the frock coat vanished, and the handle of a gun appeared behind a leather belt. The doorman imagined himself hanged from the fore-topgallant. With his own eyes he saw his own protruding tongue and lifeless head, lolling on his shoulder; he even heard the splashing of the waves against the ship. The doorman's knees buckled. But here the buccaneer took pity on him and extinguished his burning stare.

"Take care now, Nikolay, this is the last time! We don't need such doormen at the restaurant, even for nothing. Get yourself a job as watchman in a church." Having pronounced these words, the commander issued a command, clear, sharp, and quick: "Get Panteley from the buffet. Get a militiaman. A report. A car. To the psychiatric ward." And he added: "Whistle!"

Fifteen minutes later the astounded public, not only in the restaurant, but on the boulevard itself and in the windows of the buildings facing the restaurant garden, saw Panteley, the doorman, a militiaman, a waiter, and the poet Ryukhin carry out through the Griboyedov gates a young man swaddled like a doll, streaming with tears, spitting, aiming particularly at Ryukhin, and screaming over the whole boulevard:

"Swine! . . . Swine! . . ."

A furious-faced truck driver was starting up his motor. Next to him a coachman whipped his horse's flanks with violet reins, shouting:

"Why not get a racer? I have taken others to the psychiatric ward!"

The crowd hummed around them, discussing the unprecedented occurrence. In short, there was a low, vile, enticing, ugly scandal which ended only when the truck rolled away from the Griboyedov gates with the unfortunate Ivan Nikolayevich, the militiaman, Panteley, and Ryukhin.

Chapter 6

SCHIZOPHRENIA, AS SAID BEFORE

When the man with a pointed beard, in a white coat, came out into the waiting room of the famous psychiatric clinic recently built near the river bank on the outskirts of Moscow, it was half-past one in the morning. Three attendants kept their eyes unremittingly on Ivan Nikolayevich, who sat on the sofa. The poet Ryukhin was also there, in a state of extreme agitation. The towels which had bound Ivan Nikolayevich lay in a heap on the same sofa. The poet's hands and feet were free.

Seeing the man who entered, Ryukhin turned pale, cleared his throat and said timidly:

"How do you do, Doctor."

The doctor bowed to Ryukhin, but as he bowed his eyes were not on Ryukhin but on Ivan Nikolayevich. The poet sat utterly motionless, with knitted brows and a furious face, and did not even stir when the doctor entered.

"This, Doctor," Ryukhin began for some reason in a mysterious whisper, casting apprehensive glances at Ivan Nikolayevich, "is the well-known poet Ivan Homeless. . . . You see . . . we were afraid it might be delirium tremens. . . ."

"Did he drink much?" the doctor asked through his teeth.

"No, he drank a bit, but not too . . ."

"Was he trying to catch cockroaches, rats, devils, or running dogs?"

"No," Ryukhin answered with a start. "I saw him yesterday and this morning. . . . He was perfectly well."

"And why is he wearing underpants? Did you get him out of bed?"

"No, Doctor, he came to the restaurant like that. . . ."

"Uhum, uhum," the doctor said with great satisfaction. "And why the scratches? Was he fighting with anyone?"

"He fell off a fence, and then he hit a man in the restaurant . . . and one or two others. . . ."

"I see, I see, I see," said the doctor and, turning to Ivan, he added, "How do you do!"

"Hello, saboteur!" Ivan replied loudly, with venom.

Ryukhin was so embarrassed that he did not dare to look up at the courteous doctor. But the latter was not in the least offended. With a neat, practiced gesture he took off his glasses, lifted the flaps of his coat and put the glasses in the back pocket of his trousers. Then he asked Ivan:

"How old are you?"

"Go to the devil, all of you! Really!" Ivan cried rudely and turned away.

"But why are you angry? Did I say anything unpleasant?"

"I am twenty-three years old," Ivan broke out excitedly, "and I will lodge a complaint against all of you. And you, especially, vermin!" he addressed himself separately to Ryukhin.

"Why will you complain?"

"Because I am a perfectly healthy man, and I was grabbed and brought by force to an insane asylum!" Ivan said savagely.

Ryukhin looked closely at Ivan and went numb: there was no trace of madness in his eyes. They were no longer wandering as they had been at Griboyedov's, but bright and lucid, as usual.

"Good heavens!" Ryukhin thought with alarm. "But he is really normal! What a mess! Why did we drag him here, after all? He is normal, quite normal, only his face is scratched. . . ."

"You are not in an insane asylum," the doctor said calmly, sitting down on a white stool with a shiny base, "but in a hospital, where no one will detain you without need."

Ivan Nikolayevich looked at him distrustfully out of the corner of his eye; nevertheless he muttered:

"Thank God! At last there is one normal man among all those idiots, the worst of whom is this blockhead without a shred of talent, Sashka!"

"Who is this blockhead Sashka?" the doctor inquired.

"This Ryukhin, here," Ivan replied, pointing a dirty finger at him.

Ryukhin flushed with indignation. "That's what I get instead of thanks," he thought bitterly, "for trying to help him! What a louse!"

"A typical little kulak in his psychology," Ivan Nikolayevich continued, evidently determined to expose Ryukhin to the end. "And a little kulak who carefully pretends to be a proletarian. Take a look at his pious physiognomy and compare it with the ringing verses he concocts. Ha! . . . Just take a look inside him, and see what he really thinks. . . . You'll gasp!" and Ivan Nikolayevich laughed balefully.

Ryukhin was breathing hard. His face was scarlet, and his one thought was that he had warmed a serpent on his breast, that he had taken the trouble to help a man who turned out to be a vicious enemy. And worst of all, nothing could be done about it. How can you argue with a madman?

"And why were you brought here?" asked the doctor, after listening attentively to Ivan's accusations.

"The devil only knows, the imbeciles! They grabbed me, tied me up with rags, and dragged me off in a truck!"

"May I ask you why you came to the restaurant in nothing but your underwear?"

"There's nothing strange about it," said Ivan. "I went to take a swim in the Moskva River, and someone filched my clothes and left me this trash! I couldn't have gone naked across Moscow! I put on what was there because

I was in a hurry to get to the Griboyedov restaurant."

The doctor looked questioningly at Ryukhin, who muttered glumly:

"That's the name of the restaurant."

"Ah," said the doctor. "And why were you in such a hurry? A business meeting?"

"I'm trying to catch the consultant," answered Ivan Nikolayevich and looked around anxiously.

"What consultant?"

"Do you know Berlioz?" Ivan asked significantly.

"The . . . composer?"

Ivan became upset.

"What composer? Oh, yes . . . Oh, no. The composer was a namesake of Misha Berlioz."

Ryukhin did not feel like saying anything, but he had to explain:

"Berlioz, the secretary of MASSOLIT, was run over by a streetcar today at the Patriarchs' Ponds."

"Don't babble about things you don't know anything about!" Ivan said angrily to Ryukhin. "You weren't there, I was! He deliberately got him under the streetcar!"

"Did he push him?"

"'Push him!' What has that to do with it?" Ivan cried, angered at everyone's obtuseness. "That kind does not have to push! He can pull such tricks, just hold on! He knew beforehand that Berlioz would fall under the streetcar!"

"Did anyone else see this consultant?"

"That's the whole trouble—only Berlioz and myself."

"I see. And what did you do to catch this murderer?" The doctor turned and glanced at the woman in the white coat who sat at a table near the wall. She took out a sheet of paper and began to fill out the blank spaces in its columns.

"This is what I did: I took a candle in the kitchen . . ."

"This one?" asked the doctor, pointing at the broken candle lying on the table before the woman, next to the icon.

"Yes, that's it. And . . ."

"And what is the icon for?"

"Oh, well, the icon . . ." Ivan blushed. "It was the icon that frightened them most of all." He poked a finger at Ryukhin again. "But you see, the consultant . . . he . . . let us speak frankly . . . he's in league with the evil ones . . . and it is not so simple to catch him."

The attendants for some reason stretched their hands at their sides and did not take their eyes away from Ivan.

"Oh, yes," continued Ivan, "he's in with them! This is a fact! He had conversations with Pontius Pilate. Don't look at me like that, I am telling you the truth! He saw everything—the balcony, the palms. In a word, he visited Pontius Pilate, I'll swear to that."

"Well, well? . . ."

"Well, then, I pinned the icon on my chest and ran . . ."

The clock suddenly struck twice.

"Oh!" cried Ivan, getting up from the sofa. "Two o'clock, and I'm wasting time with you here! I'm sorry, where is the telephone?"

"Let him get to the telephone," the doctor told the attendants.

Ivan seized the receiver, and the woman in the meantime asked Ryukhin quietly:

"Is he married?"

"Single," Ryukhin answered, frightened.

"Member of a trade union?"

"Yes."

"Militia?" Ivan shouted into the telephone. "Militia? Comrade officer, see that five motorcycles with machine guns are sent out at once to catch the foreign consultant. What? Call for me, I'll come with you myself. . . . This is the poet Homeless, calling from the insane asylum. . . . What's your address?" Homeless asked the doctor in a whisper, covering the receiver with his hand. Then he shouted again: "Are you listening? Hello! . . . Outrageous!" Homeless roared and threw the receiver against the wall. Then he turned to the doctor, held out his hand, said drily, "Good-by," and turned to go.

"But wait, where will you go now?" the doctor protested, peering into Ivan's eyes. "So late at night, and in your underwear . . . You are not feeling very well, why not stay with us?"

"Let me pass," Ivan said to the attendants who closed in at the door. "Will you, or won't you?" the poet shouted in a furious voice.

Ruykhin shook with fear. The woman pressed a button on the table, and a shiny box with a sealed ampoule leaped out onto its glass surface.

"Ah, so?!" Ivan spoke wildly, looking around him like a beast at bay. "Very well, then . . . Good-by!" and he dived headfirst into the drapery over the window.

There was a rather loud crash, but the glass behind the drapery did not even crack, and a moment later Ivan was struggling desperately in the hands of the attendants. He panted, tried to bite, and screamed:

"So that's the kind of windows you've put in here! Let go! Let go! . . ."

The syringe flashed in the doctor's hands. The woman slit the sleeve of the Tolstoy blouse with a single stroke and clutched the poet's arm with unfeminine strength. There was a smell of ether, Ivan drooped in the grip of four people, and the skilled doctor used the moment to plunge the needle into Ivan's arm. Ivan was held a few more seconds, then he was lowered on the sofa.

"Bandits!" he yelled and jumped up, but was reinstated on the sofa. As soon as they released him, he jumped again, but a moment later he sat down by himself. He was silent a while, looking around, somewhat bewildered. Suddenly he yawned, then smiled maliciously.

"Imprisoned, after all," he said, and yawned again. Then suddenly he lay down, put his head upon the pillow, slipped his fist under his cheek like a child, and mumbled sleepily, this time without rancor: "Very well . . . you'll pay for everything yourselves . . . I warned you, now you can do what you want. . . . Right now, I am interested in Pontius Pilate most of all . . . Pilate . . ." he closed his eyes.

"A bath, a separate room, number 117, and a guard to watch him," the doctor ordered, putting on his glasses. Ryukhin started again. The white door opened noiselessly and beyond it he could see a corridor illuminated by blue night lights. A couch on rubber wheels rolled out of the corridor, the quieted Ivan was transferred to it, wheeled into the corridor, and the door closed behind him.

"Doctor," the shaken Ryukhin asked in a whisper, "so he is really sick?"

"Oh, yes," answered the doctor.

"But what is the matter with him?" Ryukhin asked timidly.

The weary doctor glanced at Ryukhin and answered listlessly:

"Motor and speech excitation . . . delirium . . . morbid interpretations . . . It seems to be a complex case. Schizophrenia, I suppose. Aggravated by alcoholism. . ."

Ryukhin understood nothing from the doctor's words except that Ivan Nikolayevich seemed to be in a bad way. He sighed and asked:

"And what is this consultant he kept talking about?"

"He must have seen someone who struck his disordered imagination. Or it may have been a hallucination. . ."

A few minutes later the truck was taking Ryukhin back to Moscow. It was beginning to dawn; the still-burning lights along the highway were now unnecessary and irritating. The driver, angry over the wasted night, drove at top speed, and the truck skidded at every turn.

And now the wood receded, remained far behind, and the river veered off somewhere. A variety of sights rushed out helter-skelter to meet the truck: fences with sentry boxes, stacks of wood, tremendously high poles and masts with spools strung on them, piles of rubble, earth slashed with canals. The traveler felt that Moscow was right there, around the corner; in a moment it would pile itself upon him, suck him in.

Ryukhin was jolted and thrown in all directions. He sat on some sort of a stump that was constantly trying to

slip out from under him. The restaurant towels, left by the militiaman and Panteley, who returned earlier by bus, slid all over the floor of the truck. Ryukhin had tried at first to collect them, then he hissed with rage, "To hell with them! Why am I exerting myself like an idiot? . . ." He kicked them away with his foot and did not look at them again.

Ryukhin was in a terrible mood. It was clear that his visit to the house of sorrow had left a most painful mark upon him. He tried to understand just what it was that tormented him. The corridor with the blue lamps that stuck in his memory? The thought that there was no greater misfortune in the world than loss of reason? Yes, yes, of course, this too. But what else? The insult! That was it. Yes, the insulting words thrown into his face by Homeless. And the worst of it was not that they were insulting, but that they were true.

The poet no longer looked to the sides; staring at the dirty, quivering floor, he began to mutter something, whining and nagging at himself.

Yes, poems . . . He was thirty-two years old! And really, what next? Was he to go on writing his several poems a year? Until a ripe old age? Yes, yes, until a ripe old age. And what would these poems bring him? Fame? "What nonsense! Don't fool yourself, at least. Fame will never come to the man who writes bad poems. Why are they bad? He spoke the truth, he spoke the truth!" Ryukhin flayed himself mercilessly.

Thoroughly poisoned by this burst of neurasthenia, the poet swayed, and the floor under him stopped shaking. Ryukhin raised his head and realized that he was long in Moscow, that, furthermore, the dawn had risen over Moscow, that the cloud overhead was rimmed with gold, that his truck was standing, caught in a traffic jam at the turn to the boulevard, and that a metal man stood on a pedestal a step or two away, his head slightly bowed, looking indifferently at the boulevard.

A flood of strange ideas rushed through the brain of the afflicted poet. "There is an example of real luck. . . ." Ryukhin stood up in the truck to his full height and

lifted his hand, ready, for some reason, to attack the cast-iron man who was doing no one any harm.* "Every step he took in his life, everything that happened to him, worked to his benefit, increased his fame! But what did he do? I don't see it. . . . What is so special in the words, "The storm in darkness . . ."? I don't understand it! He was lucky, just lucky!" Ryukhin suddenly concluded with venom and felt the truck stir under him. "That White Guard fired and fired at him, and got him in the hip, and assured him of immortality. . . ."

The column of traffic began to move. Not more than two minutes later, the poet, feeling utterly sick and even aged by his experience, stepped on the Griboyedov veranda. It was almost empty now. In the corner, several people were finishing their drinks; at the center of this company was a bustling actor Ryukhin knew, wearing an embroidered skullcap, with a glass of "Abrau" in his hand.

Archibald Archibaldovich met Ryukhin, burdened with the towels, with an affable smile, and relieved him of the accursed rags. Had he not been so lacerated by his ordeals at the clinic and in the truck, Ryukhin would probably have taken pleasure in describing the events at the hospital and embellishing his story with improvised details. But now he was past such things. Now, after the truck ride, Ryukhin looked at the pirate closely for the first time. And, generally unobservant as he was, he realized that, although the other asked about Homeless and even cried commiseratingly, "Oh, no, oh, no!" he was in essence totally indifferent to the sick man's fate and did not feel a shred of pity. "Right! That's the way to be!" Ryukhin thought with cynical, self-demolishing hatred. And, breaking off his story about the schizophrenic, he said:

"Archibald Archibaldovich, I could do with a drink. . . ."

The pirate whispered, with an understanding look:

* The "cast-iron man" is a statue of Pushkin. "The storm in darkness" are the opening words of a famous poem by Pushkin.—*Translator's note*

"I know . . . just a moment. . . ." and he motioned to the waiter.

Fifteen minutes later, Ryukhin sat huddled in total solitude over a plate of carp, drinking glass after glass of vodka, understanding and admitting to himself that nothing in his life could be repaired any more, that all he could do was to forget.

The poet had wasted his night while others feasted, and now he knew that it could never be recovered. He needed only to raise his face from the lamp to the sky to realize that the night was lost beyond redemption. The waiters hurriedly pulled the tableclothes off the tables. The tom cats slinking around the veranda had a morning air about them. The day was irresistibly bearing down upon the poet.

Chapter 7

THE SINISTER APARTMENT

If anyone said to Styopa Likhodeyev the next morning, "Styopa! If you don't get up at once, you will be shot!" he would have answered in a faint, languid voice, "Shoot me, do anything you like to me—I won't get up."

Get up? He could not even open his eyes. He felt that if he did, there would be a flash of lightning, and his head would instantly explode to bits. A heavy bell boomed in his head. Brown spots with fiery green rims were swimming between his eyeballs and his closed lids. And, on top of all this, he felt acute nausea—this nausea seemingly connected with the sounds of a persistent phonograph.

Styopa tried to remember, but the only thing he could recall was standing with a napkin in his hand in some unknown place (it must have been the night before), trying to kiss some unknown lady, and promising that he would visit her the next day exactly at noon. The lady demurred, saying, "No, no, I won't be home!" But Styopa obstinately insisted, "I will come, see if I don't!"

Who the lady was, Styopa could not imagine. Nor did he have any idea of what time it was now, or what day, or what month. Worst of all, he could not understand where he was. Attempting to determine at least the latter fact, he made an effort and unglued the eyelid of his left eye. Something glinted dimly in the dusk. Styopa finally recognized the wall mirror and realized that he was lying flat on his back in his own bed, that is, in the bed of the ex-jeweler's wife, in the bedroom. At this point, he felt

such a stab in his head that he closed his eyes and moaned.

Let us explain: Styopa Likhodeyev, director of the Variety Theater, woke in the morning in the very apartment he shared with the late Berlioz, in a large six-story building on Sadovaya.

It must be said that this apartment, Number 50, had long enjoyed, if not a bad, at least a dubious reputation. Only two years ago it still belonged to the widow of the jeweler de Fougère. Anna Frantsevna de Fougère, a respectable and very efficient lady of fifty, let three of her five rooms to roomers: one, whose name, I believe, was Belomut, and another, whose name is lost.

Two years ago, however, a series of inexplicable events began to plague the apartment: people began to disappear from it without a trace.

For a long time, all sorts of legends circulated in the house about the cursed apartment and its lost residents. Then it was rented by the late Berlioz with his wife, and by this Styopa, also with his wife. Naturally, the moment they moved into the damned apartment, all sorts of infernal things began to happen. Namely, both wives disappeared within a single month. But these did not disappear without a trace. Of Berlioz' wife it was said that she was seen in Kharkov with a ballet master. As for Styopa's wife, she was allegedly discovered on Bozhe-domka Street where, gossip had it, the director of the Variety Theater had managed, with the aid of his innumerable acquaintances, to find her a room, but on one condition: she was never to show her face on Sadovaya. . . .

And so, Styopa moaned. He wanted to call the house maid, Grunya, and ask her for a aspirin, but even in his present state he realized that it was stupid, for Grunya would, of course, have no aspirin. He tried to call Berlioz and groaned twice, "Misha . . . Misha . . ." But, as you can easily surmise, he got no answer. The apartment was utterly silent.

Wriggling his toes, Styopa guessed that he was in his socks. He passed his shaking hand along his thigh to

determine whether he had his trousers on, but could determine nothing. At length, seeing that he was solitary and abandoned, with no one to help him, he decided to get up, no matter what inhuman effort it might cost him.

Styopa tore his eyelids open and saw himself reflected in the wall mirror in the shape of a man with his hair standing up in all directions, with a bloated physiognomy overgrown with black stubble, with swollen eyes, in a soiled shirt with a collar and tie, in underpants and socks.

This was his image in the glass, and next to the glass he saw an unknown man dressed in black, with a black beret.

Styopa sat up in bed and his bloodshot eyes bulged, as much as they could, at the stranger. It was the stranger who broke the silence, saying in a low, heavy voice with a foreign accent:

"Good morning, my most charming Stepan Bogdanovich!"

There was a pause, after which, making a violent effort, Styopa asked:

"What do you wish?" And was astonished, not recognizing his own voice. The "what" was said in a treble; the "do you" in a basso; and "wish" did not come out at all.

The stranger smiled amiably, took out a large, gold pocket watch with a diamond triangle on the lid. It rang eleven times and he said:

"Eleven. I have waited for your awakening exactly an hour, for you asked me to come at ten. And here I am!"

Styopa felt for his trousers on the chair next to the bed and whispered:

"Sorry . . ." He put on his trousers and asked hoarsely, "Will you please tell me your name?"

He found it difficult to speak. At every word, somebody stuck a needle into his brain, causing him infernal pain.

"Oh! So you've forgotten my name too?" the stranger smiled.

"Forgive me. . . ." Styopa croaked, feeling that his hangover was generously presenting him with a new symptom: it seemed to him as though the floor by the

bed had vanished somewhere and that he was about to fly headfirst to the devil's own mother in hell.

"My dear Stepan Bogdanovich," the visitor spoke with an understanding smile. "No aspirin will help you. Obey the wise old rule: cure like with like. The only thing that will restore you is a glass or two of vodka and a hot, spicy snack."

Styopa was a shrewd man. Sick though he was, he knew that, once he was caught in this condition, he had best admit everything.

"Frankly speaking," he began, barely able to turn his tongue, "last night I went on a bit of . . ."

"Not another word!" the visitor cried, and slid away sideways with his chair.

Styopa's eyes goggled as he saw, on the small table, a tray with sliced white bread, caviar in a dish, white marinated mushrooms on a plate, something in a saucepan, and, finally, some vodka in a good-sized decanter that had once belonged to the ex-jeweler's wife. It struck him particularly that the decanter was misted with cold. However, this was easily explained: it rested in a bowl packed with ice. In short, the service was expert and immaculate.

The stranger did not allow Styopa's astonishment to reach the painful stage and deftly poured him half a tumbler of vodka.

"And you?" squeaked Styopa.

"With pleasure!"

Styopa brought his tumbler to his lips with a shaking hand, and the stranger emptied his in a single gulp. Chewing a forkful of caviar, Styopa managed to squeeze out the words:

"And you? . . . have a bite?"

"Thank you, I never do," answered the stranger and poured a second drink. They uncovered the saucepan and found that it contained sausages with tomato sauce.

And soon the accursed green clouds before Styopa's eyes melted away, words began to come more easily, and, best of all, his memory began to clear. He recalled that

he had been in Skhodnya the night before, at the summer home of the sketch writer Khustov, where this Khustov had taken him in a taxi. He also remembered how they hired the taxi at the Metropole, in company of a third man, an actor, no, not an actor . . . somebody with a phonograph in a suitcase. Yes, yes, it was at the summer home! He also remembered that the phonograph made the dogs howl. But the lady Styopa was trying to kiss remained unexplained . . . the devil knew who she was . . . it seemed she worked at the radio station . . . but maybe she didn't. . . .

Thus, the previous day was slowly coming into focus. But Styopa was far more interested in the present day, and particularly in the appearance of a stranger in his bedroom, with vodka and an elegant snack at that. That was something he would not mind having explained!

"Well, I hope that you remember my name now?"

But Styopa merely smiled with embarrassment and raised his hands.

"But really! I have an idea you drank port after the vodka. My dear man, don't you know this is not done?"

"I want to ask you—please let this remain between us," Styopa begged obsequiously.

"But of course, of course! But naturally, I cannot vouch for Khustov."

"So you know Khustov too?"

"I saw him at your office yesterday, but a single glance at him is enough to see that he is a scoundrel, a gossip, a toady, and parasite."

"How true!" Styopa thought, amazed at this brief, sharp, and accurate description of Khustov.

Yes, the previous day was coming together piece by piece, but the director of the Variety Theater continued to feel anxious. There was a huge black gaping hole in the day. Say what you will, but Styopa had not seen this stranger in the beret at his office at all.

"Professor of black magic, Woland," the visitor said importantly, seeing Styopa's confusion. And he told him everything in order.

Yesterday afternoon he arrived in Moscow from abroad and immediately called at Styopa's office to offer his services to the theater. Styopa telephoned the Moscow Regional Theatrical Commission to get approval (Styopa turned pale and blinked), and then he signed a contract with Professor Woland for seven performances (Styopa opened his mouth), and asked Woland to come this morning at ten o'clock to discuss details. . . . And here he was. On arrival, he met the house maid Grunya, who explained that she had just come in herself, that she was a day maid, that Berlioz was out, and, if the visitor wished to see Stepan Bogdanovich, he could go to his bedroom himself. Stepan Bogdanovich, she said, was a heavy sleeper, and she would not try to wake him. When he saw the condition Stepan Bogdanovich was in, the artist sent Grunya to the nearest gourmet shop for vodka and food and to the drug store for ice, and . . .

"Allow me to pay you," the crushed Styopa whimpered and began to look for his wallet.

"Oh, what nonsense!" exclaimed the artist and would not hear of it again.

And so, the vodka and the snack were explained. And yet, Styopa was still pathetic to behold: he remembered absolutely nothing about a contract, and he was ready to stake his life that he had not seen this Woland yesterday. Yes, Khustov had been there, but not Woland.

"May I see the contract?" Styopa asked quietly.

"Certainly, certainly. . . ."

Styopa glanced at the paper and froze. Everything was in its proper place: first, Styopa's own dashing signature . . . a slanting note on the margin in the hand of the theater's financial manager Rimsky, authorizing the payment of ten thousand rubles to the artist Woland as an advance against the thirty-five thousand due him for seven performances. And even Woland's signature, attesting to his receipt of the ten thousand.

"What is this?" Styopa thought miserably and his head began to spin. Was he beginning to suffer ominous lapses of memory? But, of course, after the contract was pre-

sented, further expression of astonishment would have been improper. Styopa excused himself for a moment and ran to the hallway as he was, in socks, intending to telephone. On the way he cried in the direction of the kitchen:

“Grunya!”

But no one answered. He glanced at the door of Berlioz’ study, which was next to the foyer, and stood, as they say, petrified. On the door handle there was a huge circle of sealing wax on a cord.

“What now!” somebody barked in Styopa’s head. “That’s all we need!” And Styopa’s thoughts raced off along double tracks, but, as always in times of disaster, in tangential directions, and generally God knows where. It would be difficult to convey the confusion in his head. First, that infernal business with the black beret, chilled vodka, and the incredible contract. . . . And now, if you please, the seal on the door! You could tell anyone else that Berlioz had gotten into mischief, but not to Styopa . . . by God, he wouldn’t believe it! And yet, there was the seal! Well . . .

And then some nasty little thoughts began to stir in Styopa’s brain. As if in spite, he had just recently given Mikhail Alexandrovich an article for publication in his magazine. Between us, the article was idiotic. It was worthless, and the money was nothing to speak of. . . .

Immediately after the article, he recalled the somewhat dubious conversation that had occurred, if he remembered rightly, on April 24, right here in the dining room, as Styopa was having dinner with Mikhail Alexandrovich. That is, of course, the conversation could not be described as dubious in the full sense of the word (Styopa would never have entered into such a conversation), but it was on a useless topic. He could just as well, my dear citizens, have stayed away from such conversations. Before the appearance of the seal this could unquestionably have been regarded as a mere trifle, but after the seal. . . .

"Ah, Berlioz, Berlioz!" Styopa's mind rebelled. "Who would imagine it!"

But he had no time for wailing, and Styopa dialed the number of the financial manager of the Variety Theater, Rimsky. Styopa's position was delicate: to begin with, the foreigner might take offense at Styopa's attempt to verify his words after he had shown the contract; besides, it was difficult to speak to the financial manager. After all, one could not say, "Tell me, did I sign a contract yesterday with a professor of black magic for thirty-five thousand rubles?" No, such a question would not do!

"Yes!" he heard Rimsky's sharp, unpleasant voice in the receiver.

"Good morning, Grigory Danilovich," Styopa spoke quietly. "This is Likhodeyev. I'm calling you . . . hm . . . hm . . . well, I have this . . . umm . . . this artist Woland, here . . . and . . . I wanted to ask you, how about this evening? . . ."

"Ah, the magician?" Rimsky answered. "The posters will be ready momentarily."

"Aha . . ." Styopa said in a faint voice. "Well, see you. . . ."

"Are you coming in soon?" asked Rimsky.

"In thirty minutes," answered Styopa and, hanging up, clutched his burning head with his hands. It was a nasty business! What was happening to his memory, dear citizens, huh?

However, it was awkward to remain in the foyer any longer, and Styopa formed an immediate plan: he would do all he could to conceal his incredible forgetfulness and slyly maneuver the foreigner into telling him what exactly he intended to show that night at the theater entrusted to Styopa's management.

Styopa turned from the telephone and in the hallway mirror, which the lazy Grunya had not dusted for a long time, he clearly saw a most peculiar individual, lanky as a pole and in pince-nez (ah, if only Ivan Nikolayevich had been there! He would have recognized this character at once!). The individual was reflected for a moment and

vanished. Styopa anxiously peered further into the hallway, and was jolted a second time, for a huge black tom passed through the mirror and also disappeared.

Styopa's heart dropped and he swayed.

"What is this?" he thought. "Am I going mad? Where do these reflections come from?" He looked into the hallway and cried in alarm:

"Grunya! What is this cat slinking around here? Where does he come from? And who else is here?"

"Don't worry, Stepan Bogdanovich," a voice replied from the bedroom, but it was not Grunya's voice. "The tom is mine. Don't be nervous. And Grunya is not here, I sent her to Voronezh. She complained that you had cheated her out of her vacation."

The words were so absurd and unexpected that Styopa decided he had not heard right. In total confusion he trotted back to the bedroom and froze on the threshold. His hair stirred on his head, and small drops of sweat broke out on his forehead.

His guest was no longer alone in the bedroom. The second chair was occupied by the character he had just glimpsed in the hallway. Now he was clearly visible: a tiny feather mustache, one lens glinting in the pince-nez, the other missing. But there were even worse things in the bedroom. A third visitor sprawled insolently on the padded ottoman that had once belonged to the jeweler's lady—namely, a black tom of terrifying proportions, with a glass of vodka in one paw and a fork in the other with which he had already managed to impale a pickled mushroom.

The dim light in the bedroom began to fade out altogether in Styopa's eyes. "So that's how people lose their minds. . . ." he thought and caught at the doorpost.

"I see that you are a little surprised, my dearest Stepan Bogdanovich?" Woland inquired of Styopa who stared at the room with chattering teeth. "But there is nothing to wonder at. This is my retinue."

The tom emptied his glass of vodka, and Styopa's hand began to slide down the doorpost.

"And this retinue requires space," continued Woland.

"So that we have one too many in the apartment. And it seems to me that the one is you."

"They, they!" the lanky checkered character bleated like a goat, referring to Styopa in the plural. "Generally, they've been behaving like a dreadful swine lately. Drinking, having affairs with women on the strength of their position in the theater, not doing a stitch of work and really incapable of doing any, since they don't know the first thing about the job. Putting things over on their superiors!"

"Using the government car for nothing," the tom tattled as he chewed his mushroom.

And now came the fourth and final appearance in the apartment, while Styopa, who had already slipped down to the floor, was clawing at the doorpost.

A new visitor stepped straight out of the mirror, small but extraordinarily wide in the shoulders, in a derby and with a fang projecting from his mouth, which made his incredibly odious physiognomy still more revolting. And on top of everything, with fiery-red hair.

"I," the new arrival entered the conversation, "generally fail to see how he ever got to be a director." The redhead's voice became more and more nasal: "If he is a director, I am an archbishop."

"You don't look like an archbishop, Azazello," remarked the tom, piling sausages on his plate.

"That's what I am saying," the redhead drawled nasally. And, turning to Woland, he added deferentially, "Permit me, Messire, to throw him the hell out of Moscow?"

"Scat!" the tom roared suddenly, his fur bristling.

And then the bedroom began to spin around Styopa. His head struck the doorpost and the thought flashed through his mind as he lost consciousness, "I'm dying. . . ."

But he did not die. Opening his eyes a little, he found himself sitting on something made of stone. He heard a rushing noise. When he opened his eyes properly, he saw that the noise came from the sea and that the waves

rocked at his very feet. In short, he was sitting at the very end of a jetty, with a dazzling blue sky over him and a white city on a mountainside behind him.

Not knowing how people behave in such cases, Styopa got up on his trembling feet and walked along the jetty toward the shore.

A man stood on the jetty, smoking and spitting into the sea. He looked at Styopa wildly and stopped spitting.

Then Styopa pulled a crazy stunt; he dropped on his knees before the unknown smoker and asked:

"I implore you, tell me what city is this?"

"Well!" said the heartless smoker.

"I am not drunk," Styopa said hoarsely. "Something happened to me . . . I am sick. . . . Where am I? What city is this?"

"Oh, well, Yalta. . . ."

With a quiet sigh, Styopa toppled sideways, his head striking the sun-warmed rock of the jetty. Consciousness abandoned him.

Chapter 8

DUEL BETWEEN THE PROFESSOR AND THE POET

At the very moment when consciousness abandoned Styopa in Yalta, that is, about half-past eleven in the morning, it returned to Ivan Nikolayevich Homeless, who awakened from a deep and prolonged sleep. For a while he tried to understand how he had gotten to this unfamiliar room with its white walls, its strange night table of some light metal, and its white window shade behind which there seemed to be bright sunshine.

Ivan shook his head, discovered that it did not hurt, and remembered that he was in the hospital. This thought brought with it the memory of Berlioz' death, but now it did not cause him violent shock. The long rest calmed Ivan and he began to think more clearly. He remained motionless for a time on the immaculately clean, soft, and comfortable spring bed, then he saw the bell button near him. From his old habit of touching things without need, Ivan pressed it. He waited for a ring or someone's appearance, but something altogether different took place.

A frosted cylinder at the foot of Ivan's bed lit up, with the word "Drink" on it. After a few moments, the cylinder began to revolve until a new inscription appeared: "Attendant." Ivan was struck by the clever cylinder. Soon the "Attendant" gave way to "Call the doctor."

"Hm . . ." said Ivan, not knowing what to do with the

cylinder next. But luck intervened. Ivan pressed the button again at the word "Nurse." The cylinder rang quietly in response and stopped. The light went out, and a plump, pleasant woman in a clean white uniform came in and said to Ivan:

"Good morning."

Ivan did not reply, considering such a greeting to be out of place under the circumstances. Indeed, they had locked up a perfectly sound man in a hospital and pretended that it was right and proper!

Meanwhile, without losing her good humor, the woman raised the shade by pressing a button and the sun streamed into the room through the light, widely-spaced grating which reached down to the floor. Behind the grating was a balcony, and beyond it, a winding river, with a gay pine wood on the opposite bank.

"You may have your bath now," the woman invited him, and under her hands the inner wall slid open, revealing an excellently equipped bathroom with a toilet.

Although Ivan had decided not to speak to the woman, his resolve broke down at the sight of the wide jet of water gushing into the bathtub from a gleaming faucet, and he said ironically:

"Just look at it! As good as at the Metropole!"

"Oh, no," the woman answered with pride. "Much better. You won't find such equipment anywhere, not even abroad. Doctors and scientists make special trips to see our hospital. We have foreign tourists here every day."

The words "foreign tourists" instantly brought back the memory of yesterday's consultant. Ivan's face darkened; he scowled and said:

"Foreign tourists . . . How you all adore them! But I can tell you there are all sorts among them. The one I met yesterday, for example—a delight to know!"

And he almost began to tell her about Pontius Pilate, but he checked himself, realizing that the woman was not interested in his stories, and could not help him anyway.

The freshly bathed Ivan Nikolayevich was given everything a man needs after a bath: a nicely ironed shirt, underpants, socks. Then the woman opened the door of a wardrobe and asked, pointing inside:

“What would you like to put on—a bathrobe, or pajamas?”

Ivan, forcibly attached to his new dwelling place, all but gasped at the woman's familiarity. He silently indicated a pair of pajamas of crimson flannel.

After that Ivan Nikolayevich was led down a silent and empty corridor to a room of enormous proportions. Determined to treat everything in this marvel-filled establishment with irony, Ivan immediately christened the room a “factory kitchen.”

And there was good reason for it. The room was lined with cases and glass cabinets filled with shiny instruments. It was furnished with chairs of extraordinarily complicated construction, potbellied lamps with gleaming shades, a multitude of jars, gas burners, electric wires, and apparatus that no one could make head or tail of.

Three persons—two women and one man, all of them in white—busied themselves with Ivan. To begin with, they led him to a small table in the corner, with the obvious aim of getting information out of him.

Ivan began to assess the situation. He had three alternatives. The first and most tempting one was to throw himself upon all these lamps and intricate devices and smash them all to hell, thus showing his protest against being detained without reason. However, today's Ivan differed considerably from yesterday's, and the first alternative seemed to be of doubtful value. Those people might really become convinced that he was a violent madman. Hence, Ivan rejected this line of action. The second alternative was to launch at once into the story about the consultant and Pontius Pilate. But yesterday's experience showed that people either did not believe this story or else placed a peculiarly distorted interpretation on it. Consequently, Ivan rejected this choice as well, deciding on the third alternative: he would withdraw into proud silence.

However, he did not succeed in carrying out this decision to the full. Willy-nilly, he was obliged to answer a number of questions, if only briefly and morosely. And Ivan was questioned about absolutely everything in his past life, even including the scarlet fever he had had fifteen years before. After covering a whole page with information about Ivan, the woman in white turned it over and went on to question him about his relatives. It was an endless flood of nonsense: who died, and when, and how; did the departed drink, did he have any venereal diseases, and on and on in the same vein. In conclusion, they asked him to tell about yesterday's events at the Patriarchs' Ponds, but here they were not too insistent, and showed no astonishment over Pontius Pilate.

Then the woman yielded up Ivan to the man, and he went to work on him differently, without asking any questions. He took Ivan's temperature, counted his pulse, looked into Ivan's eyes, directing a bright light at them. Afterward another woman came to assist the man, and they stuck something into his back, though not painfully; they traced designs on his chest with the handle of a mallet, tapped his knees, which made Ivan's legs jerk, pricked his finger and drew blood from it, stuck needles into the crook of his elbow, put rubber bracelets around his arms. . . .

Ivan merely grinned bitterly to himself, reflecting on how stupidly and strangely things had turned out. Just think! He wanted to warn everyone of the danger from the unknown consultant and to catch him, but all he achieved was to be brought to this mysterious room to talk about Uncle Fyodor who drank himself to death in Vologda. Insufferably stupid!

At last, Ivan was allowed to go. He was escorted back to his room, where he was given a cup of coffee, two soft-boiled eggs, and buttered white bread. He ate and drank everything offered him, and resolved to wait for someone of importance in this institution, whom he would finally convince to give him due attention and justice.

He did not have to wait long. Soon after he had eaten his breakfast, the door was suddenly flung open and a crowd of people in white coats piled in. In the van of this crowd walked a man of about forty-five, as carefully shaved as an actor, with pleasant but very penetrating eyes, and a courteous manner. His entire suite showed him marked respect and attention, and this lent his entrance an air of great solemnity. "Just like Pontius Pilate," thought Ivan.

Yes, this was unquestionably the chief. He sat down on a stool, while the rest remained standing.

"Doctor Stravinsky," the seated man introduced himself to Ivan and glanced at him in a friendly manner.

"Here, Alexandre Nikolayevich," someone with a small, neatly trimmed beard said in a low voice, handing the chief the paper on Ivan, covered with writing on both sides.

"They've cooked up a whole case," thought Ivan. And the chief ran through the sheet with a practiced eye, muttered "U-hum, u-hum . . ." and exchanged a few phrases with his retinue in a little-known language. "Speaks Latin too, just like Pilate," Ivan thought sadly. At this point one word made him start; it was "schizophrenia"—a word, alas, spoken but yesterday by the accursed foreigner at the Patriarchs' Ponds, and now repeated here by Professor Stravinsky. "He knew this too," Ivan thought anxiously.

The chief had evidently made it a rule to agree with everything and to rejoice in everything his companions said to him, and to express this with the words, "Fine, fine. . . ."

"Fine!" said Stravinsky, returning the sheet to someone, and turned to Ivan:

"You are a poet?"

"A poet," Ivan answered gloomily and for the first time suddenly felt an inexplicable aversion to poetry. His own verses which he recalled at the moment seemed most unpleasant now.

Wrinkling his face, he asked Stravinsky in turn:

"You are a professor?"

Stravinsky nodded politely.

"And you're the chief here?" continued Ivan.

Stravinsky nodded again.

"I must speak to you," Ivan Nikolayevich said significantly.

"That's what I came for," replied Stravinsky.

"The point is this," began Ivan, feeling that his hour had come. "They've rigged me out here as a madman, and no one wants to listen to me! . . ."

"Oh, no, we shall listen to you with utmost attention," Stravinsky said earnestly and reassuringly. "And we shall certainly allow no one to rig you out as a madman."

"Well, listen to me then: last evening I met a mysterious individual at the Patriarchs' Ponds, perhaps a foreigner, or perhaps not. He knew beforehand that Berlioz would die, and he had personally seen Pontius Pilate."

The group listened to the poet silently, without moving.

"Pilate? The Pilate who lived at the time of Jesus Christ?" Stravinsky asked, narrowing his eyes at Ivan.

"That's the one."

"Ah," said Stravinsky. "And this Berlioz died under a streetcar?"

"Exactly. He was killed by a streetcar last night at the Patriarchs' Ponds in my presence, and this mysterious citizen. . . ."

"The acquaintance of Pontius Pilate?" asked Stravinsky, obviously a man with a quick mind.

"Yes, the same one," confirmed Ivan, studying Stravinsky. "Well, then, he said beforehand that Annushka had spilled the sunflower oil . . . and this was exactly the spot where he slipped! What do you think of that?" Ivan inquired significantly, expecting his words to produce an effect.

But the effect did not follow, and Stravinsky simply asked him the next question:

"And who is this Annushka?"

This question somewhat unsettled Ivan, and his face twitched.

"Annushka is absolutely irrelevant here," he said, becoming nervous. "The devil knows who she is. Some fool from Sadovaya. The important thing, you see, is that he knew about the sunflower oil in advance! Do you understand me?"

"I understand very well," Stravinsky answered seriously and, touching the poet's knee, he added: "Don't get upset. Continue please."

"I will continue," said Ivan, trying to strike the same tone and knowing from bitter experience that only a calm approach could help him. "Well, then, this dreadful character (and he is lying about being a consultant) possesses extraordinary powers! . . . For example, you chase him, but you can never catch up with him. . . . And he has a pair of cronies—gems of their own kind! A stringy type with broken glasses and a tom cat of incredible size, who travels in streetcars by himself. Besides," Ivan, uninterrupted by anyone, spoke with increasing heat and persuasiveness, "he was personally on Pontius Pilate's balcony—that is beyond all doubt. And how can such things be allowed? He must be arrested immediately, or he will work untold disasters."

"And you are trying to get him arrested? Do I understand you correctly?" asked Stravinsky.

"He is clever," thought Ivan. "One must admit that even among intellectuals there are sometimes highly intelligent men; this cannot be denied." And he answered:

"Exactly! What else can you do? Think for yourself! And yet they've forcibly detained me here, they shine lamps into my eyes, they bathe me, and ask idiotic questions about Uncle Fedya who's been dead for years! I demand to be released at once!"

"Certainly. That's fine, fine!" replied Stravinsky. "Now everything is cleared up. Indeed, what sense is there in keeping a healthy man in a hospital? Very well, I shall sign you out immediately if you will tell me that you are normal. I do not say 'prove to me,' only 'tell me.' And so, are you normal?"

There was total silence, and the plump woman who had tended to Ivan that morning looked at the professor with adoring eyes. Ivan thought again, "Positively clever!"

He liked the professor's offer immensely. However, before replying he thought it over carefully, wrinkling his forehead. After a while, he said firmly:

"I am normal."

"Fine," Stravinsky exclaimed with relief. "And if so, let us talk things over logically. Let us consider your experiences the other day." He turned and someone instantly handed him Ivan's information sheet. "In attempting to find the stranger who introduced himself to you as an acquaintance of Pontius Pilate, you did the following things." Stravinsky began to bend one long finger after another, glancing now at the paper and now at Ivan. "You hung an icon on your chest. Right?"

"Right," Ivan agreed glumly.

"You fell off a fence and bruised your face. Yes? You made an appearance at the restaurant with a lighted candle in your hand, dressed only in underwear, and beat someone up. You were brought here with your hands tied. Here you telephoned the militia and asked them to send out machine guns. Then you tried to throw yourself out of the window. Right? Let me ask you: is it possible by pursuing such a course of action to catch or arrest anyone? And if you are indeed a normal man, you will answer yourself: entirely impossible. You wish to leave? Very well. But allow me to ask you: where will you go?"

"To the militia, of course," Ivan replied, but now with less assurance and becoming somewhat flustered under the professor's stare.

"Directly from here?"

"Uhum. . . ."

"And you will not stop off at home first?" Stravinsky asked quickly.

"But there's no time for stopping off! While I go home, he'll slip away!"

"I see. And what will you tell the militia to begin with?"

"I'll tell them about Pontius Pilate," answered Ivan Nikolayevich, and his eyes darkened.

"Fine!" cried Stravinsky, entirely won over. And, turning to the man with the goatee, he ordered: "Fyodor Vasilievich, please sign out citizen Homeless. He may go back to town. But keep his room open, and there is no need to change the bedding. Citizen Homeless will be back here inside two hours. Well," he turned to the poet, "I shall not wish you success, for I do not have an iota of confidence in your success. See you soon!" He rose, and his retinue stirred to follow.

"Why do you say I will be back?" Ivan asked anxiously.

Stravinsky seemed to have expected the question. He sat down again and said:

"Because I know that, as soon as you appear at the militia in your underwear and report that you met a man who was personally acquainted with Pontius Pilate, you shall instantly be brought here, and you will find yourself in the very same room."

"What does underwear have to do with it?" Ivan asked, looking around in confusion.

"Chiefly, it's Pontius Pilate. But the underwear too. After all, we shall have to take away the hospital clothes and give you back your own. And you were brought here in underwear. Yet you had no intention of stopping off at home, although I hinted at it. Then will come Pilate . . . and you're ready."

Something strange happened to Ivan Nikolayevich. His will seemed to crack, and he felt weak and in need of advice.

"But what is to be done?" he asked timidly.

"Fine!" answered Stravinsky. "A most reasonable question. Now I shall tell you exactly what happened to you. Yesterday, someone upset and frightened you badly by the story of Pontius Pilate and the rest of it. And so, with your nerves frayed to the breaking point, you went all over the city, talking about Pontius Pilate. It is quite

natural that people took you for a madman. There is only one salvation for you now—complete rest. And you must beyond all question remain here.”

“But he must be caught!” Ivan exclaimed, now in a pleading tone.

“Very well, but why must you run after him yourself? Write down all your suspicions and accusations against this man. There is nothing simpler than sending your statement to the proper authorities, and if—as you suppose—we are dealing with a criminal, the matter will be cleared up very shortly. But one condition: do not strain your mind, and try to think as little as possible about Pontius Pilate. People will tell you all sorts of stories! We cannot believe everything we hear.”

“I understand!” Ivan declared resolutely. “Please see to it that they give me a pen and paper.”

“Give him paper and a short pencil,” Stravinsky ordered the plump woman, and turned to Ivan, “But I advise you not to write today.”

“No, no, today, this very day!” Ivan cried in alarm.

“Very well. But do not strain your mind. If the report does not come out today, it will come out tomorrow.”

“But he’ll escape!”

“Oh, no,” Stravinsky said confidently. “He will not escape, I guarantee it. And remember that we shall help you here in every possible way, otherwise you won’t get anywhere. Do you hear me?” Stravinsky suddenly asked significantly, taking both of Ivan’s hands into his own. Holding them, he stared hard into Ivan’s eyes for a long time, repeating: “You shall be helped here . . . do you hear me? . . . You shall be helped here . . . you shall be relieved . . . it is quiet here, everything is peaceful . . . you shall be helped here. . . .”

Ivan Nikolayevich yawned suddenly, and his expression softened.

“Yes, yes,” he said quietly.

“Fine!” Stravinsky concluded the conversation with his usual comment and rose. “Good-by!” He pressed Ivan’s

hand and, already on his way out, said to the man with the tidy beard: "Yes, try oxygen . . . and baths."

A few moments later Ivan no longer saw either Stravinsky or his retinue. There was only the gay spring wood across the river behind the grating in the window, and the river sparkling in the midday sun.

Chapter 9

KOROVIEV'S ANTICS

Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, house chairman of No. 302-b Sadovaya Street in Moscow, where the late Berlioz resided, had had his hands full since Wednesday night.

At midnight, as we know, the commission, of which Zheldybin was a member, had come and summoned Nikanor Ivanovich. He was informed of Berlioz' death and asked to escort the commission to apartment Number 50.

There, an official seal was placed on the late editor's manuscripts and belongings. Neither Grunya, the day maid, nor the frivolous Stepan Bogdanovich was present at the time. The commission declared to Nikanor Ivanovich that it would take the late editor's manuscripts; that his three rooms (the former study, parlor and dining room of the jeweler's widow) would revert to the tenants' organization to be used as it saw fit; and that the editor's belongings were to be kept in safety in said rooms until the appearance of his heirs.

The news of Berlioz' death spread through the house with unnatural speed, and on Thursday Bosoy's telephone began to ring at seven o'clock in the morning. Very soon tenants began to arrive in person with applications asserting their claims to the dead man's rooms. Within two hours, Nikanor Ivanovich received thirty-two such applications.

They contained pleas, threats, slanders, denunciations, promises to renovate at the applicant's own expense, complaints of intolerable crowding and of utter impos-

sibility to continue in the present apartment with thieving neighbors. Among other things, there were two suicide threats, a most vivid narrative describing the theft of dumplings, which the thief put right into his coat pocket, in apartment Number 31, and a confession of secret pregnancy.

People repeatedly called Nikanor Ivanovich out into the hallway of his apartment, plucked him by the sleeve, whispered into his ear, winked at him, and promised not to forget him.

This torture went on till noon, when Nikanor Ivanovich simply fled from his apartment to the office at the gate. But when he saw the tenants lying in wait for him there, he ran from the office too. He managed somehow to shake off his pursuers, who followed on his heels across the asphalt courtyard, and disappeared in the entrance of building No. 6, where that wretched apartment Number 50 was situated.

After halting on the landing for a moment to catch his breath, the corpulent Nikanor Ivanovich rang the bell, but no one answered. He rang again and again, and began to mutter and curse to himself. Still no one answered. His patience exhausted, he took from his pocket a bundle of duplicate keys belonging to the house management, imperiously unlocked the door, and entered.

"Hey, Grunya!" Nikanor Ivanovich shouted in the dim hallway. "Grunya? . . . Aren't you there?"

No one answered.

Nikanor Ivanovich took a folding ruler from his briefcase, removed the seal from the door to the study, and stepped inside. He stepped in, but on the threshold he halted in astonishment and even alarm.

Behind the dead man's desk sat a gaunt, lanky stranger in a tight checkered coat, a jockey's cap and pince-nez. . . . In short, the same one.

"And who may you be, citizen?" Nikanor Ivanovich asked in a frightened voice.

"Ah! Nikanor Ivanovich!" the unexpected citizen cried in a quavering tenor and jumped up to welcome the

chairman with a sudden and violent handshake. This greeting did not in the least reassure Nikanor Ivanovich.

"Excuse me," he began suspiciously, "but who are you? Are you an official visitor?"

"Ah, Nikanor Ivanovich!" the stranger exclaimed warmly, "What is official and what is unofficial? It all depends on the point of view. It is all vague and conditional, Nikanor Ivanovich. Today I am an unofficial person, and tomorrow, before you know it, I am official! And sometimes it happens the other way around—and how it happens!"

This reasoning did not satisfy the house chairman in the slightest. Generally a man of suspicious nature, he concluded that the citizen declaiming before him was an unofficial—perhaps even a frivolous—person.

"But who are you? What is your name?" the chairman persisted with increasing severity and even began to advance upon the stranger.

"My name," the citizen replied, undaunted by the severity, "is . . . well . . . let us say, Koroviev. But perhaps you would like a bite of food, Nikanor Ivanovich? Don't stand on ceremony, eh?"

"Sorry," Nikanor Ivanovich became indignant. "Don't talk to me of food!" (We must confess, unpleasant though it is, that Nikanor Ivanovich was a somewhat uncouth man.) "No one is permitted in the late man's rooms! What are you doing here?"

"But do sit down, Nikanor Ivanovich," the citizen yelled, unabashed, and began to fuss, offering the chairman an armchair.

Infuriated, Nikanor Ivanovich rejected the chair and shouted:

"But who are you?"

"Well, you see, I am an interpreter, I am with the foreign gentleman who resides in this apartment," the man who called himself Koroviev introduced himself and clicked the heels of his rusty, unpolished shoes.

Nikanor Ivanovich opened his mouth. The presence in this apartment of an unknown foreigner, and with an

interpreter, too, was a complete surprise to him, and he demanded an explanation.

The interpreter willingly explained the situation. The foreign artist, Mr. Woland, had kindly been invited by the director of the Variety Theater, Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev, to stay at his apartment for the duration of their visit—about a week or so. In fact, he had written Nikanor Ivanovich to this effect the day before, requesting him to register the foreigner temporarily, while Likhodeyev himself took a trip to Yalta.

"He never wrote me anything," the chairman said with amazement.

"Take a look in your briefcase, Nikanor Ivanovich," Koroviev suggested in a honeyed tone.

Nikanor Ivanovich shrugged his shoulders and opened the briefcase, where he found Likhodeyev's letter.

"But how could I have forgotten it?" Nikanor Ivanovich muttered, looking stupidly at the opened envelope.

"It happens, Nikanor Ivanovich. All sorts of things happen!" Koroviev chattered. "Absent-mindedness, absent-mindedness, fatigue, an increase in the blood pressure, my dear Nikanor Ivanovich! I am dreadfully absent-minded myself! One day, over a glass of vodka, I shall tell you a few incidents from my own experience, you'll die laughing!"

"And when is Likhodeyev going to Yalta?"

"Why, he's gone, he's gone already!" shouted the interpreter. "Oh, he is way out by now! The devil knows how far he is!" and the interpreter waved his hands like a windmill.

Nikanor Ivanovich declared that he must see this foreigner in person, but the interpreter said it was impossible. He was busy. He was training his cat.

"I can show you the cat if you wish," Koroviev offered.

This, in turn, was rejected by Nikanor Ivanovich. And the interpreter immediately made an unexpected, but rather interesting request: since Mr. Woland absolutely refused to live in a hotel, and since he was accustomed to a great deal of space, would the house organization

consent to rent him the entire apartment, including the dead man's rooms, for the duration of his visit, for about a week?

"After all, it is all the same to him—to the dead man," Koroviev hissed in a loud whisper. "You will agree yourself, Nikanor Ivanovich, that he has no use for the apartment now?"

Nikanor Ivanovich replied uncertainly that foreigners were supposed to live at the Metropole, not in private apartments. . . .

"I tell you, he is cranky as the devil!" whispered Koroviev. "He refuses, and that's all! He hates hotels! Those foreign tourists, I've got them up to here!" Koroviev complained confidentially, poking his finger at his scrawny neck. "Believe me, they take your heart out! They'll come and spy around, like sons of bitches, or else they'll wear you out with their demands: this isn't right, and that isn't right! . . . And your house, Nikanor Ivanovich, stands only to gain—it's a clear profit! Money's no object with him." Koroviev looked around, then whispered into the chairman's ear, "A millionaire!"

The interpreter's proposal was clearly practical. It was a solid proposal. Yet there was something remarkably un-solid and disreputable in his manner of speech, his dress, and his revolting, utterly useless pince-nez. Consequently, the chairman felt vaguely troubled, and yet he decided to accept the proposal. The point is that the house, alas, was faced with a good-sized deficit. By fall he would have to buy oil for heating, and what on earth was he to buy it with? With the tourist's money he might just manage. Nevertheless, the businesslike and cautious Nikanor Ivanovich said that he must first clear the matter with the Intourist Office.

"I understand!" exclaimed Koroviev. "Naturally, how can it be done without clearance? Certainly! Here is the telephone, Nikanor Ivanovich. Call them at once and clear it! As for money, don't worry about it," he added in a whisper, drawing the chairman toward the telephone in the hallway. "If you don't charge him, whom can you

charge? You ought to see his villa in Nice! When you go abroad next summer, drop in and see it—you'll gasp!"

The Intourist Office settled the matter with extraordinary, quite astonishing speed. It turned out that they were already informed of Mr. Woland's intention to stay in Likhodeyev's private apartment and had nothing against it.

"Marvelous!" yelled Koroviev.

Somewhat dazed by his chatter, the chairman declared that the house was willing to rent apartment Number 50 to the artist Woland for one week at the rate of . . . Nikanor Ivanovich hesitated a moment, and said:

"Five hundred rubles a day."

At this point Koroviev completely stunned the chairman. Winking thievishly in the direction of the bedroom, from which they could hear the soft leaps of a heavy cat, he wheezed:

"That would come to three and a half thousand a week, wouldn't it?"

Nikanor Ivanovich thought that he would add: "You've quite an appetite, Nikanor Ivanovich!" But Koroviev said something altogether different:

"What kind of money is that? Ask for five, he'll pay it."

With a confused grin, Nikanor Ivanovich found himself at the late editor's desk, where Koroviev, with the greatest speed and agility, scribbled out two copies of the contract. Then he dashed into the bedroom and returned with both copies bearing the foreigner's sprawling signature. The chairman also signed the contract, and Koroviev asked for a receipt for five thousand.

"Write it out, write it out, Nikanor Ivanovich! . . . thousand rubles . . ." and suddenly, in a manner somehow quite inappropriate to serious business, he began to count "ein, zwei, drei . . ." as he stacked five bundles of new bank notes before the chairman.

There was a careful count, interspersed with Koroviev's little quips and pleasantries, such as "money loves to be

counted," "your own eye is the best spy," and so on in the same vein.

After he had counted the money, the chairman received from Koroviev the foreigner's passport for purposes of temporary registration, put it, together with the contract and the money, into his briefcase, and, yielding to temptation, he sheepishly asked for a free pass to the theater.

"Certainly, certainly," roared Koroviev. "How many tickets do you wish, Nikanor Ivanovich—twelve, fifteen?"

The overwhelmed chairman explained that he wanted only two, for himself and Pelageya Antonovna, his wife.

Koroviev immediately snatched up a note pad and wrote out a pass for two persons in the front row. And, as he nimbly handed Nikanor Ivanovich the pass with his left hand, he slipped a thick rustling bundle into the chairman's other hand with his right. Throwing a quick glance at it, Nikanor Ivanovich flushed darkly and tried to push it away.

"We're not supposed to . . ." He muttered.

"I won't hear of it," Koroviev whispered right into his ear. "Here we're not supposed to, but among foreigners it is the only proper thing. You will offend him, Nikanor Ivanovich, and that will be awkward. After all, your time and effort . . ."

"It is severely punished," the chairman whispered almost inaudibly and looked over his shoulder.

"But where are the witnesses?" Koroviev breathed into his other ear. "I ask you, where are they? Don't think of it! . . ."

And here, as the chairman asserted later, a marvelous thing occurred: the bundle crept into his briefcase by itself. After that, the chairman, faint and a bit dazed, found himself on the staircase. A storm of ideas raged in his brain: they revolved around the villa in Nice, the trained cat, the fact that there had, indeed, been no witnesses. He also thought how delighted Pelageya Antonovna would be with the pass. These thoughts were disconnected, but generally pleasant. Nevertheless, a little

needle seemed to prick the chairman somewhere deep down in his heart. It was the needle of anxiety. Besides, a sudden thought struck him like a blow: "But how did the interpreter get into the study when the door was sealed? And how was it that he had not asked him about it?" For a while, the chairman stared dumbly at the stairs, then he decided to forget it and stop tormenting himself with complicated questions.

As soon as the chairman had left, a low voice came from the bedroom:

"I did not like this Nikanor Ivanovich. He is a swindler and a thief. Can you see to it that he does not come here any more?"

"Messire, your word is law. . . ." Koroviev responded from somewhere, but his voice no longer quavered; it was clear and loud.

And in a moment the damned interpreter was in the hallway, dialed a number, and began to speak into the receiver in lugubrious tones:

"Hello! I consider it my duty to report that our house chairman, Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, of 302-b Sadovaya, speculates in foreign exchange. At this moment he has four hundred dollars wrapped in newspaper in the ventilator flue in his toilet, in apartment Number 35. This is Timofey Kvastsov, a tenant of the same building, apartment Number 11. But I beg you to keep my name in confidence. I am afraid the above chairman will try to get back at me."

And he hung up, the scoundrell

What took place after that in apartment Number 50 is unknown, but the events in the home of Nikanor Ivanovich are known. He locked himself up in the toilet, pulled out of his briefcase the wad of bills forced on him by the interpreter, and found that it contained four hundred rubles. He wrapped the bills in a piece of newspaper and pushed the bundle up into the ventilator flue.

Five minutes later the chairman sat at the table in his small dining room. His wife brought from the kitchen a neatly sliced herring, thickly sprinkled with chopped

scallions. Nikanor Ivanovich poured himself a glass of vodka, drank it down, poured himself another, drank it, and picked up three slices of herring with his fork . . . at this moment the doorbell rang. And Pelageya Antonovna brought in a steaming saucepan. One glance was enough to guess that it contained fiery cabbage soup and, in the thick of it, the tastiest thing in the world—a marrow bone.

Swallowing his saliva, Nikanor Ivanovich growled like a dog:

“Why don’t they go to hell! A man can’t eat in peace. . . . Don’t let anybody in, I am out, out. . . . If it’s about the apartment, tell them to stop bothering me, we’ll have a meeting next week.”

His wife ran out into the foyer, and Nikanor Ivanovich ladled out of the fire-breathing lake the object of his desire—the bone, cracked lengthwise. At this moment two citizens entered the dining room, followed by a very pale Pelageya Antonovna. At the sight of the citizens, Nikanor Ivanovich turned white too and got up.

“Where’s the toilet?” the first man, in a white blouse, asked in a worried tone.

Something banged against the dinner table: Nikanor Ivanovich dropped his spoon on the oilcloth.

“This way, this way,” Pelageya Antonovna jabbered.

And the visitors proceeded directly into the hallway.

“What’s the matter?” Nikanor Ivanovich asked in a low voice, following the visitors. “We have nothing suspicious in our apartment. . . . And what about your documents . . . if you pardon me. . . .”

The first man showed his documents to Nikanor Ivanovich without stopping, and the second one immediately climbed up on a stool in the toilet and pushed his hand into the flue. Everything turned dark before Nikanor Ivanovich. The newspaper was removed, but the bundle turned out to contain, instead of rubles, some unfamiliar bills—bluish or greenish, with the picture of an unknown old man. However, all this Nikanor Ivanovich saw only vaguely, for spots were swimming before his eyes.

"Dollars in the ventilator flue . . ." the first man said reflectively, and asked Nikanor Ivanovich softly and politely: "Is this your little bundle?"

"No!" Nikanor Ivanovich answered in a terrible voice. "It was planted by enemies!"

"This happens," the first man agreed, and added softly: "I guess you'll have to turn in the rest."

"I have nothing! I swear to God, I've never held these things in my hands!" the chairman cried desperately.

He rushed to the bureau, noisily pulled out the drawer and snatched out his briefcase, crying incoherently:

"Here is the contract . . . the interpreter—that vermin—planted it . . . Koroviev . . . in pince-nez! . . ."

He opened the briefcase, looked in, put his hand in, turned blue in the face and dropped the briefcase into the soup. There was nothing in the briefcase—no letter from Styopa, no contract, no passport, no money, and no theater passes. In short, nothing except the folding ruler.

"Comrades!" the chairman screamed frantically. "Hold them! Unholy powers are at work in our house!"

And now, heaven knows what came over Pelageya Antonovna, but she clapped her hands and cried:

"Confess, Ivanych! They'll cut your term!"

With bloodshot eyes, Nikanor Ivanovich raised his fists over his wife's head, spluttering:

"Oh, you damned idiot!"

Then he felt faint and collapsed into a chair, evidently resolved to submit to the inevitable.

Throughout all this, Timofey Kondratievich Kvastsov, out on the landing, bent now his ear and now his eye to the keyhole in the door of the chairman's apartment, dying of curiosity.

Five minutes later the tenants of the building who happened to be in the yard saw the chairman walk directly to the gate in the company of two strangers. It was said that Nikanor Ivanovich was pale as a ghost, that he swayed like a drunkard, and mumbled something indistinct.

And an hour later, just as Timofey Kondratievich,

fairly gulping with pleasure, was recounting to the other tenants how the chairman had gotten what was coming to him, an unknown citizen appeared in apartment Number 11 and beckoned him out of the kitchen into the hallway. There he said something to him, and both disappeared.

Chapter 10

NEWS FROM YALTA

At the moment when disaster struck Nikanor Ivanovich, two men sat in the office of the financial manager of the Variety Theater, which was also on Sadovaya, not far from No. 302-b. They were the financial manager, Rimsky, and the house manager, Varenuvka.

The large office on the second floor of the theater building had two windows looking out on Sadovaya, and one—directly behind Rimsky's desk—on the theater's summer garden, with its refreshment bars, shooting gallery, and outdoor stage. Besides the desk, the office furnishings consisted of a bundle of old playbills hanging on the wall, a small table on which stood a carafe filled with water, four armchairs, and a pedestal in the corner, supporting an ancient, dusty model of some set. And, naturally, there was also a small, battered, peeling fire-proof safe; it stood on Rimsky's left, next to the desk.

Rimsky had been in a bad humor since early morning. Varenuvka, on the contrary, was cheerful, but somehow restless and overactive. Yet there was no outlet for his energy.

Varenuvka had taken refuge in the financial manager's office to escape from the seekers of free passes who were the bane of his existence, especially during the periods of program changes. And today was just such a day. Every time the telephone rang, Varenuvka would pick up the receiver and lie into it:

"Who? Varenuvka? He is not here. He stepped out somewhere."

"Will you please call Likhodeyev again?" Rimsky begged irritably.

"He isn't home. I've sent Karpov over—there is no one at the apartment."

"The devil knows what's going on!" Rimsky hissed, clicking away on his adding machine.

The door opened, and the head usher dragged in a thick bundle of freshly printed additional playbills. The green sheets announced in bold red letters:

TODAY AND EVERY DAY AT THE VARIETY THEATER

EXTRA ATTRACTION

IN ADDITION TO REGULAR PROGRAM

PROFESSOR WOLAND

AND HIS BLACK MAGIC ACT

ACCOMPANIED BY A FULL EXPOSÉ

Varenuvka stepped away from the playbill he had spread over the model, admired it, and ordered the usher to have all the copies posted up.

"Good . . . Very striking!" he remarked after the man had gone.

"Well, I don't care for this business at all," Rimsky grumbled, glancing at the playbill angrily through his horn-rimmed glasses. "And, anyway, I wonder how they allowed him to present it."

"Oh, no, Grigory Danilovich, don't say that! It is a very clever move. The whole point of it is the exposé."

"I don't know, I don't know. To my mind, there is no point in it at all. . . . He'll always think up something mad! . . . At least, if he had shown us this magician! Did you see him? Where did he dig him up, anyway?"

It turned out that Varenuvka had not seen the magician either. The day before, Styopa had rushed in ("like a maniac," to use Rimsky's expression), with a rough draft of the contract, ordered it typed out, and told the financial manager to issue Woland's pay. And the ma-

gician kept out of sight; no one had seen him except Styopa himself.

Rimsky took out his watch, which showed five minutes past two, and lost his temper altogether. Really! Likhodeyev had called at about eleven and said that he would come in half an hour, yet he not only failed to show up, but disappeared from his apartment.

"He's holding up all my work!" Rimsky growled, poking his finger at the pile of unsigned papers.

"Could he have fallen under a streetcar, like Berlioz?" wondered Varenuvka, holding the receiver to his ear and listening to the long, insistent, and utterly hopeless ringing.

"Would be a good thing . . ." Rimsky muttered almost inaudibly through his teeth.

At this moment a woman entered the office. She wore a uniform jacket and cap, a black skirt and sneakers. From a pouch on her belt she took out a small white square and a notebook and asked:

"Where's Variety around here? Telegram. Sign for it."

Varenuvka scrawled something illegible in the woman's notebook and, as soon as the door closed behind her, he opened the square. He read the telegram, blinked, and turned it over to Rimsky.

The telegram bore the following message: "Yalta Moscow Variety. Eleven-thirty today brown-haired man in nightshirt trousers without shoes appeared criminal investigation office psycho calls himself Likhodeyev director Variety Theater Wire Yalta police holding director Likhodeyev."

"Well I'll be damned, another surprise!" exclaimed Rimsky.

"A False Dimitry!" said Varenuvka and spoke into the telephone receiver: "Telegraph office? Variety account. Take an urgent telegram. Are you listening? 'Yalta criminal investigation office . . . Director Likhodeyev Moscow financial manager Rimsky.'"

Disregarding the news of the Yalta impostor, Vare-

nukha resumed his search for Styopa by telephone, and, naturally, did not find him anywhere.

Just as Varenuukha, receiver in hand, was wondering where else he might call, the same woman came in and handed him another envelope. Hastily opening it, Varenuukha read the message and whistled.

"What now?" Rimsky asked with a nervous twitch.

Varenuukha silently gave him the telegram, and the financial manager read: "Implore you believe thrown Yalta Woland's hypnosis wire police confirm identity Likhodeyev."

Rimsky and Varenuukha, their heads touching, read the telegram again and, having read it, stared at one another in silence.

"Citizens!" the woman scolded. "Sign for it, then you can sit here without a word as long as you please! I have telegrams to deliver!"

Varenuukha scrawled something in her notebook without taking his eyes from the telegram, and the woman vanished.

"But you spoke to him about eleven?" the house manager asked in total bewilderment.

"Ridiculous!" Rimsky's voice rose to a scream. "Whether I spoke to him or didn't speak to him, he cannot be in Yalta now! Absurd!"

"He must be drunk. . . ." said Varenuukha.

"Who is drunk?" asked Rimsky and the two stared at each other again.

There was no question that some impostor or madman had wired from Yalta. But there was something strange about it all the same: how did the impersonator in Yalta know Woland, who had just arrived in Moscow the day before? How did he know about the link between Likhodeyev and Woland?

"Hypnosis . . ." Varenuukha repeated the word from the telegram. "But how did he learn about Woland?" He blinked and suddenly exclaimed emphatically: "Not Ridiculous! Ridiculous nonsense!"

"Where is he staying, this Woland?—the devil take him," asked Rimsky.

Varenuvka immediately telephoned the Intourist Office and, to Rimsky's utter astonishment, reported that Woland was staying at Likhodeyev's apartment. After that he dialed Likhodeyev's number and listened for a long time to the dense signals in the receiver. In the midst of these signals he suddenly heard a heavy, gloomy voice singing "Cliffs are my refuge . . ." and decided that a voice from some radio station had somehow cut in on the line.

"No one answers," said Varenuvka, putting down the receiver. "Perhaps I ought to try again. . . ."

He did not finish the sentence. The same woman appeared in the door and both Rimsky and Varenuvka rose to meet her. This time she took a dark sheet from her pouch.

"This is becoming interesting," Varenuvka drawled through his teeth, following the hastily departing woman with his eyes. Rimsky was the first to take possession of the sheet.

Against the dark background of the photographic paper, the written lines stood out clearly:

"Proof my handwriting my signature wire confirmation establish secret surveillance Woland Likhodeyev."

During his twenty years in the theater, Varenuvka had seen enough strange things, but now he felt as though a mist were clouding his brain, and all he could bring forth was the trite and totally absurd phrase:

"This cannot be!"

Rimsky reacted differently. He got up, opened the door and barked at the theater messenger sitting on a stool:

"Don't let anyone in except mail carriers!"

And he turned the key in the lock.

Then he took a pile of papers from his desk and began to compare the bold, slanting letters in the photogram with the letters of Styopa's resolutions and signatures, ending in the same whirly flourish. Varenuvka leaned against the desk, breathing hotly on Rimsky's cheek.

"It is his handwriting," the financial manager finally said in firm tones, and Varenuvka echoed:

"His."

Staring closely at Rimsky's face, Varenuvka was amazed at the change in it. Usually gaunt, it seemed to have become still more drawn and somehow older, and the eyes behind the horn rims had lost their customary, waspish look; now they expressed anxiety and even sorrow.

Varenuvka did everything that is usually done in moments of great stress. He ran from corner to corner, lifted his arms twice like a man crucified, and gulped down a whole glass of yellowish water from the carafe, exclaiming over and over:

"I don't understand it! I don't understand it! I don't understand it!"

Rimsky, meantime, stared out of the window, thinking hard. The financial manager was in a very difficult position: he felt obliged to invent at once, right on the spot, some ordinary explanation for extraordinary events.

Squinting, Rimsky imagined Styopa in a nightshirt and without boots climbing that very morning at about half-past eleven into some unheard-of super plane, and then—also at half-past eleven—standing in his socks at the airport in Yalta. . . . The devil alone could make head or tail of it!

But perhaps it was not Styopa who had telephoned from his apartment that morning? No, it was certainly Styopa! He could not possibly mistake the voice. And even if it had been someone else that morning, it was only last night that Styopa had marched into this very office with that idiotic contract and irritated Rimsky with his flighty irresponsibility. How could he have gone off without saying anything at the theater? And even if he had taken a plane last night, he would not have reached Yalta by noon today. Or would he?

"How many kilometers is it from here to Yalta?" Rimsky asked.

Varenuvka stopped his running and shouted:

"I've thought of that! I've thought of that too! It's fifteen hundred kilometers to Sevastopol by train. Add eighty more to Yalta! But, of course, it is less by air."

Hm . . . Yes . . . Trains were out of the question. But what then? A fighter plane? But who would admit Styopa without boots into a fighter plane? And what for? Or perhaps he removed his boots when he came to Yalta? Again, what for? But then, they would not have let him in with boots either! Besides, what has a fighter plane to do with it anyway? The telegram said that he appeared at the criminal investigation office at half-past eleven in the morning, and he had spoken to Rimsky in Moscow by telephone . . . let's see . . . Rimsky clearly saw in his mind the face of his watch at the time. He recalled the position of the hands . . . It had been twenty after eleven!

What did it mean, then? If Styopa had rushed to the airport immediately after their conversation, and had reached it, say, in five minutes (which, incidentally, could not be done, either), this meant that the plane, if it took off at once, covered more than a thousand kilometers in five minutes. More than twelve thousand kilometers an hour! But that was impossible. Consequently, Styopa was not in Yalta!

What remained? Hypnosis? There was no hypnosis in the world that could fling a man across a distance of a thousand kilometers! Hence, he only imagined that he was in Yalta? Well, Styopa might, perhaps, imagine it, but what about the Yalta police? Did they imagine it too? Oh, no, forgive me, but such things don't happen! And yet they wired from Yalta?

The face of the financial manager was terrible to behold. Meantime, someone was violently pulling and twisting the door handle outside, and they heard the messenger cry desperately:

"You can't! I won't allow you! Not if you kill me! There's a conference there!"

Rimsky took himself in hand as best he could, picked up the telephone and said:

"Give me Yalta, it's urgent."

"Clever!" Varenuvka exclaimed to himself.

But the conversation with Yalta did not take place. Rimsky put down the receiver and said:

"As if in spite, the line is out of order."

It was evident that the breakdown of the line particularly upset him and made him wonder still more. After a while, he lifted the receiver again with one hand, and began to write down what he was saying with the other:

"Take an urgent wire. Variety Theater. Yes. Yalta police. Yes. 'Today about half-past eleven Likhodeyev telephoned me in Moscow stop After that failed come office and cannot find him by phone stop Confirm handwriting stop Taking steps surveillance over said artist Financial manager Rimsky.'"

"Very clever!" thought Varenuvka, but before he finished the thought, the words flashed through his mind, "Stupid! He cannot be in Yalta!"

Meanwhile, Rimsky neatly folded all the telegrams received that day, put them, together with the copy of his own, into an envelope, sealed it, wrote several words on it and gave it to Varenuvka, saying:

"Ivan Savelievich, take them over at once. Let them look into it."

"That is really clever," thought Varenuvka and put the envelope into his briefcase. Then, just in case, he dialed Styopa's number again, listened, and began to wink mysteriously and grimace to indicate his joy. Rimsky craned his neck.

"May I speak to the artist Woland?" Varenuvka asked in sugary tones.

"They're busy," the receiver replied in a quavering voice. "Who wants him?"

"The house manager of the Variety Theater, Varenuvka."

"Ivan Savelievich?" the receiver cried joyously. "I am delighted to hear your voice! How is your health?"

"Merci," Varenuvka answered with astonishment. "And who is this?"

"His assistant, his assistant and interpreter, Koroviev!" the receiver chattered. "I'm all at your service, my most charming Ivan Savelievich! Command me as you wish. And so?"

"Excuse me . . . Is Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev out at the moment?"

"Alas, he is out! Out!" the receiver screamed. "He is gone!"

"Where?"

"Out of town, for a ride in the car."

"W . . . wh . . . what? A r . . . ride? . . . And when will he be back?"

"He said, I'll get some fresh air, then I'll come back."

"Oh . . ." Varenuška said, unnerved. "Merci . . . Be kind enough to tell Monsieur Woland that he appears today in the third section of the program."

"Yes. Of course. Certainly. Immediately. Most assuredly. I will," the receiver rapped out in staccato rhythm.

"Good day," Varenuška said in amazement.

"I beg you," the receiver went on, "to accept my best, my warmest greetings and wishes! Good luck! Many successes! All happiness! Good-by!"

"You see! I said so!" the house manager shouted excitedly. "He's not in Yalta, he went for a ride out of town!"

"Well, if that is so," the financial manager said, paling with anger, "it is a swinish trick beyond description!"

Varenuška suddenly jumped and gave a shout that made Rimsky start:

"I know! I just remembered! A Yalta Restaurant has opened recently in Pushkinol! Chebureki lamb pies! He got himself cockeyed drunk and keeps sending telegrams from there!"

"Well, that is too much," Rimsky answered, his cheek twitching and his eyes burning with heavy hatred. "He'll pay a price for this little outing! . . ." And suddenly he tripped and added hesitantly, "But the criminal investigation office . . ."

"Absurd! His own tricks," interrupted the effusive box office manager, and asked: "Shall I take the papers over anyway?"

"Certainly," answered Rimsky.

And now the door opened again and the same woman came in. . . . "Again!" Rimsky thought with a sinking heart. And both rose to meet her.

This time the telegram said: "Thanks confirmation wire five hundred rubles for me leaving tomorrow Likhodeyev."

"He's gone mad . . ." Vareukha said weakly.

But Rimsky clicked with his keys, took the money out of the safe, counted off five hundred rubles, rang, gave the messenger the money and ordered him to take it to the telegraph office.

"In heaven's name, Grigory Danilovich," Vareukha said, disbelieving his eyes. "I think you're sending it for nothing."

"It will come back," Rimsky spoke quietly. "But he'll answer for this little picnic." And he added, pointing to Vareukha's briefcase: "Go, Ivan Savelievich, don't delay."

Vareukha ran out of the office with the briefcase.

He went downstairs, saw the longest queue at the box office, and learned from the cashier that she expected to sell out within an hour; there was a rush for tickets since they had posted the additional playbills. He ordered the cashier to hold back the thirty best seats in the loges and orchestra, ran out of the box office, fought off the importunate seekers of passes, and dived into his own little cubicle to pick up his cap. Just then the telephone rang.

"Yes!" cried Vareukha.

"Ivan Savelievich?" the receiver inquired in a most repulsive nasal voice.

"He is not in the theater!" Vareukha began, but the receiver immediately interrupted him:

"Quit fooling, Ivan Savelievich, and listen. Do not take those telegrams anywhere, and do not show them to anyone."

"Who is speaking?" roared Vareukha. "Stop those

tricks, citizen! You'll be discovered at once! What's your number?"

"Varenuvka," the same vile voice responded. "Do you understand Russian? Do not take the telegrams anywhere."

"Oh, so you won't stop it?" the manager shouted in rage. "Look out! You'll pay for this!" He shouted some other threat, but broke off, sensing that no one was listening to him any longer in the receiver.

It suddenly began to turn very dark in the office. Varenuvka ran out, slammed the door behind him, and hurried through the side entrance to the summer garden.

He was excited and full of energy. After that impudent call, he was certain that a gang of hooligans was playing nasty tricks, and that those tricks were connected with Likhodeyev's disappearance. He choked with an angry desire to expose the scoundrels, but, strangely, as it often happens when a man hopes to become the center of attention, to announce a piece of sensational news, there was also a sense of pleasant anticipation.

In the garden a blast of wind blew sand into Varenuvka's eyes, as though to warn him or to bar his way. A window on the second floor banged so violently that the panes were nearly shattered, and the crowns of the maples and lindens rustled uneasily. The air darkened and turned chilly. The manager rubbed his eyes and saw a yellow storm cloud creeping low over Moscow. Something growled thickly in the distance.

Despite his haste, Varenuvka was suddenly overcome by an irresistible impulse to step for a moment into the summer toilet to make sure the electrician had put a net over the bulb.

He ran past the shooting gallery and dived into the dense thicket of lilac, which screened the pale-blue toilet building. The electrician turned out to have been a conscientious man, and the bulb in the men's room was already shielded with a metal net. But the manager was distressed to see, even in the darkness before the storm,

that the walls were already covered with scrawls in charcoal and pencil.

"What sort of . . ." the manager began, when a voice purred behind him:

"Is that you, Ivan Savelievich?"

Vareukha started, turned, and saw a short pudgy man with what looked like a cat face.

"Well, yes," Vareukha replied grudgingly.

"Very, very pleased," the catlike roly-poly said in a squeaky voice and suddenly swung out and landed Vareukha a blow on the ear that made the cap fly off the manager's head and vanish in the opening of the toilet seat.

The blow filled the men's room for an instant with a quivering flash of light and the sky echoed with a clap of thunder. Then there was another flash, and a second man appeared before the manager—small but with athletic shoulders, with fiery red hair . . . one eye clouded by a cataract, a fang projecting from his mouth. . . . This second one, who was evidently left-handed, cuffed the manager on the other ear. Again, there was an answering crash in the sky, and a cloudburst came down upon the wooden roof of the toilet.

"What are you doing, com . . ." whispered the half-crazed manager, but realized at once that the word "comrades" was scarcely suitable for bandits attacking a man in a public toilet and began to gurgle "citiz . . ." But just as it occurred to him that they did not deserve this designation either, he received a third, frightful blow—he was not sure from which one—that made the blood spurt from his nose down on his Tolstoy blouse.

"What do you have in your briefcase, parasite?" shriled the one who looked like a cat. "Telegrams? Were you warned by telephone not to take them anywhere? Were you warned, I ask you?"

"I was ward . . . world . . . warned . . ." the manager stuttered, gasping.

"But you ran out all the same? Hand me the briefcase, scum!" the second one cried in the same nasal voice that

had come earlier over the telephone, and tore the briefcase from Varenuvka's shaking hands.

Then the two seized the manager under the arms, dragged him out of the garden, and rushed down Sadovaya with him. The storm raged with full force, water gushed booming and clattering into sewer holes, waves swelled and bubbled everywhere, sheets of rain lashed from the roofs past drainpipes, foaming rivers streamed from under gateways. Everything living had been washed away from Sadovaya, and there was no one to rescue Ivan Savelievich. Within a second, leaping through the muddy torrents, lit up fitfully by lightning flashes, the bandits brought the half-dead manager to house No. 302-b and dived into the gateway, where two barefoot women huddled with their shoes and stockings in their hands. Then they dashed to entrance Number 6, and the almost insane Varenuvka was pulled up to the fifth story and flung down on the floor of the familiar hallway of Styopa Likhodeyev's apartment.

Instantly both hoodlums vanished, and in their place a totally naked woman—red-haired, with burning phosphorescent eyes—appeared before the manager.

Varenuvka realized that this was the most frightful of all the things that had befallen him that afternoon. He moaned and sprang back against the wall. And the woman came up close to the manager and laid her palms upon his shoulders. Varenuvka's hair stood up, for even through the cold and water-soaked fabric of his Tolstoy blouse he felt that those palms were still colder, that they were cold as ice.

"Let me kiss you," the woman said tenderly, and the blazing eyes were brought right up against his own. Varenuvka fainted and never felt the kiss.

Chapter 11

IVAN SPLITS INTO TWO

The wood on the opposite bank of the river, still bright in the Maytime sun an hour earlier, dimmed, blurred, and dissolved.

Outside the window, water tumbled down in a solid sheet. Again and again fiery threads flashed in the sky, the sky cracked, and the patient's room was flooded with fitful, frightening light.

Ivan wept silently, sitting on his bed and looking at the turgid, bubbling, seething river. At every thunderclap he cried out piteously and covered his face with his hands. The pages he had covered with writing were scattered on the floor. They had been blown down by the blast of wind that swept into the room before the storm broke.

The poet's efforts to compose a report about the terrible consultant ended in failure. As soon as the fat nurse, whose name was Praskovya Fyodorovna, had given him a stub of a pencil and paper, he rubbed his hands in a business-like manner and hastily arranged himself at the little table. He wrote the opening lines quite briskly.

"To the militia. Statement by Ivan Nikolayevich Homeless, member of MASSOLIT. Last evening I came with the late M. A. Berlioz to the Patriarchs' Ponds . . ."

And immediately the poet was entangled in confusion, chiefly over the word "late." It made for incongruity from the very outset: how could he have come with the "late" Berlioz? Dead men don't walk! They might really think he was a madman!

Ivan Nikolayevich began to revise what he had written. Now he had: ". . . with M. A. Berlioz, subsequently

dead . . ." This did not please the author, either. He tried a third version, which turned out even worse than the first two: ". . . Berlioz, who fell under a streetcar . . ." And here this composer, Berlioz' namesake that no one had ever heard of, intruded himself, and Homeless had to write in, "not the composer . . ."

Worn out with those two Berliozes, Ivan crossed everything out and decided to start at once with something very strong, in order to attract the reader's immediate attention. He wrote about the tom cat boarding the streetcar, and then returned to the episode of the severed head. The head and the consultant's prophecy led him to the thought of Pontius Pilate, and, to make his story more convincing, Ivan decided to tell about the Procurator in full, from the moment he had come out onto the columned terrace of Herod's palace in his white cloak with the blood-red lining.

Ivan worked diligently, crossing out what he had written, inserting new words, and even trying to make a drawing of Pontius Pilate and then of the cat on its hind legs. But even the drawings did not help. And the more he labored, the more confused and incomprehensible the poet's statement became.

By the time the menacing cloud with seething edges had come up from the distance and blanketed the wood, and the gust of wind had sent his pages flying, Ivan was thoroughly exhausted and lost all hope of getting anywhere with his report. He made no attempt to pick up the flying sheets, but sat there, weeping bitterly and silently. The kindly nurse, Praskovya Fyodorovna, visited the poet during the storm. She became alarmed at his crying, pulled down the blind so that the lightning would not frighten the patient, gathered the papers from the floor and hurried with them for the doctor.

The doctor came, gave Ivan an injection in the arm, and assured him that he would not cry any more. Now everything would pass, and change, and be forgotten.

The doctor had been right. The wood beyond the river soon resumed its former aspect. It emerged, to the last tree, under a sky that had cleared and regained its deep

azure hue. And the river calmed down. Ivan's sorrow began to dissipate immediately after the injection, and now the poet lay quietly, looking at the rainbow flung across the sky.

This lasted until evening, and he never noticed when the rainbow melted away, the sky saddened and faded, and the wood turned black.

Having drunk some hot milk, Ivan lay down again and wondered at the change in himself. The memory of the damned infernal tom had softened, the severed head no longer frightened him, and, abandoning his preoccupation with it, Ivan began to reflect that, actually, the hospital was not so bad, that Stravinsky was clever and famous, and extremely pleasant to deal with. Besides, the evening air was sweet and fresh after the storm.

The house of sorrow was falling asleep. The frosted white bulbs in the quiet corridors went out, and in their place, according to established order, the faint blue night lights were turned on. The nurses' cautious steps were heard more rarely on the rubber matting in the hall outside the door.

Ivan was now lying, pleasantly relaxed, and glanced, now at the bulb under the shade, spreading a subdued light from the ceiling, and now at the moon, rising behind the black wood. He was conversing with himself.

"Properly speaking, why did I get so upset when Berlioz fell under the streetcar?" the poet argued. "In the final analysis, to blazes with him! What am I to him—kith or kin? If we take a close look at the question, what do we see? I did not really know him very well. In fact, what did I know about him? Nothing, except that he was bald and frightfully eloquent. And to go on with it, citizens," Ivan continued his speech, addressing an unseen audience, "let us examine this: why, if you please, did I fly into such a rage over this enigmatic consultant, magician and professor with the empty black eye? What was that preposterous chase after him in underwear and with a candle in hand, and then the wild performance in the restaurant?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" the former Ivan suddenly spoke up

sternly from somewhere, either inside or over the ear of the new one. "After all, he knew beforehand that Berlioz would lose his head! How could you help getting upset?"

"What's the good of arguing, comrades," the new Ivan answered the shadowy old Ivan. "Even a child can see there is something behind it. He is an extraordinary and mysterious individual—no question about that! But that's what makes it so fascinating! The man was personally acquainted with Pontius Pilate—what could be more interesting? Instead of raising that idiotic row at the Patriarchs' Ponds, it would have been much more sensible to question him civilly about what happened later to Pilate and that prisoner Ha-Nozri. And look what I did! Such a great matter—an editor was run over! Is the magazine going to close down because of it? What can you do? Man is mortal and, as was said—most aptly—often suddenly mortal. Well, then, may he rejoice in paradise! And there will be another editor, perhaps even more eloquent than the old!"

After a short nap, the new Ivan asked the old Ivan tauntingly:

"And what does that make me?"

"A fool!" the answer came distinctly in a basso which did not belong to either Ivan, but was amazingly like the basso of the consultant.

Oddly, Ivan took no offense at the word "fool," but wondered at it rather pleasantly. He grinned drowsily, and lapsed into silence. Sleep stole upon him; he was already seeing the palm tree with its elephant-thick trunk, then the tom went by—not frightening, but merry. In short, Ivan was just about to submerge into slumber when the grating over the window noiselessly slid aside and a mysterious figure appeared on the balcony. It avoided the moonlight and wagged a warning finger at Ivan.

Not in the least bit frightened, Ivan raised himself in bed and saw a man on the balcony. And the man, pressing his finger to his lips, whispered:

"Tsssl!"

Chapter 12

BLACK MAGIC AND ITS FULL EXPOSÉ

A little man with a pear-shaped red nose, in a yellow derby full of holes, in checkered trousers and patent leather shoes, rolled out onto the stage of the Variety Theater on an ordinary two-wheeled bicycle. To the sounds of a fox-trot he made a circle and let out a triumphant yell, which made his bicycle rear up. After a run on the back wheel, the little man turned over with his feet up, managed, while still moving, to unscrew the front wheel and send it backstage, and continued on one wheel, turning the pedals with his hands.

Perched in a seat atop a high metal pole on a single wheel, a plump blonde in tights and a short skirt spangled with silver stars rode out and began to circle around the stage. Every time he met her, the little man shouted greetings and raised the derby from his head with his foot.

Finally, a child of about eight with an old man's face rolled out and began to scoot around between the adults in a tiny two-wheeler to which a huge automobile horn was attached.

After several turns, the entire company dashed up, to the anxious tattoo of the drum in the band, to the very edge of the stage, and the audience in the front rows gasped and recoiled, for it seemed that all three with their vehicles would crash down into the pit.

But the bicycles stopped just at the moment when the front wheels threatened to slip down into the abyss, right

on the heads of the musicians. With a loud "Aap!" the cyclists jumped off their vehicles and bowed; the blonde blew kisses to the public, and the baby honked a funny signal on his horn.

Applause shook the building, the pale-blue curtain closed in from the sides, shutting out the cyclists, the green lights with the Exit sign at the doors went out, and white spheres lit up like suns among the trapeze spider-webs under the cupola. It was intermission before the last part of the program.

The only man utterly disinterested in the wonders of the Giulli family's bicycle technique was Grigory Danilovich Rimsky. In complete solitude he sat in his office, biting his thin lips. From time to time his face twitched in spasm. In addition to the extraordinary disappearance of Likhodeyev, there was now the entirely unforeseen disappearance of Varenuvka.

Rimsky knew where he had gone, but he left . . . and he had not returned! Rimsky shrugged his shoulders and whispered to himself:

"But why?"

And strangely enough: it would have been the simplest thing for a man as business-like as the financial manager to telephone the place where Varenuvka had gone and find out what had happened to him. Yet, until ten o'clock in the evening he could not compel himself to do so.

At ten, with a violent effort, Rimsky forced himself to pick up the receiver and discovered that his telephone was dead. The messenger reported that all the other telephones in the building were out of order. This undoubtedly unpleasant, but by no means supernatural, occurrence had for some reason shaken the financial manager completely, but at the same time it relieved him: it eliminated the need to call.

Just as the red bulb over the financial manager's head flashed on and began to blink, announcing the beginning of the intermission, the messenger came in and announced the arrival of the foreign artist. The financial manager

wincing and, black as a cloud, went backstage to receive the artist, since there was no one else left to receive him.

From the corridor, where the first bell was already ringing, curious faces kept looking into the large dressing room on various pretexts: conjurers in bright robes and turbans, a skater in a white sweater, a storyteller with a powdered white face, the make-up man.

The foreign celebrity astonished everyone with his enormously long frock coat of marvelous cut and the fact that he came wearing a black half mask. But most amazing of all were the black magician's two companions: the stringy checkered one with a cracked pince-nez, and the black fat tom which entered the dressing room on his hind legs and sat down on the sofa with the air of utmost nonchalance, squinting at the bare make-up lamps.

Rimsky attempted a smile, which made his face look sour and peeved, and bowed to the silent magician, who sat on the sofa next to the tom. There was no handshake. On the other hand, the voluble checkered character introduced himself to the financial manager as "their assistant." This fact surprised the financial manager, and surprised him, again, unpleasantly: the contract contained no mention of any assistant.

Drily and with constraint, Grigory Danilovich inquired of the checkered one—who had dropped upon him so unexpectedly—where the artist's paraphernalia were.

"Our diamond from heaven, our most precious Mister Manager," the assistant quavered, "our paraphernalia are always with us. Here! Ein, zwei, drei!" And, wriggling his knobby fingers before Rimsky's eyes, he suddenly pulled from behind the tom's ears Rimsky's own gold watch and chain, which the financial manager had until that moment worn in his vest pocket under the buttoned coat, with the chain in the buttonhole.

Rimsky involuntarily caught at his stomach, everybody gasped, and the make-up man peeping into the door grunted with approval.

"Your watch? I beg you to accept it," the checkered one

said, smiling familiarly, and handed the confused Rimsky his property on a grimy palm.

"Would be a risk to get into a streetcar with a man like that," the storyteller gaily whispered to the make-up man.

But the tom pulled an even neater trick. Suddenly getting up from the sofa, he walked up to the dressing table under the mirror, drew the cork out of the carafe with his front paw, poured some water into a glass, drank it, restored the cork to its proper place and wiped his whiskers with the make-up cloth.

This time nobody even gasped. All mouths dropped, and the make-up man whispered admiringly:

"Ah, such class! . . ."

The bells rang for the third time and everyone, excited and anticipating an interesting act, hurried out of the dressing room.

A moment later the glowing spheres went out in the hall, the footlights flashed on, throwing a reddish glow at the bottom of the curtain, and from the brightly lit opening in the curtain a plump man stepped out—jolly as a baby, with a clean-shaven face, in a crumpled dress coat and an untidy shirt. It was George Bengalsky, the master of ceremonies, well-known to all Moscow.

"And so, citizens," began Bengalsky, with his childlike smile, "you will now have the . . ." Here Bengalsky interrupted himself and spoke in different intonations: "I see that our attendance has grown still more for the third act! We have half the city here! A few days ago I met a friend and said to him, 'Why don't you drop in? We had half the town over yesterday.' And he says to me, 'And I live in the other half!'" Bengalsky paused, expecting a burst of laughter, but since no one laughed, he continued: "And so, you will now see the famous foreign artist, Monsieur Woland, in an act of black magic. Of course, you and I know," Bengalsky smiled wisely, "that there is no such thing in the world, and that it is nothing but superstition. Simply, Maestro Woland is a great master of the technique of tricks, as we shall see from the most

interesting part, namely, the exposé of this technique, and since we are all unanimously both for technique and for its unmasking, we shall ask Mr. Woland! . . .”

After uttering all this rubbish, Bengalsky clasped his hands palm to palm and waved them welcomingly through the slit in the curtain, as a result of which the curtain, rustling quietly, slid apart.

The entrance of the magician with his lanky assistant and his tom, which stepped out on the stage on his hind feet, pleased the audience immensely.

“An armchair for me,” Woland commanded in a low voice, and at the same instant a chair appeared on the stage from out of nowhere, and the magician sat down in it. “Dear Fagot, show us something simple for the start.”

The audience stirred. Fagot and the tom walked away along the footlights to opposite sides of the stage. Fagot snapped his fingers, cried with a devil-may-care manner, “Three, four!” and plucked a deck of cards from the air. He shuffled it and sent the cards out like a ribbon to the tom. The tom caught the ribbon and sent it back—a hissing satiny snake. Fagot opened his mouth like a fledgling bird and swallowed it, card by card. After that the tom bowed, scraping his right rear paw, and was rewarded with frenzied applause.

“Class! Class!” the people backstage cried with admiration.

And Fagot pointed his finger at the public in the orchestra and declared:

“And now, my esteemed citizens, the deck is in the seventh row, in the pocket of citizen Parchevsky, just between a three-ruble note and the summons to court for non-payment of alimony to citizen Zerkova.”

The public rustled, people began to get up, and finally a certain citizen, whose name was indeed Parchevsky, and who was scarlet with amazement, drew from his wallet the deck of cards and began to thrust it into the air, not knowing what to do with it.

“Keep it as a memento!” cried Fagot. “After all, wasn’t

it only yesterday at supper that you said: if not for poker, life in Moscow would be altogether unbearable?"

"An old trick!" came from the gallery. "That fellow in the orchestra is part of the company."

"Do you think so?" shouted Fagot, squinting at the gallery. "In that case, you're in the same gang too, because the deck is in your own pocket!"

There was a movement in the gallery, and a voice cried delightedly:

"Right! He has it! Here, here! . . . Wait! But this is money, chervontsy!"

Those in the orchestra turned their heads. A baffled citizen in the gallery had found in his pocket a bundle wrapped in the manner employed by banks, with the words on the cover, "One thousand rubles." His neighbors piled around him, and he dug at the wrapping with his nail in utter astonishment, trying to discover whether those were real chervontsy or some charmed counterfeits.

"By God, they're real! Chervontsy!" people cried delightedly from the gallery.

"I'd like a game with such a pack myself," gaily exclaimed a fat man in the middle of the orchestra.

"Avec plaisir!" replied Fagot. "But why with you alone? Let everybody join in!" and he commanded: "Look up, please! . . . One!" There was suddenly a gun in his hand, and he cried: "Two!" The gun jerked up. He cried: "Three!" There was a flash, a crack, and all at once white strips of paper began to shower down from under the cupola, fluttering among the trapezes.

The strips whirled, they were blown aside, thrown into the gallery, flung back into the orchestra and on the stage. A few seconds later, the rain of money, constantly becoming more dense, reached the seats and the public began to catch the notes.

Hundreds of hands went up, people held up the notes to the light from the stage and saw unquestionably true and proper watermarks. The smell left no doubt either: it was the sweetest, most inimitable smell of freshly printed money. The whole theater was swept with joy, then with

amazement. The word "chervontsy, chervontsy" echoed everywhere, there were exclamations, "ah, ah!" and happy laughter.

The faces of the militiamen gradually assumed an expression of bewilderment, and the other artists unceremoniously began to come out from the wings.

The general excitement mounted, and no one knows what it would have led to if Fagot had not stopped the rain of money with a quick puff into the air.

Two young men, exchanging a meaningful and merry glance, took off from their seats and went directly to the buffet. The theater hummed, everybody's eyes glittered with excitement. Oh, yes, no one could tell what it all would have led to had Bengalsky not found within himself the strength to act. Trying to compose himself, he rubbed his hands by force of habit and in a voice of utmost resonance began:

"Well, citizens, we have now seen a case of so-called mass hypnosis. A purely scientific experiment, proving most convincingly that there are no miracles in black magic. Let us, then, ask Maestro Woland to reveal the nature of this experiment to us. In a moment, citizens, you shall see these alleged banknotes disappear as suddenly as they appeared."

He applauded, but he applauded alone, and while his face displayed a confident smile, his eyes were by no means confident; in fact, they had a pleading look.

The audience did not like Bengalsky's speech. A total silence followed. It was broken by the checkered Fagot.

"And this is a case of so-called lying," he declared in a loud, goatlike tenor. "The notes, citizens, are real."

"Bravo!" a basso barked sharply somewhere in the heights.

"And incidentally, this character," Fagot pointed at Bengalsky, "bores me. Keeps sticking his nose where he's not asked, keeps spoiling the act with his false comments! What shall we do with him?"

"Off with his head!" someone said sternly in the gallery.

"What was it you said, eh?" Fagot responded at once

to this revolting proposition. "Off with his head? That's an ideal Behemoth!" he cried to the tom. "Action! Ein, zwei, dreil!"

And an unheard-of thing came to pass. The tom's black fur bristled, and he gave off a soul-rending miaow. Then he gathered himself into a ball and, like a panther, sprang right up onto Bengalsky's chest and thence upon his head. Growling, the tom sank his plump paws into the thin, brushed-up hair of the master of ceremonies and, with a wild howl, twisted the head around twice and tore it off the heavy neck.

Two and a half thousand persons in the theater screamed in unison. Blood spurted in fountains from the torn arteries and flooded the shirt front and the dress coat. The headless body paddled absurdly with its feet and sat down on the floor. Women shrieked hysterically. The tom gave the head to Fagot, who raised it by the hair and showed it to the public, and the head cried out desperately:

"A doctor!"

"Will you babble nonsense again?" Fagot asked the weeping head sternly.

"I won't!" the head gurgled.

"For God's sake, stop torturing him!" a woman's voice cried from the loge above the hubbub, and the magician turned in its direction.

"What do you say, citizens, shall we forgive him?" asked Fagot, addressing the hall.

"Forgive him, forgive him!" cried individual and mostly female voices at first, and then they merged into a single chorus with the men's voices.

"What is your command, Messire?" Fagot asked the masked figure.

"Oh, well," the other answered reflectively. "They are people like all people. . . . Flighty, frivolous . . . still . . . compassion sometimes knocks at their hearts . . . ordinary people . . ." And he commanded loudly, "Put on the head."

The tom, taking careful aim, clamped the head on the

neck and it settled back in its place as though it had never parted from it. There was not even a scar on the neck. The tom brushed off Bengalsky's dress coat and shirt front with his paw, and all traces of blood vanished. Fagot raised the sitting man to his feet, thrust a package of bank notes into his pocket, and escorted him from the stage with the words:

"Scram, it's more fun without you!"

Staggering and looking around stupidly, the master of ceremonies just managed to reach the fireman's post, when he became sick. He cried weakly:

"My head, my head! . . ."

Several people, including Rimsky, rushed to him. The master of ceremonies cried, tried to catch at something in the air with his hands, muttered:

"Give me back my head, give it back to me. . . . Take my apartment, take my paintings, but give me back my head! . . ."

The messenger ran for a doctor. They tried to get Bengalsky to lie down on the sofa in the dressing room, but he fought back and became violent. An ambulance was called. When the unfortunate master of ceremonies was taken away, Rimsky ran back to the stage, to behold new wonders. Incidentally, it was either then or a few moments earlier that the magician, together with his faded armchair, vanished from the stage. And we must add that the audience never noticed it, so absorbed it was in the extraordinary things that Fagot was doing on the stage.

And Fagot, having gotten rid of the master of ceremonies, declared to the public:

"Now that we've kicked out the pest, let's open a ladies' shop!"

And all at once the floor of the stage was covered with Persian rugs. Huge mirrors appeared, illuminated along the edges by greenish tubes, and between the mirrors—show windows in which the happily dazzled viewers saw a display of Paris gowns of various styles and colors. Other showcases contained hundreds of ladies' hats with feathers

and without feathers, and hundreds of pairs of shoes, with and without buckles, white, black, yellow, leather, satin, suede, both with straps and with rhinestones. Among the shoes appeared elegantly packaged perfumes, mountains of handbags of antelope skin, suede, and silk, and piles of oblong little chased golden cases such as usually hold lipstick.

A red-headed young woman in a black evening dress suddenly appeared from nowhere—beautiful in every way except for the fantastic scar on her neck—and faced the audience with a shopkeeper's smile.

Fagot declared with a sugary grin that the firm would make a completely free exchange of ladies' old dresses and shoes for new Paris models. The offer extended to handbags and the rest.

The tom bowed and scraped with his hind paw, gesturing with his front paw in the manner of a doorman opening a door.

The young lady began to sing out sweetly, though somewhat hoarsely and gutturally, something difficult to understand but, judging from the female faces in the audience, extremely seductive:

"Guerlain, Chanel, Mitsouko, Narcisse Noir, Chanel No. 5, evening gowns, cocktail dresses. . . ."

Fagot twitched and wiggled, the tom bowed, the young lady opened the glass showcases.

"If you please!" shouted Fagot. "No ceremony, don't be shy!"

The audience was agitated, but no one ventured on the stage as yet. At length, a certain brunette came out of the tenth row in the orchestra and smiling as though to say that it was all the same to her, and she did not give a damn anyway, walked up the aisle and ascended the side staircase to the stage.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Fagot. "Welcome to the first customer! Behemoth, a chair! Let us start with shoes, Madame!"

The brunette sat down in the armchair, and Fagot immediately piled a mountain of slippers on the rug before

her. The brunette removed her right shoe, tried on a lilac one, stamped her foot on the rug, examined the heel.

"They won't pinch?" she asked thoughtfully.

Fagot exclaimed in an offended tone:

"Oh, no, how can you?"

And the tom squeaked with hurt pride.

"I will take this pair, Monsieur," said the brunette with dignity, putting on the second shoe.

Her old shoes were tossed behind the curtain, where the lady herself proceeded, accompanied by the redhead and Fagot, with several Paris gowns on hangers in his hands. The tom puttered, helping out, a tape measure draped around his neck for greater dignity.

A minute later, the brunette emerged from behind the curtain in a dress that made the whole audience gasp. The brave woman, astonishingly improved in appearance, stopped before a mirror, moved her bare shoulders, touched the hair on her nape, and twisted, trying to see her back.

"The firm begs you to accept this as a memento," said Fagot, handing the brunette an open box with a bottle of perfume.

"Merci," she said haughtily and walked down the stairs into the hall. As she walked, people jumped up to touch the box.

All hesitation was now cast aside, and women streamed to the stage from all sides. Amid the general excitement of talk, laughs and sighs, a man's voice said: "I do not permit you!" A woman's voice answered, "Despot and philistine! Stop breaking my hand!" Women disappeared behind the curtain, left their dresses there and came out in new ones. A row of ladies sat on stools with gilded legs, energetically stamping their newly-shod feet on the rug. Fagot kneeled, labored with a metal shoehorn; the tom, bending under piles of handbags and shoes, trudged back and forth between the stools and the showcases; the redhead with the scarred neck now appeared, now disappeared, and finally began to jabber in French altogether, and it was amazing to see how the women, including those

who did not know a word of French, understood everything she said.

A general uproar was caused by a man who had also climbed upon the stage. He declared that his wife was ill with the grippe and therefore he requested something for her. If any proof was needed of his married state, the citizen was prepared to show his passport. The statement of the devoted husband provoked a burst of laughter. Fagot yelled that he believed him even without a passport, and handed the citizen two pairs of silk stockings, to which the tom added a lipstick as his contribution.

Women who arrived late besieged the stage, from which the lucky ones streamed in ball gowns, pajamas with dragons, severe afternoon suits, and hats perched over one eyebrow.

Fagot announced that, since the hour was late, the shop would close until next evening.

Exactly a minute later there was a revolver shot, the mirrors disappeared, the showcases and stools faded out, the rug dissolved in the air, as did the curtain. The last to vanish was the mountain of old dresses and shoes, and the stage was again severe, empty, and bare.

At this point, a new character stepped into the proceedings. A pleasant, resonant, and very insistent baritone was heard from loge No. 2.

"Nevertheless, citizen artist, it is desirable that you reveal the technique of your tricks to the audience without delay, particularly the trick with the money. We should also like to see the master of ceremonies return to the stage. The audience is worried about him."

The baritone belonged to none other than the guest of honor at the evening's performance, Arkady Apollonovich Sempleyarov, chairman of the Acoustical Commission of the Moscow Theaters.

Arkady Apollonovich sat in the loge with two ladies: one middle-aged, dressed expensively and in the latest fashion, the other young and pretty, dressed more simply. The former, as was discovered soon afterward when a report was drawn up, was the wife of Arkady Apollono-

vich. The latter was a distant relation, a promising young actress who had recently arrived from Saratov and was staying at the home of Arkady Apollonovich and his wife.

"Pardon," replied Fagot. "I am sorry, but there is nothing to reveal. Everything is clear."

"Oh, no, if you'll excuse me! The exposé is entirely essential. Without it your brilliant performance will leave a rather disturbing impression. The audience demands an explanation."

"It seems to me," the impertinent buffoon interrupted Sempleyarov, "that the audience has not said anything. However, taking into consideration your most esteemed wishes, Arkady Apollonovich, I shall, after all, give you an exposé. But in order to do that, may I present just one more tiny item?"

"Why, by all means," Arkady Apollonovich consented patronizingly. "But it must be followed by an exposé."

"Certainly, certainly, sir. And so, allow me to inquire where you were yesterday evening, Arkady Apollonovich."

At this tactless and, perhaps, even boorish question Arkady Apollonovich changed in the face, and changed quite markedly.

"Arkady Apollonovich attended a meeting of the Acoustical Commission last evening," the wife of Arkady Apollonovich declared most haughtily. "But I don't see what this has to do with magic."

"Oui, Madame!" confirmed Fagot. "Of course, you don't see. As for the meeting, you are totally beguiled. Having started out for the said meeting, which, by the way, was never called for last night, Arkady Apollonovich excused his chauffeur at the building of the Acoustical Commission at the Pure Ponds (the theater was hushed), and proceeded by bus to Yelokhovskaya Street, to visit the actress of the Mobile District Theater, Militsa Andreyevna Pokobatko, with whom he spent about four hours."

"Oh!" somebody cried in a stricken voice in the total silence.

And the young relative of Arkady Apollonovich suddenly broke into a deep and terrifying laugh..

"Everything is clear!" she exclaimed. "And I have long suspected it. Now I see why this mediocrity got the part of Luisa!"

And, swinging out, she struck Arkady Apollonovich on the head with her short, thick, lilac parasol.

As for the infamous Fagot, alias Koroviev, he cried:

"Here, my esteemed citizens, is one of the revelations that Arkady Apollonovich demanded so insistently!"

"Wretch, how dare you touch Arkady Apollonovich?" the wife addressed the girl menacingly, rising to her full gigantic height in the loge.

A second short burst of satanic laughter shook the young relative.

"I don't know about anyone else," she answered, convulsed with laughter, "but I surely have the right to touch him!" and the parasol gave another dry crack as it bounded off the head of Arkady Apollonovich.

"Militia! Arrest her!" Sempleyarov's wife cried in a voice so terrible that it sent a chill through many a heart.

And then the tom leaped out to the footlights and barked in a human voice that shook the theater:

"The show is over! Maestro! Whoop it up! A march!"

The conductor, half out of his mind, hardly aware of what he was doing, swung his baton, and the band did not start up, or even strike up, but precisely—to use the tom's revolting expression—whooped up an incredible, utterly disreputable march.

For a moment it seemed that this was the music of a song, once heard under the southern stars in a café-chantant, with half-absurd, half-blind, recklessly merry words:

His very excellent excellency
Loved domestic chicks.
He always had under his wing
Four, or five, or six.

Or, perhaps, these were not the words at all. Perhaps there were others to the same tune, all of them highly scandalous. But this isn't really the point. The point is that a veritable habel broke loose in the Variety Theater after the final scene. Militiamen ran toward Sempleyarov's loge, the curious clambered up the barriers, there were infernal bursts of roaring laughter and wild shouts, drowned out by the golden jingling of the cymbals in the band.

And the stage was suddenly empty. That swindler Fagot, along with the brazen tom, Behemoth, dissolved into thin air, vanished as utterly as the magician had vanished earlier, together with his faded armchair.

Chapter 13

THE HERO APPEARS

And so, the stranger wagged a finger at Ivan and whispered "Tsss! . . ."

Ivan swung his feet down from the bed and peered. A man of about thirty-eight, clean-shaven, dark-haired, with a pointed nose, anxious eyes and a lock of hair hanging over his forehead, was cautiously looking in from the balcony.

Reassured that Ivan was alone, the mysterious visitor listened a moment. Then, emboldened, he entered the room. Ivan saw that he wore hospital clothes: underwear, slippers on bare feet, a gray bathrobe over his shoulders.

The visitor winked to Ivan, slipped a bundle of keys into his pocket, and inquired in a whisper, "May I sit down?" At a nod from Ivan, he settled in the armchair.

"But how did you get here?" Ivan whispered too, in obedience to the warning finger. "Aren't the balcony gratings locked?"

"They are locked," confirmed the guest. "But Praskovya Fyodorovna, a most charming woman, is, alas, quite absent-minded. I stole her keys about a month ago and have since been able to come out on the balcony—it runs around the entire floor—and visit a neighbor now and then."

"If you can get out on the balcony, you can escape. Or is it too high?" Ivan asked with interest.

"No," the guest answered firmly. "I cannot escape from here. Not because it is high, but because I have nowhere

to escape." After a pause, he added, "And so, here we are?"

"Here we are," answered Ivan, looking intently at the visitor's brown and extremely restless eyes.

"Yes . . ." said the guest, and suddenly became anxious: "But I hope you are not a violent case? Because I cannot endure any noise, fuss, violence, or anything of that sort. I have a particular aversion to people screaming—to screams of pain, or rage, or any other kind. Please reassure me. Tell me—you are not violent?"

"I punched a fellow on the snout the other day in a restaurant," the transformed poet confessed courageously.

"For good reason?" the guest asked sternly.

"Well, frankly, without good reason," Ivan said with embarrassment.

"Outrageous," the guest censured Ivan, and added, "Besides, how you express yourself: punched on the snout. . . . After all, it is still a moot question: what precisely does a man have—a snout, or a face? And to think of it, when all is said and done, it is, perhaps, a face. So that, you know, using one's fists. . . . No, you had better quit that, once and for all. . . ."

After this admonition, the guest inquired:

"Your profession?"

"A poet," Ivan admitted reluctantly.

"Oh, how unlucky I am!" the guest exclaimed with chagrin. But he immediately caught himself, apologized, and asked, "And what is your name?"

"Homeless."

"Uh, uh . . ." the guest said, wrinkling his face.

"Why, do you dislike my poems?" Ivan asked with curiosity.

"I dislike them dreadfully."

"What did you read?"

"I've never read any of your poems!" the visitor cried nervously.

"Then why do you say that?"

"And why not?" the guest replied. "As though I hadn't read others. Unless there's some . . . miracle? Very well,

I am prepared to take your word for it. Are your poems good? Tell me yourself!"

"Awfull" Ivan suddenly blurted out frankly and courageously.

"Don't write any more!" the guest pleaded.

"I promise and I swear!" Ivan said solemnly.

The oath was sealed with a handshake. At that moment soft footsteps and voices were heard from the corridor.

"Tss!" the guest whispered and, slipping out on the balcony, he closed the grating after him.

Praskovya Fyodorovna looked in, inquired how Ivan was feeling and whether he wished to sleep with or without light. Ivan asked her to leave the light, and she departed, wishing the patient a good night. When everything was quiet, the guest returned.

He informed Ivan in a whisper that a new patient had been installed in room 119—a fat man with a purple face, who muttered something constantly about foreign exchange and ventilation, and swore that unholy powers had taken residence in his house on Sadovaya.

"He swears at Pushkin for all he's worth and keeps shouting, 'Kurolesov, encore, encore!'" the guest said, twitching anxiously. When he calmed down, he seated himself and said, "Anyway, let's forget about him." Then he continued his interrupted conversation with Ivan: "And what brought you here?"

"Pontius Pilate," Ivan replied, looking glumly down at the floor.

"What?" the guest cried, forgetting caution, and immediately clamped his hand over his mouth. "What a startling coincidence! I beg you, I beg you, tell me about it!"

For some reason Ivan felt that he could trust the stranger. Timidly and stumblingly at first, but with growing confidence, he began the story of the previous evening at Patriarchs' Ponds. Ivan Nikolayevich found a good listener in the person of the mysterious purloiner of keys. The guest did not seem to regard Ivan as a madman and

showed the greatest interest in his account. As the story unfolded, he became increasingly enthusiastic, constantly interrupting Ivan with his exclamations:

"Go on, go on, I implore you! But in the name of all that is holy, please don't omit anything!"

Ivan omitted nothing, for it was easier for him to tell the story in full, and gradually he came to the moment when Pontius Pilate had come out on the balcony in his white cloak with the blood-red lining.

The guest folded his hands as though in prayer and whispered:

"Oh, how well I guessed it! Oh, how well I guessed it all!"

As he heard the description of Berlioz' terrible death, the visitor responded with a puzzling comment, his eyes flashing with hatred:

"I only regret this did not happen to the critic Latunsky or the writer Mstislav Lavrovich instead of this Berlioz!" And he exclaimed with soundless frenzy, "But go on!"

The story of the tom offering his fare to the woman conductor amused the visitor immensely, and he fairly choked with silent laughter as he watched Ivan who, inspired by the success of his narrative, squatted down and hopped cautiously on the floor, impersonating the tom with the coin held at the level of his whiskers.

"And so," Ivan concluded after relating the events at Griboyedov's, his face clouding over again, "I've landed here."

The guest sympathetically placed his hand on the poor poet's shoulder, saying:

"Unfortunate poet! But it is all your own fault, my friend. You should not have been so careless and impertinent with him. Now you have paid for it. You should be grateful, in fact, that you have gotten off so cheaply."

"But who is he, after all?" Ivan cried, shaking his fists with agitation.

The guest peered at Ivan and answered with a question:

"You will not throw a fit, will you? We are all unreliable here. . . . There won't be any need for doctors, injections, and all the rest of that?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Ivan. "Tell me, who is he?"

"Very well," the guest replied, and said slowly and significantly: "It was Satan whom you met last night at Patriarchs' Ponds."

Ivan kept his promise and did not throw a fit. Nevertheless, he was thoroughly shaken.

"But it cannot be! He does not exist!"

"In heaven's name! You ought to be the last man to say this. You were evidently one of his earliest victims. Here you are, confined, as you know yourself, in a psychiatric hospital, yet you keep harping that he doesn't exist. Really, it's incredible!"

Confused, Ivan fell silent.

"The moment you started to describe him," the guest continued, "I guessed with whom you've had the pleasure to talk last night. But really, I wonder at Berlioz! You—well, you're a man of virgin mind." The guest apologized again. "But he, as far as I have heard, had read a few books, after all! This professor's very first words dispelled all my doubts. It is impossible not to recognize him, my friend! However, you . . . you must forgive me again, but if I am not mistaken, you are an ignorant man?"

"No doubt about it," the unrecognizable Ivan agreed.

"Well, then . . . for even the face you described, the different eyes, the eyebrows! . . . You'll pardon me, but perhaps you have never even heard the opera *Faust*?"

For some reason, Ivan was terribly embarrassed and, with a flaming face, began to mutter something about some trip to a sanitarium . . . in Yalta. . . .

"Of course, of course . . . no wonder! But Berlioz, I must repeat, amazes me. . . . He was not only a well-read, but a shrewd man. Although I must say in his defense that Woland could easily befuddle an even shrewder man."

"What did you call him?" Ivan cried out in turn.

"Hush!"

Ivan slapped himself on the forehead and muttered hoarsely:

"I see, I see it now! That letter 'W' on his card. Oh, oh, what a business!" He was silent a while and stared in bewilderment at the moon floating outside the grating. Then he spoke again, "So he really could have been there with Pontius Pilate? He had already been born at the time, hadn't he? And they call me mad!" he added, indignantly pointing at the door.

A bitter line appeared at the guest's lips:

"Let us face the truth." And he turned his eyes up toward the nocturnal luminary flying through a cloud. "Both you and I are madmen, why deny it! You see, he shook you and you cracked up, since you were evidently predisposed to it. What you describe had indeed taken place. Yet it is so extraordinary that even Stravinsky, a psychiatrist of genius, did not, of course, believe you. He saw you? (Ivan nodded.) Your companion had visited Pilate, and had breakfasted with Kant, and now he has come to Moscow."

"But who knows what trouble he'll stir up here! Shouldn't he be caught somehow?" the old, still incompletely crushed Ivan raised up his head, without much confidence, it's true, but raised it nevertheless inside the new one.

"You have tried, you've done your share," the guest replied ironically. "And I would not advise anyone else to try it either. As for the trouble he'll cause, you may rely on that! Ah, ah! How I regret that it was you who met him, not I! Though everything has burned down by now, and the coals are turned to ash, I swear, I'd give Praskovya Fyodorovna's bundle of keys for such a meeting, and I have nothing else to give. I am a pauper."

"What do you want him for?"

For a long time the guest stared sadly, twitching. Finally he spoke:

"You see, by a strange coincidence I am here for the same reason as you—because of Pontius Pilate." The

guest glanced around apprehensively and said, "The point is that a year ago I wrote a novel about Pilate."

"Are you a writer?" the poet asked with interest.

The guest's face darkened and he shook a fist at Ivan. Then he said:

"I am a Master." He became stern and took from the pocket of his bathrobe a soiled and greasy skullcap, black, but with the letter "M" embroidered on it in yellow silk. He put on the cap and turned his head so that Ivan could see him both in profile and full face, to prove that he was a Master. "She sewed it for me with her own hands," he added mysteriously.

"And what is your name?"

"I no longer have a name," the strange visitor answered with somber contempt. "I gave it up, like everything else in life. Let us forget it."

"Then tell me about your novel, at least," Ivan asked tactfully.

"Certainly. My life, it must be said, has followed a rather unusual course," the guest began.

A historian by training, he had worked, until two years ago, at one of the Moscow museums. In addition, he also did translations.

"From what language?" Ivan broke in with curiosity.

"I know five languages besides my own," replied the guest. "English, French, German, Latin, and Greek. And then, I can read Italian a little."

"Oh!" Ivan whispered enviously.

The historian had lived a lonely life; he had no relatives anywhere, and few acquaintances in Moscow. And, think of it, one day he had won a hundred thousand rubles.

"You can imagine my astonishment," whispered the guest in the black cap, "when I put my hand into the laundry basket and, lo and behold, my lottery ticket, with the number announced in the newspaper! The ticket was given to me at the museum," he explained.

Having won a hundred thousand rubles, Ivan's mysteri-

ous guest had bought himself books and left his room on Myasnitskaya. . . .

"Uh, that damned hole!" he growled.

Then he rented two basement rooms from a builder who owned a small house with a garden in one of the alleys near Arbat. He gave up his job at the museum and began to write a novel about Pontius Pilate.

"Ah, what a golden age it was!" the narrator whispered with glittering eyes. "An altogether private apartment, with a foyer, and a sink in it," he stressed with special pride. "Small windows just above the pathway leading to the gate. And right across, four steps away, lilacs, a lime tree, and a maple. Ah, ah! In winter, I'd see an occasional pair of black feet through the window and hear the snow crunching under them. And the fire always blazed in my stove! Then suddenly spring came, and through the dim panes I could see the lilac bushes, bare at first, then turning green. And then—last spring—came something that was far more marvelous than winning a hundred thousand rubles. And that, you must admit, is an enormous sum of money!"

"It is," agreed Ivan, who was listening with utmost attention.

"I would open the window and sit in the second room, which was tiny." The guest spread out his arms to indicate the size of the room: "Here was a sofa, and here another sofa, and between them a small table, with a beautiful night lamp on it. And by the window, books. And here a tiny desk. But the first room—enormous, fourteen meters long!—was all books and books, and the stove. Ah, what a place I had! The fragrance of the lilacs was extraordinary! My head would grow light with fatigue, and Pilate was flying to an end. . . ."

"White robe, red lining! I know!" Ivan exclaimed.

"Exactly! Pilate flew to an end, and I knew already that the last words of the novel would be 'The Fifth Procurator of Judea, the rider Pontius Pilate.' Well, naturally, I'd take walks. A hundred thousand is a huge sum, and I had an excellent suit. Or I would go out to

dine at some inexpensive restaurant. There was a wonderful restaurant on the Arbat; I wonder if it still exists." The guest's eyes opened wide, and he went on whispering as he gazed up at the moon. "She carried in her hands a bunch of loathsome, disturbing yellow flowers. The devil knows what they're called, but for some reason they are the first to appear in Moscow. And these flowers stood out clearly against her black spring coat. She was carrying yellow flowers! An evil color. She turned into a lane from Tverskaya, then glanced back. Oh well, you know Tverskaya. Thousands of people walked along Tverskaya, but I assure you I was the only one she saw. And she gave me a troubled look—no, a suffering look. What struck me then was not so much her beauty as the extraordinary loneliness in her eyes. No one had ever seen such loneliness! And I obeyed the yellow sign and also turned into the lane and followed her. We walked along the crooked, dismal lane silently, I on one side, she on the other. And, imagine, there was not a soul in the lane. I was tormented by the feeling that I must speak to her. I worried that I would not say a word, and she would leave, and I would never see her again. And, think of it, suddenly she spoke:

"'Do you like my flowers?'"

"I remember clearly the sound of her voice, low, but breaking. And, silly as it is, it seemed to me that it echoed in the lane and was reflected from the dirty yellow wall. I quickly crossed to her side and answered, approaching her:

"'No.'"

"She glanced at me with surprise, and I instantly realized that I had loved this woman all my life! Would you believe it? You'll say I am mad, of course!"

"I'm saying nothing," exclaimed Ivan, adding, "I beg you, go on!"

And the guest went on.

"Yes, she glanced at me with surprise, then asked:

"'Do you dislike flowers generally?'"

"In her voice, it seemed to me, there was a note of

hostility. I walked side by side with her, trying to keep in step, and, to my utter amazement, did not feel in the least constrained.

“No, I like flowers, but not these,” I said.

“And what flowers do you like?”

“I like roses.”

“Then I was sorry I had said it, for she smiled guiltily and threw her flowers into the gutter. I was startled, but I picked them up and offered them to her. She pushed them away with a quick, wry smile, and I carried them for her.

“We walked silently for a while, until she took the flowers from my hands and threw them down on the pavement. Then she slipped her hand, in a black gauntlet, under my arm and we walked side by side.”

“And then?” said Ivan. “But, please, don’t omit anything!”

“Then?” the guest repeated. “Well, you could guess it yourself.” He wiped away a sudden tear with his sleeve and continued. “Love caught us suddenly, leaped at us like a murderer appearing from out of nowhere in an alley, and struck us both down at once. Like lightning, like a Finnish knife! However, afterward she insisted it was not so, that we had loved each other for a long, long time, without knowing one another, never having met, though she was living with another man . . . and I . . . with that . . . whatever her name was. . . .”

“With whom?” asked Homeless.

“With that, oh . . . that . . . oh . . .” the guest replied and snapped his fingers impatiently.

“You were married?”

“Well, yes, don’t you see me snapping my fingers. . . . That . . . Varenka . . . Manechka . . . no, Varenka . . . in the striped dress, at the museum. . . . Oh, well, I don’t remember. . . .”

“Well, then, she said that she had come out with the yellow flowers that day so that I’d find her at last. And if it had not happened, she would have poisoned herself, for her life was empty.

"Yes, love struck us instantly. I knew it the same day, an hour later, when, oblivious of the city, we found ourselves on the embankment, at the Kremlin wall.

"We spoke as though we had parted only yesterday, as though we had known each other for many years. We agreed to meet on the following day in the same place, by the Moskva River. And we met. The Maytime sun was shining for us. And soon, very soon this woman became my secret wife.

"She came to me every day, but I'd begin to wait for her as soon as I awakened in the morning. In my impatience, I would constantly rearrange the objects on the table. Ten minutes before her coming I would sit down at the window and listen for the opening of the ramshackle old gate. And strangely—before I had met her, few people came to our yard; in fact, no one came. But now it seemed to me that the whole city was streaming in.

"She would enter the gate only once, but—I am not exaggerating—I would suffer ten fits of palpitation before she did. Then, when her hour arrived and the hand of the clock pointed to midday, my heart kept up its hammering until, without tapping, almost soundlessly, her slippers with their black suede bows clasped with steel buckles came even with my window.

"Sometimes she'd tease and, halting at the other window, knock at the pane lightly with her toe. I'd be at the window instantly, but the slipper and the black silk shutting out the light would already be gone, and I would hurry to open the door for her.

"No one knew about us, I assure you, although this never happens. Neither her husband, nor her acquaintances knew anything. Of course, the people in the little house where I occupied the basement knew; they saw that a woman came to visit me, but they did not know her name."

"And who was she?" Ivan asked, highly intrigued by the love story.

The guest made a gesture which meant that he would never reveal it to anyone, and continued his story.

Ivan learned that the Master and the unknown woman loved each other so much that they became inseparable. Ivan clearly visualized the two rooms in the basement where it was always twilight because of the lilacs and the fence. He saw the red shabby chairs, the bureau, the clock standing on it, which rang every half hour, the endless rows of books from the painted floor up to the soot-darkened ceiling, and the stove.

Ivan learned that the Master and his secret wife had come to feel from the very first days of their acquaintance that fate itself had brought them together at the corner of Tverskaya and the lane, and that they had been created for each other for eternity.

Ivan learned from his guest's tale how the lovers spent their days. As soon as she came, she would put on an apron and go to the narrow foyer with the sink of which the poor patient seemed to be so proud. There, she would light the kerosene burner on the wooden table and prepare lunch, which she served on the oval table in the first room. During the Maytime storms, when streams of water gushed noisily past the blurred windows, threatening to flood their last refuge, the lovers would light the stove and bake potatoes. The potatoes steamed, and their charred skins blackened their fingers. There was laughter in the basement, and in the garden the trees would shed broken twigs and white clusters of flowers after the rain.

When the rainy season ended and the hot, close summer came, the vase was filled with the long-awaited roses they both loved. He who called himself Master worked feverishly on his novel, and the novel came to absorb the unknown woman too.

"Really, at times I would be jealous of her interest in it," the nocturnal visitor who had come from the moonlit balcony whispered to Ivan.

Plunging her slim fingers with pointed nails into her hair, she endlessly reread what he had written. Then she would settle down to sewing the cap he now wore. Some-

times, she would crouch at the bottom shelves, or climb up to the top ones, dusting the hundreds of bindings with a rag. She foretold him fame, she urged him on, and began to call him Master. She waited impatiently for the promised final words about the Fifth Procurator of Judea, repeated the phrases that especially pleased her in a loud sing-song, and said that the novel was her life.

It was finished in August and given to a typist who made five copies of it. And at last the hour arrived when it was necessary to leave the secret refuge, to come out and face life.

"I came out with the novel in my hands, and that was the end of my life," the Master whispered. His head dropped, and for a long time the black cap with the yellow "M" nodded sadly. When he finally resumed his story, it became so incoherent that the listener could gather only that some disaster had befallen his guest.

"That was my first encounter with the literary world, but now, when everything is over and my ruin is complete, I recall it with horror!" the Master whispered solemnly and raised his head. "Oh, he amazed me! He confounded me utterly!"

"Who?" Ivan whispered just audibly, afraid of interrupting the agitated narrator.

"Why, the editor, I've told you, the editor! Yes, so he read the manuscript. He looked at me as though my cheek were blown up with a tooth infection. He squinted off into the corner and even tittered in confusion. He crumpled the manuscript needlessly, and grunted. The questions he asked seemed quite insane to me. Saying nothing about the novel itself, he asked who I was, where I had come from, how long I had been writing and why I had not been heard of before. He even asked me what, to my mind, was a totally idiotic question: who had given me the idea to write a novel on such a strange subject? I finally got tired of it, and I asked him directly whether he would or would not publish the novel. At that point he began to fuss and mumble, and at last declared that he could not make the decision by himself, that other

members of the editorial board would have to read my work, the other members being the critics Latunsky and Ariman and the writer Mstislav Lavrovich. He asked me to come back in two weeks. Two weeks later, I was received by a young woman with eyes that squinted permanently at her own nose from constant lying."

"That's Lapshennikova, the editorial secretary," Ivan said with a grin. He was thoroughly familiar with the world his guest was describing so angrily.

"Possibly," the other cut in. "Well, she returned my novel, by now quite greasy and dog-eared. Trying to keep her eyes away from mine, Lapshennikova told me that the editors had enough manuscripts to last them two years, and hence the question of their publishing my novel was, as she put it, 'automatically eliminated.'

"What do I remember after that?" the Master muttered, rubbing his temple. "Oh, yes. The red petals dropping on the title page, and the eyes of my friend. Yes, I remember those eyes."

The guest's story became increasingly confused, increasingly full of gaps. He spoke about slanting rain and despair in the basement refuge, about taking the manuscript elsewhere. In a whisper, he exclaimed that he did not blame the woman who urged him to persist, no, he did not blame her in the least!

Then, as Ivan learned, something altogether strange and unexpected happened. One day the author of the novel opened a newspaper and found an article by the critic Ariman, who warned all and sundry that he, the author, had attempted to smuggle an apology for Jesus Christ into print.

"Ah, I remember, I remember!" cried Ivan. "But I forget your name!"

"Let us leave my name out of it, I've told you it no longer exists," replied the guest. "The name is unimportant. A day later another newspaper published an article over the signature of Mstislav Lavrovich, who advocated striking out, and striking out hard, at 'Pilatism' and the

'wretched icon-dauber' who had tried to smuggle it (again that damned word!) into print.

"Stunned by that fantastic expression, 'Pilatism,' I opened a third newspaper, and there I found two articles, one by Lațunsky, the other signed with the initials N.E. I assure you, the compositions of Ariman and Lavrovich were as child's play compared to Latunsky's piece. Suffice it to say that its title was 'Militant Old Believer.' I became so absorbed in these articles about me that I never noticed when she entered (I had left the door unlocked). She appeared before me with a wet umbrella and wet newspapers in her hands. Her eyes were burning, her hands were cold and trembling. First she rushed up to kiss me, then in a hoarse voice, banging her fist on the table, she cried that she would poison Latunsky."

Ivan grunted with confusion, but said nothing.

"Dismal autumn days followed," the guest went on. "It was as though the monstrous failure of my novel had taken out a large chunk of my soul. I had nothing left to do, and I lived only from one meeting with my beloved to the next. And something happened to me at that time. The devil knows what it was, although Stravinsky has probably gotten to the bottom of it long ago. A profound depression came over me, and strange premonitions. I began to be afraid of the dark. In short, I was slipping into psychic illness. It seemed to me, especially just as I was falling asleep, that a cold and sinuous octopus was feeling with its tentacles directly for my heart. And I was compelled to sleep with the lights on.

"My beloved changed greatly. Of course, I never told her about the octopus, but she saw that something was badly wrong with me. She grew thin and pale, she stopped laughing, and constantly begged me to forgive her for urging me to publish excerpts from the novel. She thought that it would be best for me to leave everything and spend the remainder of the hundred thousand rubles on a trip south to the Black Sea.

"She was very insistent, and, to avoid arguments (something told me I would not take this trip to the Black

Sea), I promised her to go in a few days. But she said that she would buy the ticket herself. I took out all my money—about ten thousand rubles—and gave it to her.

“‘Why so much?’ she wondered.

“I said something about being afraid of thieves and asked her to keep the money for me until my departure. She put it into her purse and began to kiss me, saying that it would be easier for her to die than leave me alone in such a state. But she was expected, she had to go, and would return tomorrow. She implored me not to be afraid of anything.

“This was at dusk, sometime in mid-October. She left. I lay down on the sofa and fell asleep without turning on the lamp. I awakened with the sensation that the octopus was there. Feeling my way in the dark, I managed to light the lamp. My pocket watch showed two o'clock in the morning. When I lay down, I had been on the verge of illness; when I awakened I was sick. It suddenly seemed to me that the autumn night would push the panes in and pour into the room, and I would drown in the flood of inky darkness. I was no longer in possession of myself. I cried out, I wanted to run to someone, anyone, even upstairs to my landlord. I fought the impulse like a madman. I mustered enough strength to drag myself to the stove and make a fire. When the firewood began to crackle, I felt a little better. I ran to the foyer, put on the light and found a bottle of white wine. I pulled out the cork and began to drink straight from the bottle. This blunted my terror a little—enough, at any rate, to keep me from rushing upstairs—and I returned to the stove. I opened the stove door, so that the heat scorched my face and hands, and whispered:

“‘Sense it, sense that something dreadful has happened to me . . . Come, come, come! . . .’

“But no one came. The fire roared in the stove, the rain lashed at the window. Then came the final thing. I took the heavy copies of the novel and the first drafts from the desk drawer and began to burn them. This is extremely difficult to do; paper covered with writing burns

very reluctantly. Breaking my nails, I tore the copybooks and slipped the sheets vertically between the logs. I ruffled and beat them with the poker. At times the ashes almost choked the flame, but I fought them, and the novel was dying despite its stubborn resistance. Familiar words flickered before me, the yellow color crept up the pages, but the words still stood out on them. They disappeared only when the paper turned black, and furiously I finished them off with the poker.

"Then somebody began to scratch softly on the window. My heart leaped and, throwing the last book into the fire, I ran to open the door. Brick steps led up from the basement to the door into the yard. Stumbling, I rushed up and asked in a low voice:

"'Who is it?'

"And a voice, her voice, answered:

"'It's I . . .'

"I don't remember how I managed the key and chain. As soon as she entered, she leaned convulsively against me, trembling, all wet, with wet cheeks and straggling hair. I could utter only a single word:

"'You . . . you? . . .' and my voice broke.

"We ran down the stairs. In the foyer she threw off her coat and we quickly entered the first room. With a low cry, she raked out everything that remained in the stove with her bare hands—the last sheets that were just beginning to burn from below. Smoke filled the room. I stamped out the fire with my feet, and she threw herself on the sofa and burst into violent, uncontrollable sobs.

"When she quieted down, I said:

"'I've come to hate the novel, and I am afraid. I am ill. I am afraid.'

"She rose and cried:

"'God, how sick you are. Why, why? What for? But I will save you, I will save you. How can this be?'

"I saw her eyes, swollen from smoke and crying, and felt her cold hands stroking my forehead.

"'I will cure you, I will cure you,' she muttered, grip-

ping my shoulders. 'You will restore it. Why, why did I not keep a copy for myself?'

"She bared her teeth with rage and went on saying things I could not hear or understand. Then, pressing her lips together, she began to collect and smooth out the charred sheets. It was a chapter from somewhere in the middle of the novel, I forget which. She neatly stacked the sheets, wrapped them in paper and tied them with a ribbon. All her actions indicated that she was filled with resolution and had recovered her self-control. She asked for some wine. After drinking it, she spoke more calmly:

"'This is how we must pay for lying,' she said. 'I will not lie any more. I would remain here with you right now, but I'd rather not do it this way. I don't want to leave him forever with the memory that I ran away from him at night. He has never done me any harm. . . . He was called away suddenly—a fire broke out in his factory. But he'll be back soon. I shall speak to him in the morning. I'll tell him I love another, and then I will return to you forever. But tell me, perhaps you do not want me to?'

"'My poor love, my poor love,' I said. 'I will not permit you to do it. Something dark is coming over me, I cannot let you perish with me.'

"'Is this the only reason?' she asked, bringing her eyes close to mine.

"'The only one.'

"She became very animated and threw her arms around my neck, saying:

"'I will perish with you. I'll be here in the morning.'

"And this is the last thing I remember of my life: a streak of light from the foyer, and in this streak of light an uncurled strand of hair, her beret and her eyes, full of determination. I also remember the black silhouette in the doorway to the yard and the white package.

"'I would see you home, but I no longer have the strength to return alone. I am afraid.'

"'Don't be afraid. Wait a few hours. Tomorrow morning I will be here with you.'

"Those were her last words in my life. . . .

"Tsss! . . ." the sick man suddenly interrupted himself and raised a finger. "What a restless moonlit night this is."

He disappeared on the balcony. Ivan heard the sound of wheels rolling down the corridor. Someone sobbed or cried out weakly.

When everything subsided, the guest returned and reported that room 120 had a new tenant. They had brought someone who kept asking that his head be given back to him. The two were anxiously silent for a while. Then they calmed down and returned to the interrupted story. The guest opened his mouth to speak, but the night was indeed a troubled one. Voices continued in the corridor, and the guest spoke so softly into Ivan's ear that what he said is known only to the poet, with the exception of the first sentence:

"Fifteen minutes after she left, someone knocked at my window. . . ."

The sick man was evidently greatly agitated by the things he was relating to Ivan in whispers. Spasms ran over his face again and again. Fear and rage swam and tossed in his eyes. The narrator pointed somewhere toward the moon, which had long departed from the balcony. It was only when all sounds outside had ceased that he moved away from Ivan and raised his voice a little.

"Well, on that night in mid-January, in the same coat, but with the buttons torn off, I shivered with cold in my yard. Behind me were the snowdrifts that covered the lilac bushes, and before me and below, my windows, feebly lit, with drawn shades. I leaned over to the first one and listened: a phonograph was playing in my rooms. This was all I heard, but I could see nothing. I stood there a while, then went out through the gate into the lane. A snowstorm was raging. A dog dashed to my feet and frightened me, and I ran across to the other side. The cold and the terror which had become my constant companions drove me to frenzy. I had nowhere to go. It would have been the simplest thing, of course, to throw

myself under the streetcar on the avenue on which my lane emerged. I could see those light-filled, ice-encrusted boxes in the distance, and heard their loathsome screeching in the frost. But, my dear neighbor, the whole point was that every cell of my body was possessed by fear. I was as terrified of the streetcar as of the dog. Oh, yes, there is no illness in this building worse than mine, I assure you!"

"But you could have let her know," said Ivan, sympathizing with the poor man. "Besides, she has your money. She must have kept it for you, of course?"

"You may be sure of that, of course she kept it for me. But you don't seem to understand me. Or, rather, I have lost my former ability to express myself. However, I do not regret it too much; it will be of no further use to me. If I had written to her," the guest stared reverently into the darkness, "she would have received a letter from the madhouse. Can letters be written from such an address? . . . A mentally ill man? . . . You are joking, my friend! Make her unhappy? No, I am incapable of that."

Ivan could offer no argument against this, but though silent, he sympathized with his guest, he felt compassion for him. And the other nodded his head in the black cap, racked by the pain of his memories. Then he went on:

"Poor woman . . . However, I am hoping that she has forgotten me. . . ."

"But you may get well. . . ." Ivan suggested timidly.

"I am incurable," the guest said calmly. "When Stravinsky says that he will restore me to life, I don't believe him. He is kind and simply wants to reassure me. I don't deny, though, that I feel better now. What was I saying? Oh, yes, the frost, those flying streetcars . . . I knew that this hospital had already been opened, and I started out here on foot across the entire city. Such madness! I surely would have frozen to death outside the city, but I was saved by chance. A truck had broken down on the road, and I went up to the driver. It was about four kilometers from the city, and, to my astonishment, he took pity on me. The truck was going this way and he took me along.

I got away with no more than frostbitten toes on my left foot. They cured them here. And so, I've been here almost four months. And, you know, I find it not at all unpleasant. There is no need for ambitious plans, my dear neighbor, there really isn't! For instance, I once dreamed of traveling around the world. Well, it turns out that I never will. I see only a tiny piece of the globe. I suppose it is not the best to be found on it, but, I repeat, it isn't too bad. Summer is coming, the ivy will climb up the balcony—Praskovya Fyodorovna says it will. The keys have broadened my possibilities. We shall have the moon at night. Ah, but it is gone. What freshness! The night is tumbling past midnight. Time to go."

"Tell me, what happened next to Yeshua and Pilate?" asked Ivan. "I beg you, I want to know."

"Oh, no, no," the guest answered with a pained twitch. "I cannot recall my novel without a shudder. And your acquaintance from Patriarchs' Ponds could have done it far better than I. Thank you for the conversation. Good-by."

Before Ivan knew it, the grating slid shut with a soft ringing sound and the guest was gone.

Chapter 14

HAIL TO THE ROOSTER!

Rimsky's nerves gave way and he fled to his office before the militia had completed their record of the incident. He sat down at his desk and stared with inflamed eyes at the magical chervontsy before him. The financial manager's mind reeled. A steady pounding came from outside. The public was thronging out of the theater into the street. Rimsky's morbidly sharpened ears clearly caught the sudden trilling of a militia whistle—a sound that under the best of circumstances never promises anything pleasant. When it was repeated and joined by another, still more urgent and prolonged, and then followed by roars of laughter and hooting, the financial manager instantly surmised that something scandalous and nasty had happened in the street, and that—reluctant as he was to face it—it had some close connection with the revolting act staged by the black magician and his assistants.

The overwrought financial manager was not mistaken. As soon as he glanced out of the window facing Sadovaya, his face contorted and he did not whisper but hissed:

"I knew it!"

On the sidewalk below, brightly lit by street lights, he saw a lady dressed in nothing but a shift and violet panties. Her head was covered by a hat, and in her hands she held an umbrella. The lady, in a state of utter dismay, now crouched, now tried to run. She was surrounded by a milling crowd, which produced those roars of laughter that sent shivers up the financial manager's spine. A man

hovered excitedly around the lady, struggling to pull off his summer coat but unable, in his agitation, to free his hand that had become entangled in the sleeve.

Screams of laughter came from another spot as well—from an entrance on the left. Turning his head in that direction, Grigory Danilovich saw a second lady, this one in pink underwear. She had jumped up from the pavement to the sidewalk and tried to hide in the doorway, but the audience streaming out barred her way, and the poor victim of her own frivolity and passion for finery, deceived by the vile Fagot and his company, had only one desire—to be swallowed by the earth. A militiaman hurried to the luckless woman, drilling the air with his whistle. Behind him ran a band of gay young men in caps, laughing and hooting.

A lean, mustachioed coachman drove up to the first victim at a gallop and abruptly reined in his bony, broken-down nag. His face bore a merry grin.

Rimsky knocked his head with his fist, spat, and sprang away from the window. For some time he sat at his desk, listening to the sounds in the street. The whistling rose to its shrillest at various points, then it began to subside. To Rimsky's astonishment, the scandal was coming to an unexpectedly speedy end.

It was time to act, to drink the bitter cup of reckoning. The telephone service had been restored during the third part of the program. He had to call, report what had happened, ask for help, lie, dodge, back out of responsibility, blame everything on Likhodeyev to save himself, and so on. The devil take it all!

Twice the thoroughly upset manager put his hand on the receiver, and twice he withdrew it. And suddenly, in the dead silence of the office, the telephone itself burst out ringing in his face. The financial manager jumped and turned numb. "My nerves are shot to hell!" he thought, lifting the receiver. But he recoiled from it at once and turned whiter than paper. A low, insinuating, lewd female voice whispered into the receiver:

"Don't telephone anywhere, Rimsky, or you'll be sorry. . . ."

The receiver went dead at once. Feeling as if ants were running up and down his back, the financial manager put down the receiver and for some reason glanced back at the window behind him. Through the still sparse young foliage of the maple outside he saw the moon racing through a transparent cloud. His eyes fixed on the branches, Rimsky stared and the longer he stared, the stronger the fear that gripped him.

With a great effort, the financial manager finally turned away from the moonlit window and got up. There could no longer be any question of calling anyone, and his only thought now was to get away from the theater as quickly as he could.

He listened: the theater building was silent. Rimsky realized that he had been alone on the entire second floor for a long time, and a childish, unreasoning terror swept over him. He could not think without dread of the walk alone down the empty corridors and stairways. Feverishly he seized the hypnotist's chervontsy from the table, stuffed them into his briefcase and coughed to bolster his courage. The sound that came was hoarse and feeble.

And now it seemed to him that a rancid dampness was drifting into the office from under the door. A shiver ran down his back. The clock suddenly shattered the silence and began to strike midnight, and even the striking of the clock made him shudder. But his heart dropped altogether when he heard a key being turned cautiously in the lock. Clutching his briefcase with moist, cold hands, the financial manager felt that if the scraping in the key-hole lasted any longer, he would lose all remnants of self-control and burst into a piercing scream.

At last the door yielded to someone's effort, opened, and Varenuha walked noiselessly into the office. Rimsky's legs gave way and he collapsed into his chair. Gathering air into his lungs, he uttered quietly, with an oddly ingratiating smile:

"God, how you startled me. . . ."

Indeed, such a sudden appearance could have startled anyone. Nevertheless, it was a great joy: at least one end of the tangled skein was coming to the surface.

"But tell me, hurry! Well? Well?" Rimsky moaned, grasping at this end. "What does it all mean?"

"Forgive me, please," the man replied in a hollow voice, closing the door. "I thought you were gone."

And, without removing his cap, Varenuvka walked to the armchair and sat down at the other side of the desk.

It must be said that there was a slight incongruity in Varenuvka's answer, which immediately stung the mind of the financial manager, who easily could have competed in sensitivity with the best seismographs in the world. What did it mean? Why did Varenuvka come to his office if he thought he was out? One, he had his own office. And two, whatever door Varenuvka may have used in entering the building, he should have passed one of the night watchmen, who had been told that Grigory Danilovich would be in his office until late. But Rimsky did not linger on this incongruity; he had too many other things to think of.

"But why didn't you telephone? What is the meaning of all that idiotic rigmarole about Yalta?"

"Well, it is just as I said," the house manager answered, sucking at his lip as though he were troubled by a sore tooth. "He was found in a tavern in Pushkino."

"In Pushkino? Just outside Moscow? And what about the telegrams from Yalta?"

"Oh, hell, there isn't any Yalta! He got the telegraph clerk in Pushkino dead drunk and both of them began to carry on disgracefully, brawling and sending telegrams marked 'Yalta.'"

"Aha . . . Aha . . . I see, I see . . ." Rimsky sang out. His eyes lit up with yellow sparks. In his mind's eye he already saw the happy picture of Styopa's ignominious dismissal. Liberation at last! The long-awaited liberation of the financial manager from that disaster called Likhodayev! And who knew, perhaps Stepan Bogdanovich would even get a taste of something worse than mere

dismissal. . . . "Give me the details!" Rimsky said, banging the paperweight on the table.

And Varenuvka began to relate the details. As soon as he had arrived at the place where he had been sent by the financial manager, he was immediately admitted and given a most attentive hearing. Of course, no one gave the slightest credence to the idea that Styopa could really be in Yalta. Everybody agreed at once with Varenuvka's idea that Likhodeyev was of course in the Yalta restaurant in Pushkino.

"But where is he now?" broke in the financial manager.

"Where can he be?" the house manager answered with a crooked grin. "Naturally, in the clink, sobering up!"

"Well, well! But thank you!"

Varenuvka continued his story, and the more he spoke, the more vividly the chain of Likhodeyev's scandalous antics and outrages unfolded before the financial manager. And every link in this chain was worse than the preceding one. There was the drunken dance with the telegrapher, their arms around each other, on the lawn before the telegraph office in Pushkino to the music of a wretched itinerant hurdy-gurdy! Then the chase after some women, who ran from them screeching with terror! The attempt at a fistfight with the bartender in the Yalta itself! The scattering of scallions all over the Yalta floor. The smashing of eight bottles of white dry Ai-Daniel. The breaking of the meter in the taxi whose driver refused to serve Styopa. The threat to get the citizens who tried to put a stop to his abominations arrested . . . In short, a fright and a disgrace!

Styopa had a reputation in Moscow theatrical circles, and everybody knew that the man was no gift to humanity. Nevertheless, what the house manager was telling about him was too much even for Styopa. Yes, too much, far too much, in fact . . .

Rimsky's needle-sharp eyes drilled the face of the house manager, and the longer the latter spoke, the darker the eyes became. The more lifelike and colorful the nasty details with which the house manager embellished his

tale, the less the listener believed him. And when Varenuvha reported that Styopa had even gone to the length of resisting those who had come to take him back to Moscow, Rimsky knew without a shadow of doubt that all the stories of the house manager who had returned to the theater at midnight were a string of lies! Lies from beginning to end!

Varenuvha had not gone to Pushkino, and Styopa himself had never been in Pushkino. There had been no drunken telegraph clerk, no broken glass in the tavern. Styopa had not been bound with ropes. . . . Nothing of the kind had ever happened.

But as soon as the financial manager became convinced that Varenuvha was lying to him, fear crawled up his body again, from his feet up, and twice it seemed to him again that a rank, malarial damp was drifting across the floor. Without removing his eyes for a moment from the house manager, who was going through strange contortions in his chair trying to stay within the bluish dusk cast by the shade of the table lamp and screening himself in an odd manner with a newspaper against the supposedly disturbing glare, Rimsky was possessed by a single thought: what did it all mean? Why had the house manager returned so late, and why was he lying to him so shamelessly in the deserted, silent building? And a sense of danger, of some unknown but awesome danger crept into Rimsky's heart. Pretending that he did not notice Varenuvha's dodges and tricks with the newspaper, the financial manager studied his face, now almost without listening to his words. He discovered something that seemed even more incomprehensible than the slanderous tale, invented for no discernible reason, of the exploits in Pushkino, and that was the change in the house manager's appearance and manners.

No matter how diligently the latter pulled down the duckbill visor of his cap over his eyes to shade his face, no matter how he manipulated the newspaper, the financial manager succeeded in catching sight of a huge dark bruise on his right cheek, right next to the nose. Besides,

the usually ruddy house manager was now pale with a chalky, sickly pallor, and his neck was for some reason wrapped on this sultry night with an old striped muffler. All this, along with the most repulsive manner of sucking and smacking his lips, acquired by the house manager during his absence, the sharp change in his voice, which had become rough and hollow, and the thievish, cowardly expression in his eyes had made Ivan Savelievich Vareukha downright unrecognizable.

Something else filled Rimsky with burning anxiety, but, strain his feverish mind as he could, stare as he could at Vareukha, he could not identify it. The only thing he could say with certainty was that there was something grotesque and unnatural in this combination of the house manager and the familiar chair.

"Well, they finally overcame him and got him into the car," boomed Vareukha, peeking out from behind the newspaper and covering the bruise with his hand.

Rimsky suddenly put out his hand and, while his fingers tapped on the table, his palm—as though by mere chance—pressed the electric bell button. And instantly he went numb: the sharp signal should have reverberated through the empty building, but no sound came. The button sank lifelessly into the surface of the table. It was dead, the bell was out of order.

The financial manager's stratagem did not escape Vareukha, who asked with a twitch, while an unmistakably malicious spark flashed in his eyes:

"What are you ringing for?"

"Just by accident," the financial manager answered hoarsely, snatching away his hand. And then he asked in turn, in a shaking voice: "What's that on your face?"

"The car skidded, I fell against the door handle," Vareukha said, looking away.

"He is lying!" the financial manager exclaimed to himself. And suddenly his eyes became round and he stared insanely at the back of the chair.

On the floor behind the chair lay two crossed shadows, one darker and more dense, the other faint and gray. The

back of the chair and its pointed legs were clearly outlined on the floor, but over the chair there was no shadow of Varenuvka's head, just as under it there were no shadows of his feet.

"He casts no shadow!" Rimsky cried out desperately in his mind. He began to shake.

Varenuvka threw a stealthy glance behind him, following Rimsky's insane stare, and realized that he had been discovered. He rose from the chair (the financial manager did the same) and retreated a step from the table, clutching the briefcase in his hands.

"You guessed it, damn you! You've always been sharp," Varenuvka said with a vicious grin. Then he suddenly leaped back to the door and quickly pushed down the button of the patent lock. Rimsky looked back desperately, retreating to the window facing the garden. But in this window, flooded with moonlight, he saw the face of a naked woman pressed to the pane, and her bare arm reaching in through the transom trying to open the lower bolt. The upper one was already open.

It seemed to Rimsky that the light in the table lamp was guttering and that the desk was slanting sideways. A cold wave flooded him, but, luckily for himself, he managed to regain control and did not fall. He had just strength enough to whisper—he could no longer cry out—"Help . . ."

Varenuvka, guarding the door, hopped up and down near it, staying up in the air for a long time and swaying in it. He waved his hooked fingers at Rimsky, hissed and smacked, and winked to the woman in the window. She hurried, stuck her red head into the transom, stretched her hand as far as she could and began to claw at the lower bolt with her nails, shaking the window frame. Her arm began to elongate as though made of rubber and became covered with the putrid greenness of a corpse. At last the dead woman's green fingers seized the head of the bolt, turned it, and the frame began to give. Rimsky leaned against the wall with a weak cry,

holding out his briefcase like a shield. He knew this was his end.

The frame opened wide, but instead of the fresh night air and linden fragrance, the room was invaded by a dank cellar smell. The dead woman stepped up on the window sill. Rimsky could clearly see the stains of putrefaction on her breast.

At this moment a sudden joyous cockcrow came from the garden, from the low building behind the shooting gallery where the theater kept the birds used in the programs. The trained rooster trumpeted his loud call, proclaiming the dawn about to roll over Moscow from the east.

Wild fury distorted the woman's face. She uttered a hoarse curse, and Varenuvha at the door squealed and dropped to the floor.

The cockcrow was repeated, the woman clacked her teeth and her red hair stood up over her head. At the third cockcrow she turned and flew out. Behind her, hopping up and stretching horizontally in the air, Varenuvha, resembling a flying cupid, slowly floated out over the desk and through the window.

Hair white as snow, without a single black one, the old man who had only a short while ago been Rimsky ran to the door, pushed up the button of the lock, opened the door and rushed out along the dark corridor. Moaning with terror, he felt for the switch at the turn to the staircase and the light went on. On the stairs the trembling, shivering old man fell because it seemed to him that Varenuvha had dropped softly upon him from above.

Below, Rimsky saw the watchman asleep on a chair in the lobby near the box office. Rimsky stole past him on tiptoe and slipped out through the main entrance. In the street he felt slightly relieved. He recovered sufficiently to realize, as he clutched his head, that he had left his hat in the office.

Naturally, he did not return for it. He ran gasping across the wide street to the opposite corner near the motion picture theater where a dim reddish light was

blinking. A moment later he was near it: no one had intercepted the taxicab.

"Leningrad express, I'll tip you," the old man gasped heavily, his hand over his heart.

"I'm going back to the garage," the driver answered with repugnance and turned away.

Rimsky unlatched his briefcase, took fifty rubles and held them out to the driver through the open front window.

A few moments later the jangling car flew like a whirlwind along the Sadovoye Circle. The passenger was shaken in his seat, and in the splinter of a mirror before the driver Rimsky saw now the pleased eyes of the driver, now his own frenzied ones.

Jumping out of the taxi before the station, Rimsky cried to the first man with a badge and a white apron:

"First class, one, I'll give you thirty." He pulled out the chervontsy from his briefcase, crumpling them in his fingers. "If there are no first-class tickets, get second class. . . . If there are none, take one for the hard-seat car!"

The man with the badge snatched the chervontsy from Rimsky's hands, glancing over his shoulder at the clock.

Five minutes later the express train pulled out from under the glass cupola and vanished utterly in the dark. And Rimsky vanished with it.

Chapter 15

NIKANOR IVANOVICH

It isn't difficult to guess that the fat man with the purple face who had been placed in room 119 at the hospital was Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy.

However, he came to Professor Stravinsky after a preliminary stay at another place. Little remained in the memory of Nikanor Ivanovich of this other place. All he remembered was a desk, a bookcase, and a sofa.

An attempt at a talk with Nikanor Ivanovich had been made at that place. But waves of darkness washed over his eyes from the blood rushing up to his head and his state of extreme agitation, and the conversation turned out to be strange and confused. In fact, nothing came of it at all.

The first question put to Nikanor Ivanovich was this:

"Are you Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy, chairman of the house committee at 302-b Sadovaya?"

Nikanor Ivanovich burst into a fit of wild laughter and answered:

"I am Nikanor, of course I am Nikanor! But what sort of a chairman am I, the devil take it?"

"What do you mean," the interrogator asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Just that," he said. "If I were a chairman, I should have seen at once that he was the unholy one! What else? A cracked pince-nez, all in rags—what kind of an interpreter could he be with the foreigner?"

"Who are you talking about?" they asked Nikanor Ivanovich.

"Koroviev!" he cried. "He's taken up residence in apartment Number 50! Write it down—Koroviev! He must be caught immediately. Write: sixth front entrance. That's where he is."

"Where did you get foreign exchange?" the interrogator asked Nikanor Ivanovich in a warm, intimate voice.

"God, the true and the almighty," Nikanor Ivanovich pattered, "sees everything, and it serves me right. I never had it in my hands, and never knew the looks of it. Foreign exchange! The Lord is punishing me for my foul sins," Nikanor Ivanovich went on with feeling, now buttoning, now unbuttoning his shirt and crossing himself. "I did, I did take bribes! I did, but always in our own Soviet money! I registered for pay, I won't deny it, it happened. And our secretary Prolezhnev is a good one too! I'll tell you straight out—everybody in the house management's a thief. . . . But foreign exchange, no, I never took that!"

When he was told to stop playing the fool but to tell how dollars had gotten into the ventilation flue, Nikanor Ivanovich dropped on his knees and swayed, opening his mouth as if he meant to swallow the floor tile.

"If you want me to," he brayed, "I'll eat the earth to prove I didn't take it. And Koroviev—he's the devil!"

There is a limit to patience, and the voice behind the desk was raised, hinting to Nikanor Ivanovich that it was time for him to start talking sense.

Suddenly the room with the sofa was filled with the wild roar of Nikanor Ivanovich, who had jumped up from his knees:

"There! There he is behind the bookcase! Look at him grinning! And his pince-nez . . . Hold him! Spray the room with holy water!"

The blood left his face. Trembling, he kept making the sign of the cross over the room, rushed to the door and back, intoned a prayer and, finally, began to rave altogether.

It became quite clear that Nikanor Ivanovich was totally unfit for any conversation. He was led out and

placed in a separate room, where he calmed down a little and merely prayed and sobbed.

Of course, they went to Sadovaya and examined apartment Number 50. But they found no Koroviev there, and no one in the house had seen or knew of any Koroviev. The apartment occupied by the late Berlioz and by Likhodeyev, who had gone on a trip to Yalta, was empty, and in the study the seals, untampered with, hung peacefully on the cabinets and bookcases. They left with nothing, but in the company of the crushed and frightened secretary of the house management committee Prolezhnev.

In the evening Nikanor Ivanovich was delivered to Stravinsky's hospital. There he behaved in such a violently disturbed manner that it was necessary to give him an injection of Stravinsky's prescription, and it was only after midnight that Nikanor Ivanovich fell asleep in room 119, a heavy, anguished moan escaping from his lips from time to time.

But his anxiety communicated itself to room 120, where the patient awakened and began to look for his head, and to room 118, where the unknown Master wrung his hands in agony, looking at the moon and recalling the bitter autumn night, the last of his life, the streak of light under the basement door, and the uncurled strands of hair.

From room 118 the restlessness flew across the balcony to Ivan, and he awakened and began to cry.

But the doctor quickly calmed all those troubled sufferers of the soul, and they began to drop off into sleep. Ivan was the last to sink into forgetfulness, just as the dawn was rising over the river. After the medicine suffused his body, peace came to him like an engulfing wave. His limbs grew light, and slumber wafted its warm breezes over his head. He fell asleep, and the last thing he heard was the pre-dawn twittering of the birds in the wood. But soon they were silent, and he began to dream that the sun was already setting over Bald Mountain, and the mountain was surrounded by a double cordon....

Chapter 16

THE EXECUTION

The sun was already setting over Bald Mountain, and the mountain was surrounded by a double cordon.

The cavalry ala which had crossed the Procurator's path at midday came out at a trot to the city gate leading to Hebron. The road had been cleared in advance for its passage. The foot soldiers of the Cappadocian Cohort had pressed aside the thronging multitudes of people, mules and camels, and the ala, raising white columns of dust, trotted out to the crossing of two roads: one leading south, to Bethphage, the other northwest, to Jaffa. The ala galloped northwest. The Cappadocians ranged along the edges of the road had driven all the caravans off the highway, which were hastening to Yershalayim for the holiday. Crowds of pilgrims now came out of their temporary tents, pitched directly on the grass, and stood behind the Cappadocians. About a kilometer up the road, the ala overtook the Second Cohort of the Lightning-Swift Legion and, after another kilometer, it galloped up first to the foot of the hill known as Bald Mountain. Here it dismounted. The commander split the ala into platoons and they surrounded the low hill, leaving open only the approach from the Jaffa road.

A little later the Second Cohort came up behind the ala; it proceeded higher and encircled the hill like a crown.

Last to arrive was the century commanded by Mark Rat-Killer. Extended in two chains, it walked along the edges of the road, and between these chains, under a con-

voy of the secret guard, rode three condemned men in a cart, with white boards on their chests, bearing the words "Outlaw and Rebel" in two languages—Greek and Aramaic.

Behind the cart with the condemned came others, loaded with freshly hewn posts with crossbars, ropes, spades, pails, and axes. Six executioners rode in these carts. Behind them on horseback rode the Centurion Mark, the chief of the temple guard of Yershalayim, and the cowed man with whom Pilate had spoken briefly in the darkened palace chamber.

The procession was closed by a chain of soldiers, followed by about two thousand curious onlookers undeterred by the scorching heat and anxious to witness an interesting spectacle. This crowd was now swelled by curious pilgrims who were permitted to join the tail end of the procession. Under the shrill calls of the criers accompanying the column and repeating the words shouted by Pilate at noon, the procession crept up Bald Mountain.

The ala allowed everyone into the upper ring, but the Second Century permitted only those who were directly involved in the execution to go on to the summit of the hill. Then, with deft maneuvers, it scattered the onlookers around the entire hill, so that they found themselves between the infantry cordon above and the cavalry below. Now they could watch the execution from behind the spaced-out row of infantry.

More than three hours had gone by since the procession ascended the hill, and the sun was already declining, although the heat was still unbearable. The soldiers in both cordons, tormented by the heat, bored and exhausted, cursed the three outlaws in their hearts, sincerely wishing them the speediest death.

The little commander of the ala had taken up his station near the open section of the ascent, at the foot of the hill. His brow moist and the back of his white shirt dark with perspiration, he went again and again to the leather pail of the first platoon, dipped water from it with cupped hands, drank it and poured it on his turban.

Somewhat relieved, he would resume his pacing of the dusty road leading to the summit. His long sword tapped against his laced leather boot. The commander wanted to give his men an example of endurance. However, taking pity on his soldiers, he permitted them to build improvised tents by driving their lances crisscross into the ground, forming pyramids, and covering them with their white cloaks. In these tents the Syrians took shelter from the merciless sun. The pails were quickly emptied, and cavalymen of different units took turns going down to the ravine behind the hill, where a muddy brook seemed to be trickling out its last in the thin shade of a scraggly mulberry tree. The grooms were also there, weary and bored, trying to stay under the shifting shadows, and even the horses they held were subdued.

The soldiers' boredom and their curses at the outlaws were understandable. The Procurator's apprehensions concerning possible disorders in the hated city of Yershalayim at the time of the execution had fortunately proved unjustified. And when the fourth hour of the execution came, despite all expectations not a single man remained at the foot of the hill between the two chains of the cordon. The sun had melted the crowd away and driven it back to Yershalayim. Behind the chain of the Roman centuries there remained only two dogs of unknown ownership, who had somehow made their way up the hill. But they were also breathless with the heat. They lay with hanging tongues, panting and paying no attention to the green-backed lizards, the only creatures unafraid of the sun and darting back and forth among the fiery rocks and long-spined creeping vines.

No one had made any attempt to rescue the condemned either in Yershalayim itself, which was flooded with armed soldiers, or here, on the guarded hill. The crowd had returned to the city, for there was truly nothing interesting in this execution, and in the city preparations were already in progress for the great holiday of Passover which was to begin that evening.

The Roman infantry in the upper ring suffered even

more than the cavalry below. The only relief the centurion Rat-Killer had allowed his men was to remove their helmets and cover their heads with moistened white cloths. However, he kept them standing, their lances in their hands. He himself, wearing a similar cloth, but dry, was pacing not far from the group of executioners. He did not even remove the breastplates with the silver lion heads from his tunic: nor did he remove his leggings, nor his sword and knife. The sun beat down on the centurion without effect, and the lion heads were intolerable to look at—the eye was blinded by the blaze of silver boiling in the sun.

Rat-Killer's mutilated face expressed neither fatigue nor irritation, and it seemed that the giant centurion was capable of pacing thus all day, all night, and yet another day—in short, as long as necessary. He paced, with his hands on the heavy belt adorned with copper disks, glancing up sternly now at the posts with the executed men, now at the soldiers in the chain, indifferently kicking away with the toe of his shaggy boot the time-bleached human bones or pebbles that rolled under his feet.

The cowled man had settled down on a three-legged stool not far from the execution posts and sat there, benignly immobile. From time to time, however, he poked at the sand with a twig from sheer boredom.

What has been said before—that not a single man remained behind the legionaries—was not entirely accurate. There was one man, but few could see him. He found a place for himself not on the side where the ascent to the hill was open and where the execution could be watched most comfortably, but on the northern slope, which was not gentle and accessible, but craggy, with gaps and crevasses, in one of which a sickly fig tree tried desperately to live, clutching at the heaven-cursed waterless earth.

It was under this fig tree, which gave no shade at all, that this sole onlooker who was not a participant in the execution had established himself. And here he sat upon

a stone from the very beginning, for the fourth hour now. Yes, he had chosen the worst rather than the best position for watching the execution. Nevertheless, he could see the posts from here as well, and he could see the two flashing spots on the centurion's chest behind the chain of soldiers, and this was evidently quite enough for the man, who clearly wished to remain unnoticed and unmolested by anyone.

But four hours earlier, when the execution was just beginning, this man had conducted himself quite differently and drew notice to himself. Perhaps this was why he had changed his manner and secluded himself.

At that earlier hour, as soon as the procession had reached the summit of the hill beyond the upper cordon, he had made his first appearance, behaving like a man who was obviously late. Breathing heavily, he did not walk but ran up the hill, pushing others aside. When he saw the chain closing before him, as it did before all the others, he made a naive attempt—pretending he did not understand the angry warning shouts—to break past the soldiers to the very place of the execution, where the condemned were already being taken down from the carts. For this he was given a heavy blow on the chest with the blunt end of a spear, and he jumped back from the soldiers with a cry, not of pain but of despair. His eyes, as he glanced at the legionary who had struck him, were unseeing and utterly indifferent to everything, as though he were a man insensible to physical pain.

Coughing and panting, clutching at his chest, he ran around the hill, trying to find an opening in the cordon on the northern slope where he could slip through. But it was too late, the chain had closed. And the man, his face contorted with grief, was compelled to abandon his attempts to break through to the carts, from which the posts had already been taken. These attempts would have resulted in nothing but his capture, and it was certainly in no way part of his plan to be arrested that day.

And so he withdrew to the side, toward the crevasse

where it was quiet and where no one would interfere with him.

Sitting on the rock, this black-bearded man with eyes inflamed from too much sun and lack of sleep, was torn with anguish. Now he sighed, opening his tallith, grown ragged in his wanderings and turned from pale-blue to dirty gray, exposing his bruised chest dripping with muddy perspiration. Now, racked with intolerable pain, he raised his eyes to the sky, following the movements of the three vultures that had long been floating in wide circles high above, in anticipation of the imminent feast. And now he stared hopelessly at the yellow earth, the half-decayed skull of a dog and the lizards scurrying around it.

The man's suffering was so great that now and then he would cry out to himself.

"Fool that I am," he muttered, rocking on the stone in mental torment and tearing his swarthy chest with his nails. "Fool, senseless woman, coward! I am a piece of carrion, not a man!"

He would fall silent and his head would drop. Then, drinking some warm water from a wooden flask, he would recover again and clutch, now at the knife concealed on his chest under the tallith, now at the piece of parchment lying before him on the stone with a stylus and a vial of ink.

Several entries had already been made on the parchment:

"The minutes fly, and I, Matthu Levi, am on Bald Mountain. But death still does not come!"

Further:

"The sun is setting, but death does not come."

Now Matthu Levi hopelessly wrote with the sharp stylus:

"Lord! Why dost Thou turn Thy wrath against him? Send him death."

Having written this, he uttered a dry sob and once more tore his breast with his nails.

The reason for Levi's despair lay in the dreadful misfortune that had befallen Yeshua and him, and also in the

great mistake he felt he had committed. Two days earlier Yeshua and Levi had been in Bethphage near Yershalayim, where they had visited a certain gardener who had admired Yeshua's sermons immensely. All morning both guests had worked in the garden, helping their host, and planning, when the cool of evening fell, to go on to Yershalayim. But for some reason Yeshua began to hurry, saying that he had urgent business in the city, and he had left alone at midday. This had been Matthu Levi's first mistake. Why, why had he allowed him to go alone?

In the evening Matthu could not go to Yershalayim. A sudden violent illness struck him down. He shivered, his body was on fire, his teeth chattered and he kept asking for water.

He could not go anywhere. He dropped on a horse-cloth in the gardener's shed and lay there until dawn on Friday, when the illness left him as suddenly as it had come. Although he was still weak and his legs were shaky, he bid his host good-by, tormented by some premonition of misfortune, and walked to Yershalayim. There he learned that the premonition had not deceived him; the misfortune had struck. Levi was in the crowd which heard the Procurator pronounce the sentence.

When the condemned were taken to the mountain, Matthu Levi ran alongside the chain through the crowd of curious onlookers, trying somehow imperceptibly to give a sign to Yeshua that at least he, Levi, was there, with him, that he had not abandoned him on his last journey, and that he prayed that death would come to him speedily. But Yeshua, who looked ahead toward the spot where he was being taken, did not see Levi.

And then, when the procession had gone part of the way along the road, Matthu, who was elbowed and shoved in the crowd right by the chain of soldiers, conceived a simple but perfect idea. And immediately, hot-headed as usual, he showered himself with curses for not thinking of it sooner. The soldiers did not walk in closed ranks; there were spaces between them. With some exercise of agility and careful aim, it was possible, by ducking, to slip

in between two legionaries, rush to the cart and jump into it. Then Yeshua could be spared the torture.

One instant would be enough to plunge a knife into Yeshua's back, with the cry, "Yeshua! I save you and go together with you! I, Matthu, your true and only disciple!"

And if God should bless him with but another free instant, he might have time enough to kill himself as well, escaping death on the post. This, however, was of little concern to Levi, the former tax collector. It made no difference to him how he would die. His only desire was that Yeshua, who had never harmed anyone, escape the agony in store for him.

The plan was excellent, but the trouble was that Levi did not have a knife. Nor did he have a single coin to buy one.

Raging at himself, Levi pushed his way out of the crowd and ran back to town. His fevered head was burning with a single thought: he must at once find some way, any way, to get a knife in town and hurry back in time to catch up with the procession.

He ran up to the city, dodging among the milling caravans that were being sucked in through the gates and on his left he caught sight of an open door to a small shop where bread was sold. Breathing heavily after the run along the glaring road, Levi composed himself and walked sedately into the shop. He greeted the woman behind the counter and asked her to take down from the shelf the topmost loaf, which for some reason pleased him most. When she turned, he silently and quickly snatched from the counter the best thing he could find—a long bread knife, honed to razor sharpness—and rushed out of the shop.

A few minutes later he was again upon the Jaffa road. But he could no longer see the procession. He ran. At moments he had to drop down in the dust and lie motionless to regain his breath. And so he lay there, to the astonishment of the people streaming toward Yershalayim on foot and on mules. He lay, listening to the hammering

of his heart not only in his breast but also in his head and ears. Having recovered a little, he jumped up and ran again, but more and more slowly. When he had finally caught sight of the long procession raising a cloud of dust in the distance, it was already at the foot of the hill.

"Oh, God! . . ." moaned Levi, realizing that he would be late. And he was late.

When the fourth hour of the execution had gone by, Levi's torment reached its utmost limit and he fell into a rage. Jumping up from the rock, he flung away what now seemed to him the uselessly stolen knife, crushed the flask with his foot, depriving himself of water, threw off the kaffiyeh from his head, clutched his sparse hair and began to curse himself.

He cursed himself, shouting senseless words, growling and spitting, berating his father and mother who had brought a fool into the world.

Seeing that the abuse and curses were of no avail and altered nothing under the scorching sun, he tightly closed his eyes, clenched his lean fists and raised them up to heaven, to the sun which crept down lower and lower, lengthening the shadows and drawing away to fall at last into the Mediterranean Sea. He stood there and demanded an immediate miracle from God. He demanded that God send Yeshua instant death.

When he opened his eyes, he saw that nothing had changed on the hill but for the flashing spots on the centurion's chest, which had gone out. The sun was now sending its rays at the backs of the victims, whose faces were turned toward Yershalayim. Then Levi cried:

"I curse Thee, Lord!"

In a rasping voice he shouted that he was now convinced of God's injustice and henceforth refused to believe in Him.

"Thou art deaf!" growled Levi. "If Thou wert not deaf, Thou wouldst have heard me and killed him on the spot!"

His eyes closed tightly, Levi waited for the bolt of fire from on high to strike him down. This did not happen,

and, without opening his eyes, Levi continued to shout insults and imprecations at the heavens. He cried that he was now completely disillusioned and that there were other gods and other religions on earth. No, another god would never have allowed a man like Yeshua to be consumed by the heat of the sun on a post.

"I was mistaken!" shouted Levi, now altogether hoarse. "Thou art the God of evil! Or have Thine eyes been blinded totally by the smoke of the Temple's incense burners, and Thine ears have ceased to hear anything but the trumpet blasts of the priests? Thou art not an omnipotent God! Thou art a black God! I curse Thee, God of thieves, their soul and protector!"

But now something blew into the face of the former tax collector and something rustled at his feet. There was another gust of wind and Levi, opening his eyes, saw that everything around had changed, whether in answer to his curses or for other reasons. The sun had vanished before it reached the sea in which it drowned every evening. The storm cloud that had swallowed it rose steadily and menacingly from the west. Its edges were already seething with white foam; its smoke-black belly was tinged with yellow. The cloud rumbled and from time to time fiery threads shot out of it. Along the Jaffa road, along the dreary Valley of Hinnom, over the pilgrims' tents, columns of dust were driven by the sudden wind.

Levi fell silent, asking himself whether the storm about to break over Yershalayim would cause any change in the destiny of the unfortunate Yeshua. And then, watching the fiery threads splitting the cloud, he began to pray that a bolt of lightning strike Yeshua's post. In desperate repentance, looking at the clear portion of the sky still undevoured by the cloud, where the vultures sailed on the wind to flee the storm, Levi thought that he had been too hasty with his curses; now God would not listen to him.

Turning his eyes to the foot of the hill, Levi stared at the place where the cavalry regiment was stationed, and found that significant changes had taken place. From

above, Levi could clearly see the soldiers hurriedly drawing their lances from the earth and putting on their cloaks; he also saw the grooms running toward the road, leading the black horses by their halters. The regiment was about to leave—that was clear. Levi, spitting and shielding his face with his hand from the driving dust, tried to understand what the withdrawal of the cavalry might mean. He looked up higher and discerned a small figure in a scarlet military chlamys ascending to the execution ground. And the heart of the former tax collector turned cold with premonition of the joyous end.

The man climbing the mountain in the fifth hour of the agony of the outlaws was the commander of the cohort who had come riding from Yershalayim accompanied by his aide. At a motion from Rat-Killer, the chain of soldiers opened and the centurion saluted the Tribune. The latter drew Rat-Killer aside and whispered something to him. The centurion saluted a second time and moved toward the group of executioners sitting on rocks at the foot of the posts. The Tribune walked toward him who sat on the three-legged stool, and the man politely rose to greet him. The Tribune said something in a low voice to him as well, and both went toward the posts. They were joined by the chief of the temple guard.

Rat-Killer threw a squeamish glance at the dirty rags heaped on the ground near the posts—rags which had recently been the garments of the criminals and which the executioners refused to take—and called aside two of them, ordering:

“Follow me!”

From the nearest post came a hoarse senseless song. Gestas, driven out of his mind in the third hour of the execution by flies and the sun, was now singing something quietly about grapes, but his head, covered by a turban, still swayed from time to time, and then the flies lazily rose from his face for a moment, only to settle on it again.

Dismas, on the second post, suffered more than the others because he remained conscious, and he rocked his

head rapidly and steadily, now right, now left, so that his ears would hit his shoulders.

Yeshua was the most fortunate of the three. He had begun to suffer blackouts during the very first hour. Then he lost consciousness, and his head in its partly unwound turban dropped on his chest. The flies had therefore covered his entire face, so that the face had disappeared under the black, stirring mask. Fat gadflies sat on his groin, his belly, and his underarms and sucked the yellow naked body.

Obeying a sign from the cowled man, one of the executioners took a spear, and another brought a pail and a sponge to the post. The first executioner raised his spear and tapped it on Yeshua's arms, which were extended and tied with ropes to the crossbar. The body with the arching ribs quivered. The executioner passed the tip of the spear across the belly. Then Yeshua raised his head, the flies rose, buzzing, and the hanged man's face was exposed to view. It was bloated from the bites, with swollen eyelids, unrecognizable.

Ungluing his lids, Ha-Nozri looked down. His eyes, always clear, were now blurred.

"Ha-Nozri!" said the executioner.

Ha-Nozri's swollen lips moved and he answered in a ruffian's harsh voice:

"What do you want? Why did you come to me?"

"Drink!" said the executioner, and the water-soaked sponge at the end of the spear rose to Yeshua's lips. Joy flashed in his eyes, he seized the sponge with his lips and greedily began to draw in the moisture. From the next post came Dismas' voice:

"Unjust! I am an outlaw like him!"

Dismas strained, but could not stir; his arms were held to the crossbars in three places by rings of rope. He drew in his stomach, sank his nails into the ends of the crossbars, and turned his head toward Yeshua's post. Hate burned in his eyes.

A cloud of dust covered the place of execution, and

it turned dark. When the dust blew away, the centurion shouted:

“Silence on the second post!”

Dismas fell silent. Yeshua tore himself away from the sponge and, trying to make his voice sound gentle and persuasive, but failing in the attempt, he hoarsely begged the executioner:

“Give him a drink.”

It was growing darker and darker. The cloud had already covered half the sky, streaming toward Yershalayim. White seething clouds flew ahead of the black mass laden with rain and fire. There was a flash and a burst of thunder over the hill. The executioner removed the sponge from the spear.

“Praise the merciful Hegemon!” he whispered solemnly and gently pricked Yeshua in the heart. Yeshua quivered and whispered:

“Hegemon . . .”

Blood ran down his belly, his lower jaw shook convulsively, and his head dropped.

At the second peal of thunder the executioner was already giving Dismas the wet sponge, and with the same words, “Praise the Hegemon,” he killed him too.

The mad Gestas cried out with fright when the executioner came near him. But when the sponge touched his lips, he growled and sank his teeth into it. A few seconds later, his body also sagged, as much as the ropes allowed.

The cowled man followed the executioner and the centurion. Behind them walked the chief of the temple guard. Halting at the first post, the cowled man attentively examined the bleeding Yeshua, touched the sole of his foot with his white hand, and said to his companions:

“Dead.”

The same procedure was repeated at the other posts.

After that the Tribune made a sign to the centurion and, turning, began to descend from the summit together with the chief of the temple guard and the cowled man. Dusk fell and lightning flashes rent the sky. The black

sky suddenly sprayed fire, and the centurion's shout, "Break the chain!" was drowned in the crashing thunder. The happy soldiers rushed down the hill, putting on their helmets.

Darkness shrouded Yershalayim.

The downpour came suddenly and found the centuries half-way down the hill. The flood of water was so overwhelming that while the soldiers ran down, raging torrents followed them. The men slipped and fell on the wet clay, hurrying to reach the even road, on which—now barely visible behind the sheet of water—the cavalry, wet to the bone, was riding off to Yershalayim. Within a few minutes, only one man remained on the hill in the steaming mass of storm, fire, and flood.

Shaking the recently stolen knife, slipping off the wet ledges, grasping at anything in reach, at times crawling on his knees, he hurried to the posts. He now disappeared in the pitch blackness, now suddenly was lit by the quivering flashes.

Reaching the posts, already ankle-deep in water, he pulled off his heavy, rain-soaked tallith, remaining only in his shirt, and fell at Yeshua's feet. He cut the ropes binding the legs, stepped up on the lower crossbar, embraced Yeshua and freed his arms of their bonds. Yeshua's wet, naked body collapsed on Levi and threw him to the ground. Levi wanted to lift him to his shoulders at once, but another thought stopped him. He left the body with its head thrown back and outflung arms in the water on the ground and ran, his feet slithering through the clay mud, to the other posts. He cut the ropes there, too, and two bodies toppled down onto the ground.

Several minutes later, nothing remained on the summit save those two bodies and three empty posts. The water beat down on the bodies, turning them where they lay.

Neither Levi nor Yeshua's body were any longer on the hilltop.

Chapter 17

A TROUBLED DAY

On Friday morning, the day after the accursed séance, the entire personnel of the Variety Theater—the bookkeeper Vasily Stepanovich Lastochkin, the two clerks, three typists, cashiers, messengers, ushers, and charwomen—in short, everyone present, sat on the window sills facing Sadovaya and watched what went on below instead of engaging in their usual occupations. Below, crowding along the wall of the theater and stretching all the way to Kudrinsky Square, there was a double queue of prospective ticket buyers. At the head of the queue stood about twenty ticket speculators well known to all theatrical Moscow.

The queue hummed with agitation, attracting the curiosity of the stream of passers-by with its inflammatory tales about the previous night's fantastic demonstration of black magic. These tales were especially embarrassing to the bookkeeper Vasily Stepanovich, who had not attended the show. The ushers talked of incredible events, of ladies running around in the street in indecent attire, and the like. The quiet and modest Vasily Stepanovich only blinked as he listened and simply did not know what to do. Yet something had to be undertaken, and he was the one to do it, since he was now the highest in command left in the theater.

By ten o'clock in the morning the queue of ticket seekers had grown to such proportions that rumors of it had reached the militia. With astonishing speed, both mounted and foot militia units arrived and brought some

semblance of order. But even the orderly line, almost a kilometer long, was in itself an object of great temptation and wonder to the citizens on Sadovaya.

This was in the street. Inside the Variety Theater things were also badly out of joint. From early morning the telephones began to ring, and went on ringing without interruption in Likhodeyev's office, in Rimsky's office, in the bookkeeping section, the ticket office, and Varenuhka's room. At first Vasily Stepanovich mumbled something in reply, as did the cashier and the ushers. But soon they stopped answering altogether, since they had absolutely no information to give as to the whereabouts of Likhodeyev, Varenuhka, or Rimsky. In the beginning they had tried to evade the questions by saying that "Likhodeyev is at home." But they were told that the inquirers had telephoned his home, and were told he was at the theater.

An agitated lady called and demanded to speak to Rimsky. She was advised to call Rimsky's wife, to which the receiver answered, sobbing, that she was Rimsky's wife, and could not find him anywhere. Things were becoming totally absurd. The charwoman had told everyone that when she came to clean up the financial manager's office, she found the door wide open, the lights on, the window into the garden broken, the chair overturned on the floor, and no sign of anyone.

At eleven, Madame Rimsky burst into the theater. She sobbed and wrung her hands. Vasily Stepanovich lost his wits altogether and did not know what to advise her. Half an hour later the militia appeared. Its first and entirely reasonable question was:

"What is happening here, citizens? What's the trouble?"

The theater personnel stepped back, leaving the shaken Vasily Stepanovich to provide the answers. He was obliged to call things by their names and to admit that the entire theater administration, including the director, the financial manager, and the house manager, had vanished and that its whereabouts were unknown; that after

last night's performance, the master of ceremonies had been taken to a psychiatric hospital; and that, in short, the performance had been an out and out scandal.

The weeping Madame Rimsky was calmed down somewhat and sent home. But the militia was most interested in the charwoman's tale of the disorderly state in which she had found the financial manager's office. The theater employees were asked to disperse to their usual places and resume their usual tasks. And after a short time a group of investigating officials appeared at the theater, accompanied by a sharp-eared, muscular dog the color of cigarette ashes, with extremely intelligent eyes. An excited whisper ran throughout the building, spreading the information that the dog was none other than the famous Ace of Diamonds. And indeed, it was. His behavior amazed everyone. As soon as the Ace of Diamonds ran into the financial manager's office, he growled, baring his enormous yellow fangs. Then he crouched on his belly and, with a strange expression of anguish combined with rage in his eyes, he crawled toward the broken window. Overcoming his terror, he suddenly jumped up on the window sill and, lifting his pointed muzzle, broke into a wild and furious howl. He refused to leave the window, growled and quivered, and fought to jump down.

The dog was led out of the office and released in the vestibule, whence he walked out through the front entrance into the street and brought the men who followed him to the taxi stand. There he lost the scent. After that the Ace of Diamonds was taken away.

The investigating commission set itself up in Varenuha's office and began to call in, one by one, all the theater employees who had witnessed the previous night's events during the act. It must be said that the commission had to struggle with unforeseen difficulties at every step. The thread kept breaking in its hands.

Had there been any playbills? Yes. But during the night they had been covered by new ones, and not a single one could be found anywhere now! Where had this magician

come from? Who knows? But there must have been a contract with him?

"I suppose so," answered the distraught Vasily Stepanovich.

"And if a contract had been signed, it must have gone through the bookkeeping department?"

"But certainly," Vasily Stepanovich answered nervously.

"Where is it, then?"

"It's not here," replied the bookkeeper, growing more and more pale and spreading his hands in perplexity.

Indeed, there was no trace of any contract in the files of the bookkeeping department, or in the offices of Likhodeyev, Varenuvka, or the financial manager.

What was the name of the magician? Vasily Stepanovich did not know; he had not attended last night's show. The ushers did not know. The cashier wrinkled her forehead, thought and thought, and finally came out with:

"Wo . . . Woland, I think . . ."

Or perhaps it wasn't Woland? Perhaps it wasn't. It might have been Valand.

At the Foreign Visitors' Office they had never heard of any Woland or Valand or any other magician.

The messenger Karpov reported that this magician was said to be staying at Likhodeyev's apartment. The apartment was, naturally, visited at once, but no magician was found there. Likhodeyev himself was not there, either. Nor was his maid Grunya, and no one knew where she had gone. The chairman of the house committee Nikanor Ivanovich was gone, Prolezhnev was gone!

What it all added up to was totally mystifying: the entire theater management had disappeared; a scandalous performance had been staged the night before, but who produced it, and at whose instigation remained unknown.

And now it was almost noon, when the ticket office was to open. But, of course, this was entirely out of the question! A huge piece of cardboard was posted on the door of the theater, with the announcement that "Today's show is canceled." Agitation spread throughout the queue, beginning with those in front. However, after

some excitement, it began to melt away, and in another hour nothing was left of it on Sadovaya. The investigating commission departed to continue its work elsewhere. The staff was dismissed, leaving only the watchmen. The doors of the Variety Theater were locked.

The bookkeeper Vasily Stepanovich had two urgent tasks to fulfill. First, he had to pay a visit to the Commission on Spectacles and Light Entertainment and report on the previous day's events. Second, he had to go to the financial office of the Entertainment Sector to turn over last night's receipts—twenty-one thousand, seven hundred and eleven rubles.

The neat and efficient Vasily Stepanovich packed the money in a sheet of newspaper, tied the package crisscross with a cord, put it into his briefcase and, fully aware of his instructions, walked to the taxi stand rather than the bus or subway.

The moment the drivers of the three taxis at the stand caught sight of the passenger hurrying toward them with a tightly packed briefcase, all three drove away empty from under his nose, for some reason glancing back at him with loathing.

Struck by their strange behavior, the bookkeeper stood petrified for a long time, trying to puzzle it out.

Three minutes later a free taxi drew up, but the driver's face contorted as soon as he saw the passenger.

"Are you free?" Vasily Stepanovich asked after clearing his throat.

"Let's see your money," the driver snapped without looking at the passenger.

With increasing astonishment, the bookkeeper, pressing the precious briefcase to his side with his elbow, pulled out a chervonets from his wallet and showed it to the driver.

"I won't go!" the latter said curtly.

"Pardon me . . ." the bookkeeper began, but the driver interrupted him:

"D'you have any three-ruble notes?"

Completely flustered, the bookkeeper took two three-

ruble notes from his wallet and showed them to the driver.

"Get in," the driver ordered and threw down the flag so violently that he nearly broke it. "Let's go."

"Are you short of change?" the bookkeeper asked timidly.

"I've got a pocketful of change!" the driver shouted, and the mirror reflected his eyes, getting bloodshot with rage. "Third time it happens to me today. And the same with other drivers. Some son of a bitch gives me a chervonets, and I give him change—four-fifty. He gets out, the bastard! Ten minutes later I look: it's no chervonets, only a label from a Narzan bottle!" The driver reinforced his story with a string of unprintable words. "Then there's another one, behind Zubovskaya. A chervonets again. I give him three rubles change, and he walks away. Then I open my change purse, and a bee flies out and gets me in the finger! Damn . . ." and again the driver interpolated unprintable oaths. "And the chervonets gone too. Last night, they say, some lousy magician (unprintable oaths) did a whole act with a pile of chervontsy at that Variety Theater (unprintable oaths) . . ."

Without another sound, the bookkeeper shrank into himself, trying to look as though he heard the very word "Variety" for the first time in his life, but to himself he thought, "What a business! . . ."

Arriving at his destination and settling with the driver without further difficulty, the bookkeeper entered the building and hurried down the corridor to the chairman's office. But before he reached it, he realized that he had come at the wrong time. The office of the entertainment commission was in an uproar. A woman messenger rushed past him, her kerchief back on her head, her eyes bulging.

"He isn't there, he isn't, he isn't! Not there, my dears!" she screamed, addressing heaven knows whom. "His coat and pants are there, but nothing's in the coat!"

She disappeared in one of the doorways, and the visitor heard the sounds of breaking dishes. The head of the

First Section of the commission, whom the bookkeeper knew, bolted out of the waiting room, but he was in such a state that he did not recognize the bookkeeper and also disappeared somewhere without a trace.

Shaken by all this, the bookkeeper came to the waiting room, which led to the commission chairman's office, and there he was altogether confounded.

From behind the closed door of the office came a furious voice, unquestionably belonging to Prokhor Petrovich, the chairman of the commission. "He must be giving someone hell," thought the bewildered bookkeeper and looked around, only to see another distressing sight. In a leather armchair, her head flung back against it and her legs stretched almost to the middle of the room, the chairman's private secretary, the beautiful Anna Richardovna, lay sobbing uncontrollably, with a wet handkerchief in her hands.

Anna Richardovna's chin was covered with smeared lipstick, and from her eyes black streams of tears mixed with mascara crept down her peach-complexioned cheeks.

Seeing that someone entered, Anna Richardovna jumped up and rushed to the bookkeeper, clutched the lapels of his coat and began to shake him, crying:

"Thank God! At least one brave man! Everybody ran off, everybody betrayed him! Come, come to him, I don't know what to do!" And, still sobbing, she dragged the bookkeeper into the office.

As he stepped in, the bookkeeper's first reaction was to drop his briefcase. All the thoughts in his head turned topsy-turvy. And, it must be said, with good reason.

Behind the enormous desk with the massive inkwell sat an empty suit and with a dry pen undipped in ink traced something on a sheet of paper. The suit wore a tie; the tip of a fountain pen protruded from its pocket. But over the collar there was neither neck nor head, just as there were no hands showing from the cuffs. The suit was absorbed in work and completely oblivious of the wild confusion around it. Hearing that someone entered,

the suit leaned back in the chair and the familiar voice of Prokhor Petrovich came from above the collar:

"What is this? Isn't there a note on the door that I'm not seeing anyone?"

The secretary let out a shriek and wrung her hands:

"You see? You see? He isn't there! He isn't! Bring him back, please bring him back!"

Somebody stepped into the office, gasped and bounced out. The bookkeeper felt that his legs were buckling and he sat down on the edge of a chair, without, however, forgetting to pick up the briefcase. Anna Richardovna was hopping around him, tugging at his coat and wailing:

"I've always, always tried to stop him when he swore! The devil take this, and the devil take that! He's done it now!" She ran up to the desk and cried in a tender, musical voice, slightly nasal from crying:

"Proshal Where are you?"

"Whom do you address as 'Prosha'?" the suit inquired haughtily, sinking deeper into its armchair.

"He doesn't recognize me! Me! You understand? . . ." And she burst into sobs again.

"I must ask you to desist from sobbing in my office!" the hot-tempered striped suit said, flaring up, and with its sleeve it pulled over a fresh pile of papers, evidently intending to affix its resolutions to them.

"Oh, no, I cannot watch it, I can't, I can't!" screamed Anna Richardovna and ran back to the waiting room. The bookkeeper shot out after her like a bullet.

"Just imagine," Anna Richardovna spoke, trembling with agitation and clutching at the bookkeeper's sleeve again. "I sit here, and a tom cat comes in. Black, huge as a hippopotamus. Naturally, I yell, 'scat!' He walks out and instead of him a man walks in, fat, with a cat-face too, and says: 'What is this, citizen, why do you shout "scat" at visitors?' And slips right through to Prokhor Petrovich. Naturally, I run after him and shout, 'Are you crazy?' And he, the brazen lout, walks straight in and sits down in the chair across the desk. Well, you know . . . Prokhor Petrovich is the kindest man alive, but

nervous. He blew up, I won't say he didn't. A nervous man, works like a horse—he blew up. 'Why are you barging in here unannounced?' And the other, the nerve of him, makes himself comfortable in the chair and says, smiling: 'I have a little business to discuss with you.' Prokhor Petrovich flared up again, 'I'm busy.' And then, just think of it, the other says, 'You aren't doing a thing.' . . . Well! Naturally, Prokhor Petrovich exploded and he shouted: 'What the hell is this? Get him out of here, the devil take me!' And the man—can you imagine?—smiles and says: 'The devil take you? Why not, it can be done!' And—bang! I had no time to cry out. I look, the cat-faced fellow is gone, and there, behind the desk, is that . . . that . . . suit . . . Ooo-ooo . . ." And, her now altogether shapeless mouth opening wide, Anna Richardovna howled with grief.

Choking on a sob, she caught her breath and went on with her story, which no longer made any sense at all.

"And now it keeps writing, writing, writing! It's enough to drive you crazy! Talks on the telephone! The suit! And everybody scattered like a bunch of rabbits!"

The bookkeeper just stood there, shaking. But fate came to his rescue. The militia, represented by two men, walked into the secretary's room with a calm, business-like stride. At the sight of them, the secretary sobbed still more bitterly, pointing at the office door.

"Let us stop sobbing, citizen," the first man said calmly, and the bookkeeper, feeling himself quite superfluous there, bounded out of the room. A moment later he was outside, in the fresh air. A draft seemed to be blowing though his head, which hummed like a chimney, and through this humming he heard bits of the ushers' stories about the tom in last night's show. "Ah-h-h! Could it be our tom?"

Having gotten nowhere at the Commission, the conscientious Vasily Stepanovich decided to visit its branch on Vagankovsky Lane. To quiet his nerves, he went there on foot.

The branch office was situated in an old house, peeling

with age. The house, set deep within its courtyard, was famous for the porphyry columns in its vestibule. But on this day the visitors were struck less by the columns than by what went on beneath them.

Several visitors stood transfixed, staring at the weeping young lady behind the table with the theatrical literature which she usually sold. At this moment the young lady was not offering anything to anyone and merely waved away the sympathetic souls who tried to question her. And all this time, the air was shaken by the ringing of at least twenty frantic telephones—from above and below, from all sides and offices of the department.

After sobbing a while, the young lady suddenly started and cried hysterically:

“Again!” And she sang out in a quavering soprano:

“Glorious sea, sacred Baikal . . .”

A messenger appeared on the stairs, shook his fist at someone, and joined the young lady in a flat, dull baritone:

“My glorious ship, a herring barrel . . .”

Other voices in the distance joined in, the chorus swelled, and finally the song was thundering in every corner of the building. From room number 6 nearby, which housed the accounting section, a man’s voice, slightly cracked but powerful, rose distinctly above all the rest.

“Hey, western wind . . . roll the waves on! . . .” the messenger roared on the stairs.

Tears flowed down the girl’s face, she tried to clench her teeth, but her mouth opened despite herself, and she sang an octave higher than the messenger:

“I haven’t far to go! . . .”

The silent visitors were amazed at the harmony maintained by the singers scattered in various parts of the building, as though the entire chorus were standing together and watching every move of an invisible conductor.

Pedestrians walking past the building on Vagankovsky stopped by the fence, wondering at all the merriment inside.

As soon as the first verse was finished, the singing

stopped abruptly, again as at the wave of a conductor's baton. The messenger swore quietly and disappeared.

At this moment the front door opened and a man in a spring coat thrown hastily over a long white smock appeared in the company of a militiaman.

"Do something, doctor, I implore you!" the young lady cried hysterically.

The secretary of the branch office ran down the stairs and, evidently consumed with shame and humiliation, began to stutter:

"You see, doctor, there's some sort of a mass hypnosis here, and you must . . ." He did not finish the sentence, began to gag on his words, and suddenly burst out in a tenor, "Shilka and Nerchinsk . . ."

"Idiot!" the girl just barely had time to cry, but instead of explaining whom she meant, she trailed off into a roulade and began to sing about Shilka and Nerchinsk herself.

"Take yourself in hand! Stop singing!" the doctor turned to the secretary.

It was obvious that the secretary himself would give anything to stop singing, but he could not stop and, together with the chorus, he brought to the attention of the passers-by in the lane the information that "in the woods he was untouched by ravening beasts, unharmed by the soldiers' bullets."

When the verse ended, the young lady was the first to receive a dose of valerian from the doctor, who then hastened away after the secretary, to treat the rest of the staff.

"Excuse me, citizen," Vasily Stepanovich turned suddenly to the young lady. "You did not have a visit from a black tom here, by any chance?"

"What tom?" the girl cried with exasperation. "We have an ass here in the branch, an ass!" And adding, "Let him hear, I'll tell everything," she related the whole story.

It turned out that the director of the branch office, "who had brought enlightened entertainment to total

rack and ruin" (in the young lady's words), had a mania for organizing all sorts of clubs and circles.

"Blowing smoke in the eyes of his bosses!" shouted the girl.

In the course of a single year, the director had managed to organize a circle for the study of Lermontov, a chess and checkers club, a ping-pong club, and a horseback riding circle. By summer he threatened to form a circle of fresh-water rowing and a mountain-climbing club. And today, at lunch time, the director comes in . . .

". . . and brings in by the hand some son of a bitch," the girl went on. "Heaven knows where he picked him up—in tight checkered pants, with a cracked pince-nez, and . . . generally . . . an impossible mug! . . ."

And then and there the director introduced this character to all the people lunching in the branch office cafeteria as an eminent specialist in the organization of choral circles.

The faces of the future mountain climbers fell, but the director called on everyone to be of good cheer, and the specialist took over. After a few jokes and puns, he swore that singing takes up very little time, while there's a ton of good to be derived from it.

Naturally, the girl reported, the first to jump up were Fanov and Kosarchuk, well-known toad-eaters, who volunteered to join the circle. The rest of the staff saw that there was no way to escape the singing, and had to sign up too. The singing was to be done during the lunch hour, since the rest of the time was taken up by Lermontov and chess. The director, wishing to set an example, declared that he had a tenor voice, and after that everything turned into a nightmare. The checkered specialist choirmaster bellowed:

"Do-mi-sol-do!"

He dragged out all the shyest people from behind the cabinets and closets where they sought refuge from the singing, told Kosarchuk that he had a perfect ear, howled and whined, begged everyone to do a kindness to an old

conductor, tapped a tuning fork on his fingers, and pleaded with the singers to strike up "Glorious Sea."

And they struck up. Gloriously. The checkered fellow really knew his business. They finished the first verse. Then the conductor excused himself, saying "I'll be back in a minute . . ." and disappeared. They thought he would really be back in a minute. But ten minutes went by, and there was still no sign of him. The singers were overcome with joy—he had run off!

But suddenly they somehow automatically began the second verse. They were led by Kosarchuk, who may not have had a perfect ear, but had a rather pleasant high tenor. They finished it. The conductor was still absent! They dispersed to their places, but before they had time to sit down, they burst into song once more, against their own will. They tried to stop—impossible. They would be silent for three minutes, and again burst into song. Silence—song! They realized they were in trouble. The director locked himself up in his office from shame!

The young lady's story was broken off—the valerian had not helped.

Fifteen minutes later three trucks drove up to the wrought-iron fence on Vagankovsky, and the entire staff of the branch office, headed by the director, got in.

The first truck pitched slightly going past the gate and swung out into the lane. It had barely begun to move when the branch office employees standing on the platform and holding on to each other's shoulders opened their mouths and the whole lane resounded with the popular song. The second truck caught it up, then the third. And so they went. Pedestrians hurrying along on their own business merely threw a passing glance at the trucks, uncurious and assuming that this was an excursion leaving town for an outing. The trucks were indeed going out of town, but not for an outing; they were on the way to Professor Stravinsky's hospital.

Thirty minutes later, the bookkeeper, who was completely at the end of his wits, reached the financial office, hoping at last to rid himself of the box-office money.

Warned by experience, he first peeked cautiously into the long room where the employees sat behind frosted glass partitions with gold inscriptions. He found no signs of disturbance or disorder. Everything was quiet and proper, as you would expect of a decent institution.

Vasily Stepanovich bent his head to the window under the sign *INCOMING FUNDS*, greeted the clerk whom he did not know, and civilly requested a deposit slip.

"What for?" asked the clerk in the window.

The bookkeeper was taken aback.

"I have some cash here, I'm from the Variety Theater."

"One moment," the clerk said and instantly pulled a wire grating over the opening in the glass.

"Strange! . . ." thought the bookkeeper. His astonishment was entirely natural. It was the first time in his life that he was faced with such a situation. Everyone knew how difficult it was to withdraw money; there were always obstacles arising. But in his thirty years as a bookkeeper, he had never seen anyone, be it an official or a private person, demur at accepting money.

At last the grating slid aside, and the bookkeeper leaned down to the window again.

"How much do you have?" asked the clerk.

"Twenty-one thousand, seven hundred and eleven rubles."

"Oh-o!" the clerk responded ironically, and handed the bookkeeper a green slip.

Familiar with the blank, the bookkeeper filled it out in an instant and began to untie the cord on the package. When he unfolded the newspaper, he saw spots before his eyes, and he mumbled something like a man suddenly taken ill.

Before his eyes flashed an array of foreign money: bundles of Canadian dollars, English pounds, Dutch guldens, Latvian lats, Estonian kroons . . .

"There he is, one of those tricksters from the Variety Theater!" a stern voice shouted behind the dazed bookkeeper. And Vasily Stepanovich was placed under immediate arrest.

Chapter 18

THE LUCKLESS VISITORS

Just at the time when the conscientious bookkeeper was speeding in the taxi to his encounter with the writing suit, a neatly dressed passenger with a small cardboard valise alighted, among others, from the reserved-seat car number 9 of the Kiev train, just arrived in Moscow. This passenger was none other than the uncle of the late Berlioz, Maximilian Andreyevich Poplavsky, a planning economist who lived on what used to be known as Institute Street in Kiev. The reason for his arrival in Moscow was a telegram he had received late at night two days before. The telegram read: Have just been run over by streetcar at Patriarchs' Ponds funeral Friday three afternoon come Berlioz.

Maximilian Andreyevich was known, and deservedly so, as one of the cleverest men in Kiev. But even the cleverest man would be baffled by such a telegram. If a man could wire that he had been run over, he obviously was not dead. Then what was this about the funeral? Or was he hurt so badly that he knew he would die? That was possible, but how could he know with such precision the day and hour of his funeral? An amazing telegram!

However, what are clever people clever for if not to get confusions straightened out? The answer was simple. There had been an error and the telegram was garbled. The words "have just been" were inserted by error, and "Berlioz" was put at the end instead of the beginning. With such a correction, the meaning of the telegram became clear, though naturally, tragic.

When the outburst of grief—which surprised his wife—subsided, Maximilian Andreyevich immediately began to prepare for the journey to Moscow.

We must now reveal a certain secret longing cherished by Maximilian Andreyevich. Unquestionably, he was sorry for his wife's nephew, who had perished in the bloom of his years. However, as a man of sound practical sense, he understood that there was no particular need for his presence at the funeral. Nevertheless, Maximilian Andreyevich hurried off to Moscow. What could have prompted him to do it? A single reason—the apartment. An apartment in Moscow—why, that was a matter of utmost importance! No one knows why, but Maximilian Andreyevich disliked Kiev, and the thought of moving to Moscow had become so obsessive with him of late that it did not let him sleep at night.

He derived no pleasure from the overflow of the Dnieper in the spring, when, flooding all the land on the low bank, the river merged with the horizon. He did not relish the magnificent view opening from the foot of the monument to Prince Vladimir. Nor did it gladden his heart to see the sunflecks playing on the brick walks of Vladimir Hill in springtime. He wanted none of this; he wanted one thing only—to move to Moscow.

His newspaper advertisements offering to exchange the apartment on Institute Street in Kiev for a smaller one in Moscow brought no results. There were no candidates, and those who appeared from time to time proved untrustworthy.

The telegram staggered Maximilian Andreyevich. This was a moment that it would be sinful to ignore. Men of good sense know that such moments do not repeat themselves.

In short, it was essential, whatever the obstacles in the way, to manage to take over his nephew's apartment on Sadovaya. True, this was complicated, extremely complicated, but all the complications had to be overcome at any cost. Maximilian Andreyevich, a man of wide experi-

ence, knew that the first step to his goal was registration, if only temporary, at his late nephew's three rooms.

On Friday afternoon Maximilian Andreyevich entered the office of the house management of No. 302-b Sadovaya in Moscow.

In the narrow room, the wall of which was adorned by an old poster illustrating, in a series of pictures, methods of reviving drowned persons, a middle-aged, unshaven man with troubled eyes sat in total solitude at a wooden table.

"May I see the chairman of the house committee?" the economist inquired civilly, removing his hat and placing his valise on an empty chair.

For some reason this seemingly simple question upset the sitting man so badly that he turned gray in the face. Squinting with anxiety, he muttered almost inaudibly that the chairman was away.

"Is he at his apartment?" asked Poplavsky. "I have most urgent business with him."

The man said something incoherent again, but one could guess from his reply that the chairman was not at home.

"And when is he coming back?"

The man said nothing and looked out of the window with an oddly wretched expression.

"Ah! . . ." the clever Poplavsky said to himself, and inquired about the secretary.

The strange man at the table turned purple with tension and once again mumbled that the secretary was also away . . . no one knew when he would return, and . . . he was sick. . . .

"Ah! . . ." Poplavsky said again to himself. "But someone must be here?"

"I am," the man responded in a faint voice.

"You see," Poplavsky began with dignity, "I am the sole heir of the late Berlioz, my nephew who perished, as you know, at the Patriarchs' Ponds. And, according to law, I am to receive the effects contained in his apartment, Number 50. . . ."

"I don't know anything about it. . . ." the man interrupted miserably.

"But allow me," Poplavsky said in a resonant voice. "You are a member of the house committee, and you must . . ."

At this point another citizen came into the room. At the sight of the newcomer, the man at the table blanched.

"Member of the house committee Pyatnashko?" the visitor asked him

"Yes," he answered almost inaudibly.

The new arrival whispered something to the sitting man. Now totally distressed, the latter rose from his chair, and a few seconds later Poplavsky found himself alone in the empty house committee office.

"Ah, such a complication! Who would think that they would all . . . and at the same time. . . ." Poplavsky thought with annoyance, crossing the asphalt courtyard and hurrying upstairs to apartment Number 50.

As soon as the economist rang, the door was opened and Maximilian Andreyevich entered the dim foyer, somewhat astonished to find no one there. Who could have opened the door for him? The foyer was empty save for a huge black tom, sitting on a chair.

Maximilian Andreyevich cleared his throat, tapped his feet, and then the door of the study opened and Koroviev walked into the foyer. Maximilian Andreyevich bowed politely, but with dignity, and said:

"My name is Poplavsky. I am the uncle . . ."

But before he had time to finish his sentence, Koroviev pulled a dirty handkerchief from his pocket, buried his nose in it and burst out crying.

". . . of the late Berlioz . . ."

"Of course, of course!" Koroviev broke in, taking the handkerchief away from his face. "As soon as I saw you, I knew it was you!" He shook with a new spasm of tears and began to wail: "Such a catastrophe! What things can happen in this world!"

"Killed by a streetcar?" Poplavsky asked in a whisper.

"Killed outright!" cried Koroviev, and tears ran down in

streams from under his pince-nez. "Outright! I saw it. Would you believe it—one, and his head was off! The right leg—crunch, and in half! The left—crunch, and in half! That's where those streetcars get you!" And, evidently unable to contain his grief, Koroviev pecked the wall next to the mirror with his nose and shook with sobs.

Berlioz' uncle was sincerely moved by the stranger's conduct. "And they say there are no good people left in the world today!" he thought, feeling that this own eyes were beginning to smart. At the same time, however, an unpleasant little cloud darkened his spirit, while the thought flicked like a lizard: what if this good man had already registered for his nephew's apartment? He had known such cases before.

"Forgive me, were you a friend of my poor Misha?" He asked, wiping his dry left eye with his sleeve, and with the right eye studying the grief-convulsed Koroviev. But the latter was sobbing so violently that nothing could be understood except the words, repeated over and over, "crunch—and in half!" Having wept his fill, Koroviev finally unglued himself from the wall and said:

"No, no, I can't any more! I'll go and take three hundred drops of valerian . . ." and, turning his tear-stained face to Poplavsky, he added, "Streetcars!"

"Pardon me, was it you who sent the telegram?" asked Maximilian Andreyevich, straining his mind to guess who this astonishingly lugubrious character might be.

"He did," Koroviev answered, pointing at the tom.

Poplavsky's eyes bulged; he thought he had not heard correctly.

"No, I can't, I can't bear it any more," Koroviev continued, snuffing. "When I remember—the wheel across the leg . . . each wheel must weigh at least ten poods . . . Crunch! . . . I'll go and lie down, forget myself in sleep." And he disappeared from the foyer.

The tom stirred, jumped off the chair, stood up on his hind legs, with his paws akimbo, opened his maw and said:

"Well, I sent the telegram. And now what?"

Maximilian Andreyevich felt that his mind was reeling. His arms and legs went numb. He dropped the valise and collapsed on the chair opposite the tom's.

"I am asking you in Russian, it seems to me," the tom said sternly. "And now what?"

Poplavsky made no reply.

"Passport!" the tom barked and held out a plump paw.

Understanding nothing and seeing nothing except two sparks burning in the cat's eyes, Poplavsky pulled the passport from his pocket as if it were a sword. The tom picked up a pair of glasses with thick black frames from the pier-glass table and put them on his nose, which made him even more imposing, and took the passport from Poplavsky's shaking hand.

"It would be interesting to know—will I faint or not? . . ." thought Poplavsky. From afar he heard Koroviev's sobs. The entire foyer filled with the smell of ether, valerian, and some other nauseating stench.

"What department issued this document?" the tom asked, peering at the page. There was no answer.

"The 412th," the tom said to himself, passing his paw across the passport, which he held upside down. "Of course! I know this department—they issue passports to anyone and everyone. As for me, for example, I'd never give a passport to someone like you! Never! I'd take one look at your face, and I'd refuse at once!" The tom became so incensed that he flung the passport on the floor. "Your presence at the funeral is canceled," the tom continued in an official tone. "Be kind enough to return to your place of residence." And he barked through the door: "Azazello!"

In response to his summons a little man ran out into the foyer—lame, in black tights, with a knife in his leather belt, red-haired, with a yellow fang, and a cataract in his left eye.

Poplavsky felt that he could not breathe. He rose from the chair and backed away, his hand on his heart.

"Azazello, see him out!" the tom commanded and left the foyer.

"Poplavsky," the newcomer said quietly in a nasal drawl. "I hope that everything is clear now?"

Poplavsky nodded.

"Return to Kiev at once," continued Azazello. "Dig in and lie low. Let's not hear a peep from you, and forget about apartments in Moscow. Is that clear?"

The little man, who terrified Poplavsky to death with his fang, knife, and single eye, reached only to the economist's shoulder, but he acted with energy and dispatch.

To begin with, he picked up the passport and handed it to Maximilian Andreyevich, who took it with a numb hand. Then he who was called Azazello picked up the valise with one hand, flung the door open with the other, and, taking Berlioz' uncle by the arm, led him out to the landing. Poplavsky leaned against the wall. Without any key Azazello opened the valise, took out a huge roast chicken with one leg missing, and put it down on the floor in its wrapping of greasy newspaper. Then he pulled out two pairs of underwear, a razor strop, a book, a box, and kicked everything but the chicken down into the stairwell. The empty valise followed. It crashed below and, judging from the sound, its lid was knocked off.

Then the red-headed bandit seized the chicken by its one leg and smacked Poplavsky flat on the neck with it so savagely that the chicken's body flew off, leaving only the drumstick in Azazello's hand. "Everything became jumbled in the Oblonsky household," in the apt words of the famous writer Lev Tolstoy. And these are the words he would have used in the present instance as well. Yes. Everything became jumbled in Poplavsky's eyes. A long spark flashed across his vision, giving way to a funereal serpent which for a moment blotted out the light of the spring day, and Poplavsky tumbled down the stairs clutching his passport in his hand.

Reaching the first turn, he knocked out a window pane with his foot, and sat down on the landing. The legless chicken bounced down past him and dropped into the stairwell. Azazello, who remained upstairs, instantly gnawed the drumstick clean to the bone and slipped the

bone into the side pocket of his tights. Then he returned to the apartment and the door crashed shut behind him.

The cautious steps of someone coming up now reached Poplavsky's ears. He hurried down another flight of stairs, sat down on the wooden bench on the landing, and caught his breath.

A tiny elderly man with an unusually sad face, in an old-fashioned shantung suit and a hard straw hat with a green ribbon, was ascending the stairs. He halted near Poplavsky.

"May I ask you, citizen," the little man in the shantung inquired sadly, "where I can find apartment Number 50?"

"Further up," Poplavsky said shortly.

"Thank you most kindly, citizen," the little man said with the same melancholy expression, and continued on his way up. Poplavsky rose and ran down.

It might be asked where he was hurrying. Was it perhaps to the militia, to complain against the bandits who had attacked him so savagely in the middle of the day? No, not at all; that is quite certain. To come to the militia and report that just a little while ago a tomcat in eyeglasses read his passport, and then a man in tights with a knife. . . ? Oh, no, not Maximilian Andreyevich. He was a sensible man.

He was already downstairs when he noticed a door near the entrance, leading to a small pantry room. The glass in the door was broken. Poplavsky slipped his passport into his pocket and looked around, hoping to find his belongings. There was no trace of them. Poplavsky was himself astonished to discover how little he minded this. He was preoccupied with something else—the idea of checking the accursed apartment just once more, through the little man who had gone up. If he asked where it was, he must have been going there for the first time. Hence, he was now proceeding straight into the clutches of the company in occupation of apartment Number 50. Something told Poplavsky that this mannikin would very soon be coming out. Naturally, Maximilian Andreyevich had given up all thought of attending any funerals of any

nephews, and there was time enough until the next train to Kiev. The economist glanced around and slipped into the pantry.

A door shut somewhere far above. "He just went in . . ." Poplavsky thought with a beating heart. The pantry was cool and smelled of mice and boots. Maximilian Andreyevich sat down on a stump of wood and decided to wait. His observation post was most convenient, affording a direct view of the sixth front entrance.

However, the visitor from Kiev had to wait longer than he had expected. For some reason the staircase remained deserted. But he could hear well, and finally there came the sound of the closing door on the fifth floor. Poplavsky held his breath. Yes, the same little footsteps. "He's coming down. . . ." A door opened on the landing below. The steps halted. A woman's voice. The voice of the sad little man—yes, it was his voice. . . . He said something like, "Let me be, for Christ's sake . . ." Poplavsky's ear was glued to the hole in the glass. It caught a woman's laughter. Quick and confident steps running down, and a woman's back flashed by. The woman, carrying a green oilcloth bag, went out through the door into the yard. And the little man's steps were heard again. "Strange! He is returning to the apartment! Could he be a member of that gang himself? Yes, he is returning. They opened the door again. Oh, well, let's wait a while longer. . . ."

This time he did not have to wait long. The opening of the door. Little steps. Silence. Desperate scream. A cat's yowl. Little steps again, quick, tapping, down, down, down!

Poplavsky had not waited in vain. Muttering and crossing himself, the sad little man flew past, hatless, wild-eyed, his bald head scratched and his trousers wet. He began to tug at the door handle, unable to determine, in his panic, whether the door opened in or out. At last he opened it and shot out into the sunlit yard.

The apartment had been checked. Without further thought of either his late nephew or the apartment, shuddering at the danger he had been subjected to, Maximilian Andreyevich ran out into the yard, muttering three

words, over and over, "all is clear, all is clear!" A few minutes later the bus was carrying the economist away in the direction of the Kiev station.

As for the little man, a most unpleasant thing befell him while the economist was hiding in the pantry below. The little man was the bartender and manager of the buffet at the Variety Theater, and his name was Andrey Fokich Sokov. All through the investigation at the theater, Andrey Fokich kept quietly to himself. The only thing that might have been noticed about him was that he had become even more melancholy than usual, and also that he had questioned the messenger, Karpov, as to where the foreign magician was staying.

And so, leaving the economist on the landing, the bartender climbed up to the fifth floor and rang the bell of apartment Number 50.

The door opened instantly, but the bartender started, backed away, and hesitated before entering. And no wonder. The door was opened by a young woman wearing nothing but a frivolous little lace apron and a white housemaid's cap on her head. Her feet, however, were shod in gold slippers. The young woman's figure was flawless, the sole defect in her appearance being the purple scar on her neck.

"Well, come in, since you rang," said the woman, staring at the bartender with lewd green eyes.

Andrey Fokich gasped, blinked, and stepped into the foyer, removing his hat. At this moment the telephone rang in the foyer. The shameless maid put one foot up on a chair, picked up the receiver and said:

"Hello!"

The bartender did not know where to turn his eyes. He shifted from foot to foot, thinking: "Some maid he keeps, this foreigner! A disgrace and an abomination!" And, to keep himself undefiled by the abomination, he looked off to the sides.

The large and dim foyer was filled with an assortment of unusual objects and clothing. Carelessly thrown over the back of the chair was a dark cloak with a fiery lining;

on the pier-glass table lay a long sword with a glinting gold hilt. Three swords with silver hilts stood in the corner as simply as if they were umbrellas or canes. And on the stag's horns hung berets with eagle feathers.

"Yes," the maid said into the telephone. "Who? Baron Meigel? I am listening. Yes. The artist is at home today. Yes, he will be glad to see you. Yes, guests . . . A dress coat or a black jacket. What? By midnight." Having ended the conversation, the maid put down the receiver and turned to the bartender:

"What can I do for you?"

"I must see the artist."

"Really? Himself?"

"Yes," the bartender answered sadly.

"I'll ask," the maid said, obviously hesitant, and, slightly opening the door to the study of the late Berlioz, she reported: "My knight, there is a little man here who says he must see Messire."

"Let him come in," Koroviev's cracked voice came from the study.

"Come into the parlor, please," said the woman as simply as if she were normally dressed. She opened the door to the parlor and walked out of the foyer.

When he entered where he had been bidden, the bartender was so struck by the room's furnishings that for a moment he forgot the reason for his coming. An extraordinary light, as in a church, poured in through the colored panes of the large windows (the fancy of the vanished jeweler's lady). A wood fire blazed in the enormous antique fireplace despite the hot spring weather. Yet the room was not hot. Indeed, a dankness as from a cellar embraced the visitor. A huge black tom sat on a tiger skin before the fireplace, staring at the blaze complacently through narrowed eyes. There was a table in the room and, glancing at it, the God-fearing bartender started: it was covered with a brocade altar cloth. On the brocade cloth stood an array of bottles—potbellied, covered with mold and dust. A platter glinted among the bottles, and one glance at it was enough to tell that it was made of pure gold.

By the fireplace, a small redheaded man with a knife in his belt was roasting pieces of meat held on a long steel sword; the juice dripped into the fire, and smoke went up the chimney. The room was filled not only with the smell of roasting meat, but also of some strong perfume and incense, and the bartender, who had learned from the newspapers about Berlioz' death, as well as his place of residence, thought for a fleeting instant that a requiem mass might have been held here for the editor. But he immediately dismissed the thought as patently absurd.

The stunned bar manager suddenly heard a low bass voice asking:

"Well, what can I do for you?"

The visitor now discovered in the shadows the man he had come to see.

The black magician lay comfortably back on an immense sofa, very low and strewn with cushions. It seemed to the bar manager that he wore only black underwear and black pointed slippers.

The bar manager addressed him bitterly:

"I am the manager of the refreshment bar at the Variety Theater. . . ."

The artist stretched out his hand as though to close the speaker's lips. Precious stones glittered on his fingers. He spoke heatedly:

"No, no, and no! Not another word! Never, and under no circumstances! Never will I touch a bite of food at your buffet! My most esteemed sir, I passed your bar the other day, and I still cannot forget your sturgeon or your brynza cheese! My precious soul! Brynza is never green, someone is swindling you. It must be white. And the tea? Why, it is nothing but slops! I saw with my own eyes how some slattern poured unboiled water from a pail into your huge samovar, yet they continued to serve tea from it. Oh, no, my dearest man, that's impossible!"

"Excuse me," Andrey Fokich began, overwhelmed by this sudden onslaught. "This isn't why I am here, and sturgeon has nothing to do with it. . . ."

"What do you mean nothing, when it's putrid?"

"They sent us sturgeon of the second freshness," said the bar manager.

"My good man, that's nonsense!"

"What's nonsense?"

"'Second freshness'—that's nonsense! There is only one kind of freshness—first. And that's the last too. And if the sturgeon is of the second freshness, that means it is rancid."

"Excuse me . . ." the bartender began once more, not knowing how to divert the carping artist.

"I cannot excuse you," the other said firmly.

"This is not why I came here," the bartender said, altogether unnerved now.

"It isn't?" the foreign magician was astonished. "But what else could have brought you to me? If memory serves me, I have never known any people of your profession, except for one canteen girl. But even that was long ago, before you ever came into the world. However, I'm glad to see you. Azazello! A stool for the manager of the refreshment bar!"

The man who was roasting meat turned, horrifying the bartender with his fang, and deftly slipped him one of the dark oak stools. There were no other chairs in the room.

The bar manager said:

"I thank you kindly," and lowered himself onto the stool. One of its back legs immediately cracked and folded, and the bartender gasped and sat down most painfully on the floor. As he fell, his foot caught at the bench before him, turning over a bowl full of red wine on his trousers.

The artist exclaimed:

"Ow! Did you hurt yourself?"

Azazello helped the bartender to get up and gave him another stool. In a voice full of grief the bartender refused his host's invitation to remove his trousers and dry them before the fire. Feeling wretchedly uncomfortable in his wet clothing and underwear, he cautiously sat down on the other stool.

"I like to sit low," said the artist. "A fall from a low seat is less dangerous. Yes, so we were talking about sturgeon. My dear fellow, freshness, freshness, and freshness! This should be the motto of every bar manager. How would you like to taste . . ."

The sword flashed in the scarlet light of the fireplace, and Azazello slipped a sizzling piece of meat onto the gold platter. He squeezed some lemon juice over it and gave the bartender a two-pronged gold fork.

"Thank you most kindly, I . . ."

"No, no, taste it!"

Out of politeness, the bartender put a morsel into his mouth and immediately knew that he was, indeed, chewing something very fresh and, moreover, extraordinarily delicious. However, as he chewed the fresh, fragrant meat, he gagged and nearly fell a second time. A large dark bird flew in from the next room, and its wing brushed the bartender's bald head. The bird alighted on the fireplace mantel, next to the clock, and he saw that it was an owl. "Good God," thought Andrey Fokich, who was very high-strung, like all bartenders. "What a house! . . ."

"A glass of wine? White, red? What country's wine do you prefer at this time of day?"

"Thank you . . . I don't drink. . . ."

"Too bad! Would you like a game of dice? Or do you favor any other game? Dominoes, cards?"

"I don't play," the bartender answered wearily.

"That's altogether bad," the host concluded. "Say what you will, but there is something suspicious about men who eschew wine, games, the society of lovely women, table talk. Such people are either seriously ill or they secretly hate everyone around them. True, there may be exceptions. There were, indeed, some remarkable scoundrels among the people who sat down to banquet tables with me! . . . Oh well, then, I am all ears."

"The other day, if you don't mind, it was your pleasure to perform some tricks . . ."

"Tricks?" the magician exclaimed with astonishment.

"Surely, you don't mean it! Such things would ill become me!"

"Sorry," said the abashed bartender. "But you . . . the black magic act . . ."

"Oh that, I see, I see! And what was it about the act that brought you to me?"

"Well, among other things there was the money coming down from the ceiling. . . ." The bartender lowered his voice and glanced around him with some embarrassment. "Well, everybody started catching it. And so a young man comes to the buffet and gives me a chervonets, and I give him eight and a half change. . . . Then another . . ."

"Another young man?"

"No, middle-aged. Then a third, a fourth. . . . And I keep making change. Today I went to check the cash, and there's nothing but strips of paper there instead of money. The bar was done out of one hundred and nine rubles."

"Oh, oh!" cried the artist. "Did they really think it was money? I'd never believe they did it knowingly!"

The bartender threw a sidelong, suffering look over his shoulder, but said nothing.

"Crooks?" the magician asked his guest anxiously. "Could there be crooks in Moscow?"

The bartender smiled so bitterly that every doubt vanished: yes, there were crooks in Moscow.

"But that's contemptible!" Woland was indignant. "You are a poor man. . . . You are a poor man, aren't you?"

The bartender pulled his head into his shoulders, so that it became obvious that he was indeed a poor man.

"How much money do you have in your savings?"

The question was asked sympathetically; nevertheless, it was undeniably indelicate. The bartender hemmed and hawed.

"Two hundred and forty-nine thousand rubles in five savings banks," a cracked voice said from the next room.

"And two hundred gold ten-ruble coins at home, under a floorboard."

The barkeeper seemed glued to his stool.

"Oh, well, of course, it's just a trifling sum," Woland said benevolently to his guest. "Although, in fact, you do not need it. When will you die?"

At this, the bartender lost his temper.

"Nobody knows this, and it doesn't concern anybody," he said indignantly.

"Hm, nobody," the same nasty voice came from the study. "You'd think it's the binomial theorem! He will die in nine months; next February, from cancer of the liver, in the Moscow State University Hospital, Ward 4."

The bartender turned yellow in the face.

"Nine months," Woland calculated reflectively. "Two hundred and forty-nine thousand . . . that comes to twenty-seven thousand a month, to take round figures . . . not so very much, but enough to live on modestly. . . . And then there are those ten-ruble coins. . . ."

"He'll have no time to use them," the same voice broke in, chilling the bartender's heart. "After Andrey Fokich dies, the house will be demolished and the coins will be sent to the State Bank."

"As a matter of fact, I would not even advise you to go to the hospital," continued the artist. "What sense is there in dying in the ward, listening to the moaning and death rattle of incurables? Isn't it better to throw a banquet with these twenty-seven thousand and take poison—move on to the other world to the sound of singing strings, surrounded by tipsy beauties and jolly friends?"

The bartender sat motionless, looking suddenly aged. There were dark circles around his eyes, his cheeks sagged, and his lower jaw hung open.

"However, we are daydreaming," cried the host. "Let us get down to business! Show me your strips of paper."

The bartender nervously pulled from his pocket a small bundle, unwrapped it and was dumbfounded: the piece of newspaper contained chervontsy.

"My dear man, you are really ill," said Woland, shrugging.

The bartender rose from the stool with a dazed smile.

"A . . . a . . . a . . ." he stuttered, "and if they . . . change again . . . you know . . ."

"Hm . . ." the artist thought a moment. "Well, then you'll have to come to us again. By all means do, delighted to have met you . . ."

Koroviev bounced out of the study, clutched the bartender's hand and began to shake it and beg Andrey Fokich to give everyone his greetings. Utterly bewildered, the bartender turned toward the foyer.

"Hella, see the gentleman out!" shouted Koroviev.

Again the naked redhead in the foyer! The bartender squeezed through the doorway, squeaked "Good-by," and walked away like a drunken man. A short way down he halted, sat down on the stairs, took out his package and checked it—the chervontsy were there.

A woman with a green bag came out of the apartment facing the landing. Seeing the man sitting on the stairs and staring dully at a pile of chervontsy, she smiled and said pensively:

"What a house this is. . . . That one drunk from morning . . . The glass smashed again on the stairs!"

Taking a closer look at the bartender, she added:

"Hey, citizen, you're rolling in chervontsy! . . . Why not share them with me, eh?"

"Let me be, for Christ's sake!" the bartender was frightened and quickly hid the money.

The woman laughed.

"Go to the devil, you old skinflint! I was only joking. . . ." And she walked down.

The bartender got up slowly, raised his hand to straighten his hat and discovered that it was not on his head. He hated to go back, but it was a pity to lose the hat. After a moment's hesitation, he went back to the door and rang.

"What else now?" the damned maid asked him.

"I forgot my hat. . . ." the bartender whispered, point-

ing at his bald head. Hella turned. The bartender spat mentally and closed his eyes. When he opened them, Hella was holding out his hat and a sword with a dark hilt.

"This isn't mine . . ." he breathed, pushing away the sword and quickly putting on his hat.

"You came without a sword?" Hella wondered.

The bartender mumbled something and rapidly walked down. His head, for some reason, felt uncomfortable and too warm. He removed his hat and cried out, jumping up with fright: in his hands was a velvet beret with a frayed rooster's feather. The bartender crossed himself. At this moment, the beret miaowed, turned into a black kitten, jumped back on Andrey Fokich's head and sank all its claws into the bare skin. With a scream of despair, the bartender bounded down, and the kitten dropped off his head and spurted up the stairs.

Breaking out into the open, the bartender ran at a fast trot to the gate and departed forever from the infernal house No. 302-b.

What happened to him next is well known. Coming out of the gateway, the bartender looked around wildly, as though searching for something. A moment later he was in the drugstore across the street. He had barely said, "Tell me, please . . ." when the woman behind the counter cried:

"Why, citizen, your whole head is slashed!"

Within five minutes the bartender's head was bandaged and he learned that the best specialists in diseases of the liver were the Professors Bernadsky and Kuzmin. He asked which was nearer and lit up with joy to learn that Kuzmin lived literally across the yard, in a small white house. Two minutes later he was there.

The house was old, but very, very cosy. The bartender remembered that the first person he met was a little old nurse who wanted to take his hat, but since he had no hat, the nurse withdrew somewhere, chewing with her toothless mouth.

Instead of her, he saw a middle-aged woman near the

mirror and, it seemed, under a kind of archway. She told him that he could not have an appointment before the 19th. The bartender immediately found a way to get around the obstacle. Staring off with a fading eye beyond the arch where three patients were waiting in an ante-room, he whispered:

"I am mortally ill. . . ."

The woman threw a wondering look at his bandaged head, hesitated a moment, and saying "Well, in that case . . ." she allowed him inside the arch.

At this moment a door opened at the opposite end and there was a glint of gold pince-nez. The woman in the white coat said:

"Citizens, this patient will enter without waiting his turn."

And before he knew it, the bartender was in Professor Kuzmin's office. There was nothing frightening, solemn, or medical in that longish room.

"What is the matter with you?" Professor Kuzmin asked in a pleasant voice and glanced with some anxiety at the bandaged head.

"I have just learned from a reliable source," the bartender answered, with a frantic look at a photograph of a group of people behind glass, "that I will die next February of cancer of the liver. I implore you, stop it."

Professor Kuzmin threw himself back against the high gothic leather chair.

"Pardon me, I do not understand you. . . . Did you . . . did you see a doctor? Why is your head bandaged?"

"A doctor! . . . You ought to see this doctor. . . ." the bartender answered and his teeth suddenly began to chatter. "As for the head, pay no attention to it, it has nothing to do with . . . To hell with the head, it's beside the point . . . Cancer of the liver—I beg you, stop it! . . ."

"But allow me, who told you?"

"Believe him!" the bartender pleaded fervently. "He knows!"

"I don't understand anything!" the professor said, shrugging his shoulders and sliding his chair away from

the table. "How can he know when you will die? Especially if he is not a doctor?"

"In Ward 4," said the bartender.

The professor looked at his patient, his head, his damp trousers, and thought: "That's all I need, a madman. . . ." He asked:

"Do you drink vodka?"

"Never touch it," the bartender replied.

A minute later he was undressed and lay on a cold oil-cloth couch while the professor was kneading his stomach. Now, we must say, he felt much better. The professor told him categorically that at the present moment, at any rate, there were no symptoms of cancer. But since . . . since he was so worried and since some charlatan had frightened him, it would be best to have all the necessary tests made. . . .

The professor was scribbling something rapidly on sheets of paper while he explained to the bartender where he was to go and what he was to bring. He also gave him a note to the neuropathologist, Professor Boure, telling the bartender that his nerves were totally disordered.

"How much do I pay you, Professor?" the bartender asked in a tender, trembling voice, pulling out a thick wallet.

"Whatever you want," the professor answered drily and curtly.

The bartender took out thirty rubles and placed them on the desk. Then, with an unexpectedly soft movement, as though his hand were a cat's paw, he put a clinking roll of gold coins wrapped in a piece of newspaper over the bills.

"And what's that?" asked Kuzmin and twisted his mustache.

"Please don't disdain to accept it, citizen Professor," the bartender whispered. "I beg you, stop the cancer!"

"Take your gold away at once," said the professor, feeling proud of himself. "You had better look after your nerves. Bring a urine sample for analysis tomorrow. Don't drink much tea and use no salt in your food."

"Even in soup?" asked the bartender.

"No salt in anything," ordered Kuzmin.

"Ah-h-h! . . ." the bartender exclaimed sorrowfully, looking at the professor with melting eyes, gathering up his gold coins and backing away toward the door.

The professor had few patients that evening. The last one left at dusk. As he was removing his white office smock, the professor glanced at the spot where the bartender had left the chervontsy and discovered that there was none there; instead of chervontsy, he saw three labels from bottles of Abrau-Durso wine.

"What the devil!" muttered Kuzmin, trailing the end of his smock over the floor and feeling the labels. "So he is not only a schizophrenic, but also a crook! But what did he want of me? It could not be just a prescription for a urine analysis? Ooh! . . . He stole my coat!" And the professor rushed to the foyer, with one hand still in the sleeve of his white smock. "Ksenia Nikitishna!" his voice rose shrilly in the doorway. "Take a look, are the coats there?"

It turned out that all the coats were there. But when, finally pulling off his smock, the professor returned to the table, he remained rooted to the parquet, his eyes glued to the tabletop. In the place where the labels had been there was now an orphaned black kitten with a miserable little face, miaowing over a saucer of milk.

"What's this now? But this is too . . ." And Kuzmin felt a chill crawling up the back of his neck.

Ksenia Nikitishna came running in response to the professor's low and pitiful cry and immediately reassured him, saying that one of the patients must have left the kitten there. Such things often happened to professors.

"They must be poor," explained Ksenia Nikitishna, "and we, naturally . . ."

They tried to guess who could have done it. The suspicion fell on the old woman with stomach ulcers.

"No question, it was she," said Ksenia Nikitishna. "She

must be thinking: 'I'll die anyway, and there's no one to care for the poor kitten.'"

"But wait!" cried Kuzmin. "And what about the milk? . . . Did she bring that too? And the saucer?"

"She brought it in a bottle and poured it into a saucer here," elucidated Ksenia Nikitishna.

"In any case, take away the kitten and the saucer," said Kuzmin, and accompanied Ksenia Nikitishna to the door himself. When he returned, there were new developments.

As he was hanging his smock on a nail, the professor heard a burst of laughter in the yard. He looked out and, naturally, was dumbfounded. A lady was running across the yard to the house opposite, wearing nothing but a shift. The professor even knew her name—Marya Alexandrovna. The burst of laughter came from an urchin in the yard.

"What next?" Kuzmin asked contemptuously.

In his daughter's room behind the wall, the phonograph began to play the fox trot "Hallelujah," and at the same moment the professor heard the twittering of a sparrow behind his back. He turned and saw a large sparrow hopping on his desk.

"Hm . . . calm, now!" the professor said to himself. "It flew in when I was walking away from the window. Everything is all right!" the professor told himself, feeling that everything was all wrong, mainly, of course, because of that sparrow. Taking a close look at it, the professor immediately realized that it was not quite an ordinary sparrow. The wretched bird limped on its left foot, obviously clowning and dragging it, moving in syncopation—in short, it was dancing a fox trot to the music of the phonograph like a drunk in a bar, staring at the professor as impudently and provokingly as it could.

Kuzmin's hand went to the telephone. He meant to call his old schoolmate Professor Boure, to ask what such sparrows meant at the age of sixty—appearing suddenly, too, when a man was feeling dizzy.

The sparrow, in the meantime, sat down on his gilt ink-

well, left a dropping in it (I'm not joking!), then flew up and hung for a moment in the air. Then, darting over to the photograph of the university graduating class of '94, it pecked at the glass forcefully, as with a steel beak, shattered it to splinters, and flew out of the window.

The professor changed his mind and, instead of calling Boure, he telephoned the department of leeches, telling them that it was Professor Kuzmin on the wire, and that he wanted leeches sent immediately to his home. When he put down the receiver, the professor turned back to the desk and screamed. At the desk sat a woman in a nurse's cap, holding a small bag with the word "leeches" on it. The professor screamed looking at her mouth: it was a man's mouth, crooked, wide to the ears, with a single fang protruding from it. The nurse's eyes were dead.

"I'll take the money," the nurse said in a male basso. "No reason why it should lie around here." She raked the labels together with a bird's claw and began to dissolve in the air.

Two hours later Professor Kuzmin sat in his bed in the bedroom, with leeches hanging from his temples, behind his ears and on his neck. The gray-mustached Professor Boure sat on the silk quilt at his feet, looking sympathetically at Kuzmin and assuring him that it was all nonsense. Outside the window it was already dark.

We do not know what other fantastical events took place in Moscow that night and, of course, we shall not try to search them out—especially since the time has come for us to go on to the second part of this truthful narrative. Follow me, reader!

BOOK TWO

Chapter 19

MARGARITA

Follow me, reader! Who told you that there is no true, eternal, and faithful love in the world! May the liar have his foul tongue cut out!

Follow me, my reader, and only me, and I will show you such a love!

No! The Master was mistaken when he spoke bitterly to Ivan at the hospital, when he said at that hour when the night was tumbling past midnight that she had forgotten him. This could not happen. And, of course, she had not forgotten him.

To begin with, we must reveal the secret which the Master refused to divulge to Ivan. His beloved was called Margarita Nikolayevna. Everything the Master had said about her to the poet was entirely true. She was beautiful, and she was intelligent. And we must add one more thing: it can be said with absolute assurance that many women would have given anything to exchange their lot for the lot of Margarita Nikolayevna. Margarita, childless and thirty years old, was the wife of a very prominent specialist, who had made an important discovery of utmost value to his country. Her husband was young, handsome, good, honest, and he adored his wife. Margarita Nikolayevna and her husband occupied the entire upper floor of an excellent house which stood surrounded by a garden in one of the lanes in the vicinity of Arbat Square. A charming place! As anyone can see for himself if he takes the trouble of visiting the garden. Let him speak to

me, and I will tell him the address and how to get there. The house is still there.

Margarita Nikolayevna was never short of money. She could buy anything that caught her fancy. Among her husband's friends there were interesting people. Margarita Nikolayevna never touched the primus stove. Margarita Nikolayevna did not know the horrors of living in a communal apartment. In short . . . she was happy? Not for a moment! Since the age of nineteen when she married her husband and went to live in her house, she had known no happiness. Gods, gods! What did this woman need? This woman, in whose eyes there always flickered an enigmatic little spark? This witch with just the slightest cast in one eye, who had adorned herself that spring day with mimosa? I do not know. Evidently, however, she spoke the truth in saying that she wanted the Master, and not the Gothic house, not a private garden, and not money. She loved him. She spoke the truth.

And even my heart, the heart of an honest narrator, but nonetheless a stranger, aches at the thought of Margarita's feelings when she came to the Master's house on the following day (fortunately, without having spoken to her husband, who had not returned as expected) and learned that the Master was no longer there. She did everything she could to get some information about him and, of course, found none. She returned to her house and went on living as before.

But when the grimy snow disappeared from the streets and sidewalks, when the moisture-laden restless winds of spring began to flow in through the opened window-pane, Margarita Nikolayevna became still more disconsolate than she had been all winter. She often cried bitterly and long in secret. She did not know whether she loved a living man, or a dead one. And the longer the desperate days stretched out, the more frequently she felt, especially during the hours of twilight, that she was bound to a dead man.

She must either forget him or die herself. It was impossible to go on like this. Impossible! She must forget

him, forget him at any cost! But she could not forget him, that was the trouble.

"Yes, yes, the very same mistake!" Margarita spoke to herself sitting by the fireplace and staring at the fire lit in memory of the fire that blazed while he was writing about Pontius Pilate. "Why did I leave him that night? Why? It was madness! I returned faithfully the next day, as I promised, but it was too late. Yes, I returned like the miserable Matthu Levi—too late!"

These self-reproaches were, of course, absurd. What would have changed if she had stayed with the Master that night? Could she have saved him? "Ridiculous!" we are tempted to exclaim to her. But how can such things be said to a woman in despair?

On that Friday when the appearance of the black magician had caused all the preposterous confusions in Moscow, when Berlioz' uncle was driven back to Kiev, when the bookkeeper was arrested, when all the other stupid and incomprehensible events took place, Margarita awakened at about noon in her bay bedroom in the upper story of the house.

When she awakened, Margarita did not cry, as she so often did, because she woke with a premonition that something was at last to happen that day. As she became aware of the premonition, she began to warm and nurture it in her soul, afraid that it might disappear.

"I believe!" Margarita whispered solemnly. "I believe! Something will happen! It cannot fail, for why should I be punished with lifelong torment? I admit that I have lied and deceived and lived a secret life, hidden from others. But surely this does not deserve such cruel punishment. . . . Something is sure to happen. Nothing lasts forever. Besides, my dream was prophetic, I am certain it was. . . ."

All of this Margarita whispered to herself, gazing at the crimson window shades glowing in the sun, dressing anxiously, combing her short waved hair before the triple mirror.

The dream that Margarita dreamed that night was in-

deed extraordinary. Throughout the tormented winter she had never seen the Master in her dreams. At night he would leave her, and her suffering was confined to waking hours. But on this night she dreamed of him.

She saw in her dream an unfamiliar landscape—hopeless and dismal under the dreary sky of early spring. She saw this tattered, rushing gray sky, and under it a soundless flock of rooks. A rough little bridge, a muddy stream beneath it. Trees—joyless, wretched, almost bare. A solitary aspen, and beyond it, among the trees, behind a vegetable patch, a wooden shack—either a separate kitchen, or a bathhouse, or whatever else!

And then, imagine, the door of this shack opened and he appeared. Quite far, but distinctly visible. He was shabby, it was difficult to see what he was wearing. His hair was ruffled, he was unshaven. His eyes were sick and troubled. He beckoned to her, called her with his hand.

Gasping in the dead air, Margarita ran toward him over ruts and hillocks. Then she awakened.

“This dream can mean only one of two things,” she said to herself. “If he is dead and beckoned to me, it means he came for me and I shall die soon. But if he is alive, then it can mean only that he is trying to remind me of himself! He wants to tell me that we shall meet again. . . . Yes, we shall, soon, very soon!”

In this state of excitement, Margarita dressed, trying to convince herself that everything, in fact, was going very well, and that a person must know how to catch and use such favorable moments. Her husband was away for three days on a business trip. For three full days she was her own mistress. No one to interfere with her or keep her from thinking of anything she wanted, dreaming of anything she liked. The entire apartment, which tens of thousands of Muscovites would envy, was at her disposal.

However, granted freedom for three days, Margarita chose a place in her luxurious apartment that was far from the best. After her morning tea, she proceeded to the dark, windowless room filled with suitcases and a variety of discards in two chests of drawers. Squatting

down before the first chest, she opened the bottom drawer and pulled out from under a pile of silken scraps the only thing of value she possessed. In Margarita's hands was an old album of brown leather, which held a photograph of the Master, a savings bankbook with a deposit of ten thousand in his name, the petals of a dried rose preserved between sheets of tissue paper, and a part of a typewritten manuscript with charred edges.

Returning to her bedroom with these treasures, Margarita Nikolayevna set the photograph in front of her triple mirror and sat before it for an hour, with the fire-damaged manuscript on her lap, turning the pages and rereading passages which, after the burning, had neither beginning nor end: "The darkness which had come from the Mediterranean shrouded the city hated by the Procurator. The hanging bridges connecting the Temple with Antony's dreaded tower disappeared. The abyss that had descended from the heavens engulfed the winged gods over the Hippodrome, the crenellated Hasmonaean Palace, the bazaars, the caravansaries, the alleys, ponds. . . . The great city of Yershalayim had vanished as though it had never been. . . ."

Margarita wanted to read more, but there was nothing more beyond the charred, uneven fringe.

Wiping her tears, Margarita Nikolayevna put aside the manuscript, rested her elbows on the table beneath the mirror, and sat for a long time opposite her reflection, her eyes fixed on the photograph. After a while her tears dried. Margarita gathered her treasures and put them together neatly. A few moments later they were buried once again under the silken rags, and the lock clinked shut in the dark room.

Margarita Nikolayevna put on her coat in the foyer, preparing for a walk. The pretty Natasha, her house servant, asked what to serve for the entree and, told that it made no difference, she went on to a general conversation with her mistress—simply to divert herself. She told her about the magician at the theater the other night, whose tricks left everybody gaping. She said he had given every-

one two bottles of imported perfume and stockings—free. Then, when the audience had gone out into the street, they looked—and everybody was naked! Margarita Nikolayevna dropped on the chair before the mirror, laughing.

“Natasha! You ought to be ashamed!” she cried. “You are an intelligent, literate girl . . . They babble silly nonsense in the queues, and you repeat it!”

Natasha flushed and objected heatedly that it was not nonsense. She herself had seen a woman that very morning in the food store on Arbat who had come in wearing shoes, but just as she was paying the cashier the shoes disappeared from her feet and she was left in her stockings. The woman’s eyes popped, and there was a big hole in the heel of her stocking! And the shoes were magical—she’d gotten them during that act from the magician!

“And she went home that way?”

“She went home that way!” Natasha exclaimed, flushing still more because her story was disbelieved. “Why, Margarita Nikolayevna, last night the militia rounded up about a hundred people. Women who came out of the theater were running around on Tverskaya in their panties.”

The absurd conversation ended in a pleasant surprise for Natasha. Margarita Nikolayevna went to the bedroom and came back with a pair of stockings and a bottle of cologne. Saying that she also wanted to do a trick, she gave the girl the stockings and the bottle, with a single request: Natasha was not to run around on Tverskaya in nothing but stockings, and she was not to listen to Darya. The mistress and the servant kissed and said good-by.

Leaning back against the soft, comfortable seat in the bus, Margarita Nikolayevna rode along the Arbat, now thinking her own thoughts, and now listening to the whispered conversation of two men sitting before her.

The men, occasionally glancing back over their shoulders to make sure no one heard them, whispered some strange gibberish. The one near the window, large and beefy, with small shifty pig’s eyes, told his little neighbor

under his breath that it had been necessary to cover the coffin with a black cloth . . .

"You don't say so!" the little man whispered with astonishment. "But this is unheard of! . . . And what did Zheldybin do?"

Amidst the even hum of the bus, the words came from the window:

"Criminal investigation . . . a scandal . . . an out and out mystery! . . ."

From these fragments, Margarita Nikolayevna somehow put together a more or less coherent story. The citizens were whispering about some dead man (they did not name him) whose head had been stolen from the coffin that morning. . . .

In the end, Margarita Nikolayevna tired of listening to this mysterious prattle about a head stolen from a coffin, and she was glad when it was time for her to get off.

Several minutes later Margarita Nikolayevna was sitting beneath the Kremlin wall on a bench which afforded a view of the manège.

Margarita squinted at the bright sun, thinking of last night's dream and recalling how, exactly one year ago, to the day and the hour, she had sat on the same bench with him. And just as then, her black handbag lay on the bench next to her. Today he was not with her, but she spoke to him mentally: "Why don't you let me hear from you? Have you stopped loving me? No, I somehow can't believe it. That means you are dead. . . . But then, I beg you, release me, make me free at last to live, to breathe! . . ." Margarita Nikolayevna answered herself for him: "You are free . . . Am I keeping you?" Then she argued with him: "But no, this is no answer. No, get out of my memory, then I'll be free. . . ."

People walked by. A man threw a sidelong glance at the well-dressed woman, attracted by her beauty and solitude. He cleared his throat and sat down at the end of the same bench. Gathering courage, he began:

"The weather today is definitely good. . . ."

But Margarita gave him such a dark look that he got up and went away.

"There's an example for you," Margarita mentally addressed the one who possessed her. "Why did I drive this man away? I am bored, and there is nothing bad about this Lovelace except, perhaps, for the stupid word, 'definitely'. . . . Why am I sitting like an owl, alone by the wall? Why have I been expelled from life?"

She drooped sadly. But then a wave of the anticipation and excitement she had felt that morning flooded her again. "Yes, it will happen!" The wave went over her a second time, and she realized that it was a wave of sound. Through the noise of the city she heard ever more clearly approaching drumbeats and the sound of trumpets, slightly out of tune.

First she saw a mounted militiaman ride slowly past the garden railing. He was followed by three men on foot and then by a truck with the musicians, moving at a snail's pace. After that came a brand-new, slow-moving open hearse; it bore a coffin covered with wreaths, and four persons—three men and one woman—standing at each corner of the platform.

Margarita followed the procession with her eyes, listening to the dying sounds of the melancholy Turkish drum repeating a single note as it receded into the distance—boom, boom, boom—and thinking, "What a strange funeral . . . and how depressing to hear this boom, boom . . . Really, I would pawn my soul to the devil to find out whether he is alive or dead. I wonder whose funeral it is."

"It is the funeral of Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz," she heard a somewhat nasal man's voice near her. "The chairman of MASSOLIT."

The astonished Margarita Nikolayevna turned and saw a citizen who had evidently seated himself quietly on her bench while she was looking at the procession. She had probably forgotten herself and asked the question aloud.

"Yes," continued the unknown citizen. "They are in a most amazing state of mind. They are escorting a corpse,

but thinking only of where its head could have gone to."

"What head?" asked Margarita, staring closely at her unexpected neighbor. This neighbor turned out to be short, with fiery red hair and a protruding fang, in a starched shirt, a striped expensive suit, patent shoes, and a derby. His tie was gaudy. But the oddest thing about him was the well-gnawed chicken bone protruding from the pocket where men usually carry a fountain pen or a handkerchief.

"Well, you see," the redheaded man explained, "this morning in the Griboyedov Hall somebody filched the dead man's head from the coffin."

"But how can that be?" Margarita cried involuntarily, recalling the whispers in the bus.

"The devil knows how!" the man replied carelessly. "And the worst thing is that nobody can understand who would need this head, and why!"

Preoccupied as she was with her own feelings, Margarita nevertheless was struck by the unknown citizen's peculiar lies.

"Wait!" she suddenly exclaimed. "What Berlioz? The one . . . in the papers today? . . ."

"Certainly, certainly . . ."

"So these must be writers following his coffin?" she asked.

"Well, naturally!"

"Do you know them?"

"To the last one," answered the redhead.

"Tell me," Margarita's voice suddenly lost its resonance. "Is the critic Latunsky among them?"

"But of course. How could they hold a funeral without him? There he is, in the fourth row, at the end."

"The one with the blond hair?" Margarita asked, screwing up her eyes.

"Ash blond . . . watch him raise his eyes to heaven!"

"Looks like a priest?"

"That's him!"

Margarita asked no more questions, peering at Latunsky.

"As I see," the redhead said smiling, "you hate this Latunsky, Margarita Nikolayevna!"

She was astonished:

"You know me?"

Instead of replying, the redhead removed his derby and bowed.

"What a bandit's mug!" thought Margarita, looking at her neighbor.

"But I don't know you," she said drily.

"How can you know me? Nevertheless, I was sent to you on a certain business."

Margarita turned pale and recoiled from him.

"I don't understand, what business?"

The redhead glanced around him and said mysteriously:

"I was sent to invite you for a visit this evening."

"You're raving, what visit?"

"At the home of a very eminent foreigner," the redhead said significantly, screwing up one eye.

Margarita flared up.

"A new breed—a street procurer!" she said, getting up to go. But at this moment she heard the man's voice behind her:

"The darkness which had come from the Mediterranean shrouded the city hated by the Procurator. The hanging bridges connecting the Temple with Antony's dreaded tower disappeared. . . . The great city of Yershalayim had vanished as though it had never been. . . . And may you also vanish as though you had never been, with your charred book and dried rose! Sit here on this bench alone and plead with him to free you, to let you breathe, to get out of your memory!"

With a blanched face, Margarita returned to the bench. The redhead stared at her through narrowed eyes.

"I do not understand anything," Margarita Nikolayevna began quietly. "You somehow could have learned about the pages, spied on me . . . But how could you learn my thoughts?" She wrinkled her forehead painfully and added: "Tell me, who are you?"

"What a bore . . ." the redhead grumbled. "Sit down, please."

Margarita obeyed without protest, but as she sat down she asked again:

"Who are you?"

"Very well, my name is Azazello, but it will not mean anything to you anyway."

"But you know something about him?" she whispered imploringly.

"Well, and suppose I do."

"I beg you, tell me one thing only . . . is he alive? . . . Don't torture me!"

"Oh well, he is alive . . ." Azazello answered reluctantly.

"God! . . ."

"Please, without excitement and exclamations," Azazello said, frowning.

"Forgive me, forgive me," muttered the now submissive Margarita. "Of course, I flared up at you. But you must agree, when a woman is accosted in the street and invited to visit someone . . . I have no prejudices, I assure you," Margarita smiled joylessly. "But I never meet any foreigners, and have no desire to associate with them. . . . Besides, my husband . . . my tragedy is that I am living with a man I do not love . . . but I feel that it would be wrong to ruin his life . . . I have never seen anything from him but kindness . . ."

Azazello listened to this incoherent speech with obvious boredom and said curtly:

"I'll ask you to be silent for a moment."

Margarita obediently fell silent.

"I am inviting you to an entirely harmless foreigner. And not a soul will know about this visit. I guarantee that."

"Who is this foreigner?" Margarita cried in dismay, so loudly that passers-by turned to look at her. "And what possible interest can I have in visiting him?"

Azazello bent over to her and whispered significantly:

"Ah, very great interest . . . seize the occasion . . ."

"What?" Margarita exclaimed and her eyes opened wide. "If I understand you correctly, you are hinting that I may learn something about him there?"

Azazello replied with a silent nod.

"I'll go!" Margarita cried forcefully and grasped Azazello's hand. "I'll go anywhere!"

Azazello, puffing with relief, threw himself back against the bench, covering with his shoulders the name "Niura," carved in large letters. He said ironically:

"A difficult tribe, these women!" He slipped his hands into his pockets and stretched his legs forward. "Why did they send me on this mission? Behemoth should have gone, he is full of charm . . ."

Margarita spoke with a bitter, twisted smile:

"Stop teasing and tormenting me with your riddles. I am an unhappy woman, and you take advantage of it. . . . I am allowing myself to be drawn into the strangest business, but, I swear, only because you tempted me with hints about him! My head is reeling with all these mysteries. . . ."

"No dramatics, please, no dramatics," Azazello responded, grimacing. "After all, my position isn't enviable either. Punching a house manager on the jaw, or kicking out an uncle, or shooting someone, or other trifles of that kind—those are directly in my line. But talking to women in love—thank you kindly! . . . Here I've been struggling with you for half an hour . . . So you'll come?"

"I'll come," Margarita Nikolayevna answered simply.

"Then be so kind as to accept this," said Azazello, and, taking from his pocket a little round golden box, he held it out to Margarita with the words: "But put it away, put it away, people are looking. It will be useful to you, Margarita Nikolayevna, you've aged quite a bit from sorrow in the last half year." Margarita flushed, but said nothing, and Azazello continued:

"This evening, exactly at half-past nine, be so kind as to undress and rub this cream all over your face and body. After that you can do anything you like, but don't go away from the telephone. At ten I shall call you and tell

you everything you need to know. You will not have to worry about anything. You will be brought wherever necessary, and you shall not suffer any inconvenience. Is that clear?"

Margarita was silent a while, then she said:

"It's clear. This box is made of pure gold, judging from its weight. Well, I understand perfectly that I am being bribed and drawn into some shady affair for which I'll have to pay a heavy price. . . ."

"What's this now?" Azazello almost hissed at her. "You're starting it again?"

"No, wait!"

"Give me back the cream!"

Margarita's hand closed more tightly around the box.

"Give it back!" Azazello shouted angrily. "Give it back, and to the devil with all of it. Let them send Behemoth!"

"Oh, no!" cried Margarita, arousing the curiosity of passers-by. "I agree to everything, I agree to this comedy with the cream, I am ready to go to the devil himself! I will not give it back!"

"Hah!" Azazello yelled suddenly, his eyes bulging and finger pointing somewhere in the direction of the garden railing.

Margarita turned to look, but found nothing out of the ordinary. When she turned back to Azazello for an explanation of the preposterous "Hah!" there was no one to offer explanations. Margarita Nikolayevna's mysterious acquaintance had disappeared.

Chapter 20

AZAZELLO'S CREAM

The full moon suspended in the clear evening sky shone down through the maple branches. The lindens and acacias etched intricate patterns of light and shadow on the garden floor. The triple window of the bay, wide open but with drawn shades, blazed madly with electric lights. All the lamps were turned on in Margarita Nikolayevna's bedroom, illuminating the total disorder in the room.

The bed was strewn with shifts, stockings, and other underwear. Crumpled underwear lay scattered on the floor next to a box of cigarettes, which had been crushed in the excitement. A pair of slippers stood on the night table near an unfinished cup of coffee and an ash tray with a smoking cigarette butt. A black evening dress was thrown over the back of a chair. The room was filled with the scent of perfume, mingled with the smell of an overheated iron.

Margarita Nikolayevna sat before the pier glass in nothing but a bathrobe over her naked body and black suede slippers. A gold wristwatch lay before her next to the box she had received from Azazello, and Margarita's eyes were fixed on its face.

At times it seemed to her that the watch was broken and the hands were not moving. But they moved, though slowly, as if forever getting stuck. And finally the minute hand was on the twenty-ninth minute past nine. Margarita's heart gave such a violent thump that for a moment she could not even pick up the box. Mastering herself, she opened it and saw that it contained a rich,

yellowish cream. It seemed to her that it smelled of swamp mud. With her fingertip, she spread a tiny dab of cream on her palm. The odor of swamp grass and forest became stronger. Then, with her palm, she began to rub the cream over her cheeks and forehead.

The cream spread easily and, it seemed to Margarita, evaporated at once. After rubbing in several coats, Margarita glanced into the mirror and dropped the box directly on her wristwatch, cracking the glass. Margarita closed her eyes, then glanced once more and burst into wild laughter.

Her carefully plucked eyebrows, thinned to a thread at the ends, had thickened and lay in even black arches above the suddenly green eyes. The thin vertical line which appeared on her forehead after the Master had vanished in October, was now gone without a trace, as were the yellowish shadows at the temples and the faint networks of lines at the outer corners of her eyes. Her cheeks glowed with an even, rosy flush; her forehead was white and pure; and the hairdresser's careful wave was gone from her hair.

The woman looking at the thirty-year-old Margarita from the mirror had naturally curly black hair and was about twenty years old.

Having laughed her fill, Margarita slipped out of her bathrobe at a single bound, dipped into the light rich cream and began to rub it into her body with firm strokes. Her body immediately turned a glowing pink. Then, in an instant, the nagging pain in her temple, which had troubled her all evening since the meeting at the Alexandrovsky Garden, disappeared as though someone had drawn a needle out of her brain. The muscles of her arms and legs grew strong, and her body became weightless.

She jumped up and hung suspended in the air just above the rug. Then she was slowly pulled down and descended.

"What a cream! What a cream!" Margarita cried, throwing herself into an armchair.

The changes wrought by the salve were not only ex-

temal. An effervescent joy welled up in her, in all of her, and she felt as if a million stinging bubbles had spread through every particle of her body. Margarita felt free, free of everything. She understood with utter clarity that this was the fulfillment of the premonition she had felt that morning, and that she was leaving her house and her former life forever. Nevertheless, splitting off from that former life, one idea still reached her: she had to perform one final duty before the beginning of something new and extraordinary, something that was drawing her upward, into the air. And naked, just as she was, she ran, now and then flying up into the air, to her husband's study, turned on the light and hurried to the desk. On a sheet torn from a pad she wrote a note in pencil in a rapid, bold, unhesitating hand:

"Forgive me and forget me as quickly as you can. I am leaving you forever. Do not search for me—this would be useless. I have become a witch from all the trials and tribulations that befell me. Time to go. Farewell.

Margarita."

With an entirely light heart now Margarita flew back to her bedroom. Natasha ran in after her, with a pile of things in her arms. And all these things—a wooden hanger with a dress, lace shawls, a pair of blue silk slippers on shoe trees, and a belt—slipped down to the floor and Natasha clasped her hands in wonder.

"Well, how do you like me?" Margarita Nikolayevna cried loudly in a hoarse voice.

"How is this?" Natasha whispered, backing away. "How did you do it, Margarita Nikolayevna?"

"It's the cream! The cream, the cream!" Margarita answered, pointing to the gleaming gold box and turning before the mirror.

The stunned Natasha went on staring for a time, as if she had lost her wits, then threw her arms around Margarita's neck, kissing her and crying:

"Just like satin! Glowing! Like satin! And the eyebrows, the eyebrows!"

"Take all my rags, take my perfumes and put them in your trunk, hide them," cried Margarita. "But don't take any jewelry, or they will say you stole it!"

Natasha gathered up into a bundle everything that came to hand—dresses, shoes, stockings, and underwear—and ran out of the bedroom.

A thunderous virtuoso waltz burst out of an open window somewhere across the lane. A car stopped, puffing, at the gate.

"Azazello will call any moment now!" Margarita exclaimed, listening to the waltz as it came pouring down through the lane. "He will call! And the foreigner is not dangerous, yes, now I understand he is not dangerous!"

The car started noisily and drove away from the gate. The gate clicked, and steps were heard along the path.

"It's Nikolay Ivanovich, I recognize his steps," thought Margarita. "I'll have to do something amusing and interesting before I go."

Margarita pulled the shade aside and sat down on the window sill sideways, clasping her knee with her arms. The moonlight licked her right side. Margarita raised her face to the moon and assumed a pensive and poetic expression. The steps went on, once, twice, and then grew silent. After admiring the moon a moment longer and sighing, for the sake of propriety, Margarita turned her head to the garden and there, indeed, was Nikolay Ivanovich, who lived in the lower story of the house. The moon cast a bright light upon him. He sat on a bench, and it was obvious that he had dropped there suddenly. The pince-nez on his face was awry, and he was clutching at his briefcase.

"Ah, Nikolay Ivanovich," Margarita said in a melancholy voice. "Good evening! You have been at a meeting?"

Nikolay Ivanovich made no reply.

"And I," Margarita continued, leaning out further into the garden, "I am sitting here alone, as you see, bored, gazing at the moon and listening to the waltz. . . ."

Margarita brushed her left hand across her temple, adjusting a strand of hair, then she said indignantly:

"But this is impolite, Nikolay Ivanovich! After all, I am a woman! It's boorish not to answer when you are spoken to."

Nikolay Ivanovich, visible in the moonlight to the last button on his gray vest, the last hair of his blond goatee, suddenly broke into a wild grin, rose from the bench and, evidently beside himself with embarrassment, waved his briefcase somewhere to the side instead of tipping his hat, and bent his knees as if preparing to go into a squatting dance.

"Ah, what a bore you are, Nikolay Ivanovich!" continued Margarita. "Generally, I'm so sick of all of you, I cannot tell you how happy I am to say good-bye to you! To the devil's mother with you!"

The telephone burst out ringing in the bedroom behind Margarita. She leaped down from the window sill and, forgetting Nikolay Ivanovich, seized the receiver.

"Azazello speaking," said the voice in the receiver.

"My dear, dear Azazello!" cried Margarita.

"Time to start out," said Azazello in the receiver, and his tone showed that he was pleased by Margarita's sincere and delighted response. "As you fly over the gate, shout 'I am invisible!' Fly a bit over the city, for practice, and then go south, out of town, directly toward the river. You are expected!"

Margarita hung up. In the next room something hobbled woodenly and began to bang on the door. Margarita flung the door open, and a broom flew dancing into the room, with the bristles up. It beat a tattoo on the floor, kicked and pulled toward the window. Margarita squealed with joy and jumped astride it. It was only now that the rider remembered in a flash that, in all the excitement, she had forgotten to get dressed. She galloped over to the bed and seized the first thing that came to hand—a pale-blue shift. Waving it like a banner, she flew out of the window. And the waltz rose louder over the garden.

From the window, Margarita slipped down and saw

Nikolay Ivanovich on the bench. He seemed to have frozen to it, listening in total petrification to the clattering and shouts from the brightly lit bedroom of the upstairs tenants.

"Farewell, Nikolay Ivanovich!" cried Margarita, hopping before him.

He gasped and crawled away along the bench, pawing at it with his hands and knocking down his briefcase.

"Farewell forever! I am off!" cried Margarita, drowning out the waltz. She suddenly realized that she had no need of the shift and, with a chilling laugh, she threw it down on Nikolay Ivanovich's head. Blinded, he tumbled down from the bench onto the brick-paved pathway.

Margarita turned for a last glance at the house where she had suffered so many years and saw in the blazing window Natasha's face, agape with astonishment.

"Good-by, Natasha!" Margarita shouted and hitched up the broom. "Invisible! Invisible!" she cried out still more loudly as she flew between the maple branches which lashed her face, then over the gate and out into the lane. And the utterly crazed waltz flew after her.

Chapter 21

FLIGHT

Invisible! Invisible! . . . From her own lane, Margarita flew into another, which crossed it at right angles. In an instant, she cut across this long, patched, mended, crooked lane with the warped door of the shop which sold cans of kerosene and bottles of exterminating fluid, and learned that, even in a completely free and invisible state it was necessary to exercise a little caution. It was only by some miracle that she managed to pull up short and not to smash herself to death against the old, bent street light on the corner. Swerving around it, Margarita tightened her hands on the broom and slowed down her flight, watching for electric lines and signs hanging across the sidewalk.

In the third lane, which led directly to the Arbat, Margarita gained still more confidence in managing the broom and realized that it was obedient to the slightest touch of her hands or feet. She also understood that, flying over the city, one must keep one's eyes open and curb the impulse to reckless play. Besides, it became entirely clear to her that the pedestrians did not see her. Nobody raised his head, nobody cried "Look! Look!" or jumped aside, nobody screamed or fainted or broke into laughter.

Margarita flew soundlessly, very slowly and at a low height, just about the level of the second story. But even at her slow speed, she miscalculated a little at the very exit to the dazzlingly illuminated Arbat and struck her shoulder against a brightly lit disk with an arrow painted

on it. This angered her. She reined in the broom, flew aside and, making a sudden rush at the disk, she smashed it to pieces with the end of the broomstick. The splinters clattered down, pedestrians dashed out of the way, there was the sound of a whistle, and Margarita, having performed this needless act, burst into laughter.

"I'll have to be even more careful over the Arbat," she thought to herself. "There's such a tangle of obstacles here, you can't tell what is what." She began to dive in and out among the wires and cables. Under her swam the roofs of buses, streetcars and automobiles, and the sidewalks looked to her like rivers of caps. Rivulets separated themselves from these rivers and flowed into the fiery maws of stores open at night.

She crossed the Arbat, rose higher, to the fourth floors, floated past the dazzling signs over the theater building on the corner and turned into a narrow lane bordered by tall buildings. All the windows were open and everywhere she heard the music of radios. Curious, Margarita peeked into one of the windows. She saw a kitchen. Two primuses roared on the stove; two women stood near them with spoons in their hands, quarreling.

"You should turn off the light in the bathroom when you leave, Pelageya Petrovna," said the woman before a saucepan with some steaming food, "or we'll apply for your eviction."

"You're a fine one yourself," answered the other.

"You're both fine ones," Margarita said loudly, tumbling across the window sill into the kitchen.

The quarreling women turned to the voice and froze with the dirty spoons in their hands. Margarita cautiously stretched out her hand between them, and turned out both primus stoves. The women gasped and opened their mouths. But Margarita was already bored in the kitchen and flew out into the lane.

At the end of the lane she was attracted by the magnificent bulk of an eight-story building, evidently newly erected. Margarita lowered herself till she stood on the ground and saw that the front of the building was faced

with black marble and that the doors were wide; behind their glass could be seen the doorman's cap embellished with gold braid and his gleaming buttons; over the doors was a sign in golden letters, DRAMLIT HOUSE.

Margarita squinted at the sign, trying to decipher the word "Dramlit." With the broom under her arm, she entered the lobby, bumping the astonished doorman with the door, and found a huge blackboard near the elevator, with the apartment numbers and tenants' names in white letters. She rose a little and greedily began to read the names: Khustov, Dvubratsky, Kvant, Beskudnikov, Latunsky . . .

"Latunsky!" Margarita shrilled. "Latunsky! Why, it was he . . . it was he who ruined the Master!"

The doorman's eyes bulged and he jumped up with shock as he stared at the board, trying to understand the marvel: how was it that the tenants' directory had suddenly burst out squealing?

And Margarita meantime was already speeding up the staircase, repeating with a kind of rapture:

"Latunsky eighty-four . . . Latunsky eighty-four. . ."

At the left here, 82. On the right, 83. Further up, left, 84! Here! And here is the name plate, "O. Latunsky."

Margarita jumped off the broom, and the stone landing was pleasantly cool to her hot soles. Margarita rang once, twice. But no one opened. Margarita pressed the bell harder and could hear the furious ringing inside Latunsky's apartment. Yes, the tenant of apartment 84 ought to be grateful to his dying day to the late Berlioz for falling under the streetcar and for the memorial meeting which had been set for just that evening. The critic Latunsky had been born under a lucky star—it saved him from a meeting with Margarita, who had become a witch that Friday.

No one opened. Then Margarita dashed down, counting off the floors, broke out into the street and, looking up, counted the floors again outside, trying to find the windows of Latunsky's apartment. Unquestionably, his were the five dark windows on the eighth floor, on the

corner. Margarita rose into the air and a few moments later she floated through an open window into a dark room lit only by a silver strip of moonlight. Margarita ran down this strip and found the switch. A moment later the entire apartment was lit. The broom stood in the corner. Making sure that no one was home, Margarita opened the door to the landing and checked the name plate. It was there. Margarita was in the right place.

Oh, yes, people say that Latunsky still turns pale when he recalls that frightful evening, and that he still pronounces Berlioz' name with veneration. No one knows what dark and evil crime would have marked this evening, for when Margarita returned from the kitchen she had a heavy hammer in her hands.

The invisible flier tried to restrain and argue with herself, but her hands shook with impatience. Taking careful aim, she struck the piano keys, and the first pathetic howl spread through the apartment. The innocent parlor instrument screamed in a frenzy. Its keys dropped out, the ivory tops flew in all directions. The instrument howled, gurgled, rang.

Streams of water roared in the bathroom and the kitchen. "It must be coming down on the floor already. . ." thought Margarita and added aloud:

"However, I must not linger here."

A torrent ran from the kitchen into the hallway. Splashing with her bare feet in the water, Margarita carried pails of water from the kitchen into the critic's study. Then she broke the door of the wardrobe with the hammer and ran to the bedroom. There she smashed the mirror front of the closet, pulled out the critic's suit and drowned it in the bathtub.

The destruction she was wreaking gave her burning pleasure, but it seemed to her that the results were too niggardly.

At this time, in apartment 82, which was directly below Latunsky's apartment, the maidservant of the playwright Kvant was drinking tea in the kitchen and wondering at all the clatter, running, and ringing upstairs.

Raising her head to the ceiling, she suddenly saw that it was changing from white to a corpse-like bluish hue. The stain grew larger as she stared and suddenly large drops were hanging from it. The maid sat for about two minutes, amazed at the phenomenon, until the water began to rain down, tapping on the floor. She jumped up and brought a basin to catch it. But that did not help, since the area of the rain expanded and the water began to pour down on the gas stove and the table with the dishes. Then Kvant's housemaid ran out on the staircase with a cry and the bell began to ring in Latunsky's apartment.

"Ah, they're ringing now . . . time to go," said Margarita. She sat down astride the broom, listening to the female voice screaming through the keyhole:

"Open, open up! Dusya, open the door! You must have a leak. We're flooded!"

Margarita rose about a meter above ground and struck at the chandelier. Two bulbs exploded, and the crystal pendants flew in all directions. The cries in the keyhole ceased and running steps were heard on the stairs. Margarita floated out of the window and swung the hammer lightly at the pane. The pane sobbed and a cascade of splintered glass poured down the marble-faced wall. Margarita flew to the next window. Far below people were running on the sidewalk, and one of the cars standing before the entrance started and drove away.

Passers-by came running down the lane toward the Diamlit building, and within the building people rushed senselessly and frantically up and down the stairs. Kvant's maid cried to them that the apartment was flooded. She was soon joined by Khustov's servant from apartment 80, which was below Kvant's. In the Khustov apartment there was a downpour in the kitchen and the bathroom. Finally, a huge slab of plaster came crashing from the ceiling in Kvant's kitchen, breaking all the dirty dishes. After that the water gushed down in veritable torrents through the squares of sodden, sagging lath. And now screams rose from the stairways.

Flying past one of the last windows on the fourth floor,

Margarita looked in and saw a man who had pulled a gas mask over his face in sheer panic. Margarita tapped his window with the hammer, and the terrified man vanished from the room.

And suddenly the wild rampage was at an end. Slipping down to the third floor, Margarita looked into the last window, covered with a thin dark shade. A faint light burned in the room. A boy of about four sat in a little bed with netting stretched across the sides and listened fearfully. There were no adults in the room; evidently, they had all run out of the apartment.

"They are breaking windows," said the boy and called, "Mamma!"

No one answered, and the boy said:

"Mamma, I'm afraid."

Margarita raised the shade and flew into the window.

"I'm afraid," the boy repeated, trembling.

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, little one," said Margarita, trying to soften her criminal voice, grown hoarse and harsh in the wind. "It's only boys breaking windows."

"With a sling?" asked the boy and stopped trembling.

"With a sling, with a sling," confirmed Margarita. "Go to sleep."

"It's Sitnik," said the boy. "He has a sling."

"Of course, it's hel!"

The boy glanced slyly sideways and asked:

"And where are you, auntie?"

"I'm not here," answered Margarita. "You're dreaming about me."

"I thought so," said the boy.

"Lie down," Margarita commanded. "Put your hand under your cheek, and I will come to you in your dream."

"All right, come, come," the boy agreed and immediately lay down and put his hand under his cheek.

"I'll tell you a fairy tale," said Margarita and placed her burning hand on the cropped head. "There was a certain lady in the world . . . She had no children, and no happiness generally. And so at first she cried a lot, and

then she became wicked. . . ." Margarita fell silent and removed her hand. The boy was asleep.

Margarita put the hammer down quietly on the window sill and flew out. The street below was in an uproar. People ran back and forth over the glass-strewn asphalt sidewalk, shouting something. Militiamen darted about among them. Suddenly the alarm bell struck and a red fire engine with a ladder rolled into the lane from the Arbat.

What happened afterward did not interest Margarita any longer. Careful to avoid wires, she pressed the broom in her hands and in an instant she was above the ill-starred building. The lane beneath her slanted and dropped back. Instead, she saw under her feet a jumble of roofs crisscrossed by gleaming paths. All of this suddenly shifted to the side, and the chains of lights blurred and ran together.

Margarita made another upward spurt, and the whole medley of roofs fell away, giving way to a pool of quivering electric lights. And suddenly the pool rose up vertically and appeared over Margarita's head, while the moon glinted underfoot. Realizing that she had tumbled over, Margarita assumed the proper position. When she turned, she saw that the pool had also disappeared. There was nothing now but a rosy glow on the horizon. Within a second this vanished too, and Margarita found herself alone with the moon, which flew above her on the left. Margarita's hair had long been standing up like a haystack, and the moonlight washed her body, whistling by. Seeing the two rows of infrequent lights below merge into two continuous fiery threads and vanish rapidly behind her, Margarita guessed that she was moving with enormous speed and wondered why she was not breathless.

After several seconds a new blaze of electric lights flared and rolled up underfoot, but instantly it spun around like a top and fell away. Another few seconds, and the sequence was repeated.

"Cities, cities!" cried Margarita.

After that she saw two or three long swords glinting

dully in open black sheaths, and realized that those were rivers.

Turning her head up and to the left, the flier admired the moon rushing madly above her back to Moscow, yet, strangely, standing still so that she clearly saw upon it some dark, mysterious image—either a dragon, or a hump-backed horse with a sharp muzzle turned to the abandoned city.

And now she heard a dense sound, as of something ripping up the air behind her and following her. Gradually, a woman's laughter, spreading over many versts, was added to this noise of something flying like a bomb-shell. Margarita looked back and saw a complicated dark object catching up with her. As it came nearer, it grew more distinct and she could see that it was someone flying mounted. And finally the flier was clearly visible: slowing down a little, Natasha caught up with Margarita.

Completely naked, with tangled hair flying in the wind, she rode a fat hog. The hog was clutching a briefcase with its front hooves, while the hind ones furiously beat the air. A pair of pince-nez, occasionally glinting in the moonlight, had evidently fallen off its nose and flew beside it on a cord. Its hat kept slipping down over its eyes. Taking a close look, Margarita recognized the hog as Nikolay Ivanovich, and her laughter reverberated over the forest, mingled with Natasha's.

"Natashka!" Margarita shrilled. "You used the cream?"

"Darling!" Natasha shouted, wakening the sleeping pine forest. "My French queen, I smeared it on his bald pate too, that's what I did!"

"Princess!" the hog roared plaintively, carrying its rider at a gallop.

Flying side by side with Margarita, Natasha told her amid bursts of laughter about the events that took place in the house after Margarita Nikolayevna had flown away across the gate.

Natasha confessed that she had never touched the clothes she had been given but threw off her own dress and ran at once to rub herself with the cream. And the

same thing happened to her as to her mistress. While Natasha, laughing with joy, adored her magical beauty in the mirror, the door had opened and Nikolay Ivanovich made an appearance. He was excited. In his hands he had Margarita Nikolayevna's shift and his own hat and briefcase. At the sight of Natasha, Nikolay Ivanovich was petrified. Then he collected himself a little and, red as a lobster, declared that he had deemed it his duty to pick up the shift and return it personally. . . .

"The things he said to me, the scoundrell!" Natasha squealed and laughed. "The things he said! How he tried to seduce me! The money he promised me! He told me that Klavdia Petrovna would never discover anything. Now, tell me, am I lying?" Natasha cried to the hog, which merely turned away its snout in embarrassment.

Prancing around the bedroom, Natasha playfully daubed Nikolay Ivanovich with the cream and stood dumbfounded herself at the result: the face of the esteemed downstairs neighbor drew up into a pig's snout, and his hands and feet were tipped with hooves. Nikolay Ivanovich glanced at himself in the mirror and set up a desperate howl, but it was too late. A few seconds later he was flying, with a rider on his back, the devil alone knew where out of Moscow, sobbing with grief.

"I demand the return of my normal shape!" the hog suddenly croaked and grunted in frenzied, pleading tones. "Margarita Nikolayevna, you must stop your maid, you must tell her!"

"Ah, so I'm a maid to you now? A maid?" Natasha cried, pinching the hog's ear. "And before I was a goddess? What did you call me?"

"Venus!" the hog sniveled, flying over a noisy brook that ran along a rocky bed, and brushing the low-growing nut trees with its hooves.

"Venus! Venus!" Natasha cried triumphantly, one arm akimbo, the other stretched to the moon.

She dug her heels into the hog's flanks, grown thinner from the mad gallop, and it spurred forward so violently that the air was rent again. After a moment, Natasha

was already far ahead, no larger than a black dot. Soon she vanished from sight altogether, and the noise of her flight faded away.

Margarita flew slowly over an unfamiliar, deserted landscape, over hills strewn with infrequent boulders which lay among widely spaced giant pines. Margarita was now flying, not above the pines, but between their trunks, silvered on one side by the moon. Her light shadow flitted on the ground before her. The moon was now at her back.

Margarita sensed the nearness of water and guessed that her goal was near. The pines spread out, and Margarita slowly floated to the edge of a precipitous chalk bank. Beyond this bank, a river lay in the shadows far below. Mist hung in tatters on the bushes along the bank, and the opposite shore was low and flat. There, under a solitary clump of spreading trees, she saw a tiny, tossing fire and moving figures. It seemed to Margarita that she heard gay, monotonous, throbbing music coming from there. Beyond that spot, as far as the eye could see, there were no signs of people or habitation on the silvered plain.

Margarita leaped down from the bank and quickly descended to the water, which tempted her after the aerial race. Throwing aside the broom, she made a running start and dived headfirst into the stream. Her light body pierced the water like an arrow, throwing up a column of spray that almost reached the moon. The water was warm as in a bathhouse. Coming up from the depths, Margarita swam to her heart's content in total solitude in that nocturnal river.

Then she whistled sharply and, mounting the broom that came flying at her call, she dashed across the river to the opposite bank. The shadow of the chalk mountain did not reach here, and the entire bank was flooded with moonlight.

As soon as Margarita's feet touched the moist grass, the music under the willows struck up louder and a shower of sparks flew up more merrily from the fire.

Under the willow branches, hung with tender, fluffy tassels clearly visible in the moonlight, sat two rows of fat-jowled frogs. Blowing themselves up like rubber toys, they played a bravura march on wooden pipes. Pieces of decaying, phosphorescent wood hung from willow withes before the musicians, lighting up the notes. The tossing flames of the bonfire played on the faces of the frogs.

The march was performed in honor of Margarita. She was being tendered a gala welcome. The transparent mermaids stopped their round of games over the river and waved to Margarita with water weeds. The greenish, deserted bank moaned with their greetings, echoing far and wide. Naked witches jumped out from behind the willows, lined themselves up and began to curtsy and bow with courtly bows. Someone with goat's feet flew up and kissed her hand, spread silk over the grass, inquired whether the queen had had a pleasant swim, and invited her to lie down for a rest.

Margarita lay down. The goat-legged one brought her a glass of champagne. She drank it, and it instantly sent warmth to her heart. She asked about Natasha, and was told that Natasha had already had her swim and hurried off on her hog to Moscow, to announce that Margarita would soon arrive and to help prepare suitable raiment for her.

Then everybody began to make ready. The mermaids finished their dance in the moonlight and dissolved in it. The goat-legged one respectfully inquired how Margarita had come to the river. When he learned that she had come astride a broom, he said:

"Oh, no, that is uncomfortable!" In a moment he constructed a suspicious-looking telephone out of two twigs and demanded that someone instantly send a car. His order was obeyed at once.

A palomino-colored, open car dropped on the island, but instead of a chauffeur, a rook, black, long-beaked, sat in the driver's seat, wearing an oilcloth cap and gauntlets. The island was becoming deserted. The witches flew away

and melted in the glow of the moon. The fire was burning down and the coals were covered with gray ash.

The goat-legged one helped Margarita in, and she settled in the wide back seat of the car. It roared, leaped up and rose almost to the moon. The island vanished, the river vanished. Margarita sped through the night to Moscow.

Chapter 22

BY CANDLELIGHT

The even hum of the car, flying high above the land, made Margarita drowsy, and the light of the moon warmed her pleasantly. She closed her eyes and gave her face to the wind, thinking with a touch of sadness about the unknown river bank she had just left and, as she felt, would never see again. After all the sorceries and marvels of that evening, she already half-guessed to whom she was being taken, but it did not frighten her. The hope of winning back her happiness made her fearless. However, she did not have much time to dream of this happiness on the way. Whether the rook knew his job well, or the car was swift, very soon Margarita opened her eyes and, instead of the dark forest, she saw beneath her the quivering lake of Moscow lights. The black bird-chauffeur unscrewed the right front wheel while still in motion, then landed the car in some deserted graveyard in the Dorogomilov district.

He let off the silent, unquestioning Margarita with her broom near one of the gravestones, started the car, and sent it rolling straight into the ravine beyond the graveyard. It tumbled down and crashed below. The rook respectfully tipped his cap, mounted the wheel, and flew off.

Immediately, a black cape appeared from behind one of the monuments. A fang flashed in the moon, and Margarita recognized Azazello. He gestured to her to mount the broom, while he bestrode a long rapier. Both of them soared up into the air and, seen by no one, alighted some seconds later on Sadovaya, near No. 302-b.

When the companions passed through the gateway, carrying the broom and rapier under their arms, Margarita noticed a man in a cap and tall boots, restless and evidently waiting for someone. Light as their steps were, the solitary man heard them and started anxiously, unable to make out where the sounds came from.

They did not ring at the door of apartment Number 50. Azazello noiselessly opened the door with his key.

The first thing that struck Margarita was the dense darkness she found herself in. It was as dark as in an underground cave, and she involuntarily clutched at Azazello's cape, afraid of stumbling. But then a tiny light, as of an icon lamp, blinked somewhere far above and began to draw nearer. Azazello took Margarita's broom from under her arm as they walked and the broom disappeared without a sound in the dark.

They began to ascend a wide staircase, and it seemed to Margarita that the stairs would never end. She was astonished that a foyer of an ordinary Moscow apartment could contain this extraordinary, invisible, but quite palpable, endless staircase. But the ascent was finally over, and Margarita understood that she was on a landing. The flame approached and Margarita saw in its light the face of a tall, black man who held the lamp in his hand. Those who had had the misfortune of getting into his way during the past few days would, of course, have recognized him at once, even in that feeble light. It was Koroviev, alias Fagot.

True, Koroviev's appearance had undergone a considerable change. The flickering light was reflected, not in the cracked pince-nez, which should have been thrown out into the garbage heap a long time ago, but in a monocle—also cracked. The skimpy mustache on his face was curled and pomaded, and his blackness was quite easily explained: he wore an evening coat. Only his chest was white.

Magician, choirmaster, wizard, interpreter, or the devil knows what else in truth, Koroviev bowed and, with a

broad sweep of the lamp in the air, invited Margarita to follow him. Azazello vanished.

"A remarkably strange evening," thought Margarita. "I was ready for anything but this. Could their electricity have gone out? But the most astonishing thing of all is the size of this place. . . . How could all this be squeezed into a Moscow apartment? It simply couldn't! . . ."

"Permit me to introduce myself," Koroviev creaked. "Koroviev. You are amazed at the absence of light? Economy—you must think? No, no and no! Let the first executioner who comes our way—say, one of those who will have the honor later on to kiss your knee—chop off my head on this very block if this is so! Simply, Messire dislikes electric light, and we shall turn it on only at the very last. And then, believe me, there will be light enough. In fact, it might be better if there were less."

Margarita liked Koroviev, and his clacking chatter seemed to calm her.

"No," she answered. "What strikes me most is where you found space for all of this." She swept her hand to emphasize the immensity of the hall.

Koroviev smirked sweetly, which made the shadows stir in the folds near his nose.

"The simplest thing of all!" he said. "Those who are familiar with the fifth dimension can easily expand a place to the required proportions. I'll tell you more, dear madame, they can stretch space the devil knows how far! However," Koroviev rattled on, "I have known people without the least conception not only of the fifth dimension, but of anything else, yet capable of working wonders in the sense of expanding space. I heard of one man, for example, who received a three-room apartment and immediately turned the three into four without any fifth dimension or any other things that make your mind reel, simply by dividing one room with a partition.

"After that, he exchanged the apartment for two in different districts of Moscow—one with three rooms, and the other with two. You will agree that now he had five rooms. Then he exchanged the three-room one for two two-room apartments, and thus became the possessor, as

you see, of six rooms—though scattered, it's true, in total disorder all over Moscow. He was already about to perform the final and most brilliant step by placing an advertisement in the newspaper, offering to exchange six rooms in different districts of Moscow for one five-room apartment on Zemlyany Val, when his activities were ended for reasons independent of his will. It is possible that he still has a room somewhere, but—I can assure you—not in Moscow. There's an operator for you! And you talk of a fifth dimension!"

Although it was not Margarita but Koroviev who had talked of the fifth dimension, she laughed gaily at his story of the real estate operator. And Koroviev continued:

"But let's get on to business, Margarita Nikolayevna, let's get on to business. You are quite a clever woman and have probably guessed who our host is."

Margarita's heart thumped, and she nodded.

"Well, then," said Koroviev. "We hate to leave things half-said and unclear. Every year Messire gives a ball. It is called the spring ball of the full moon, or the ball of a hundred kings. The mobs of people! . . ." Koroviev clutched his cheek as though he had a sudden toothache. "But I hope you will see for yourself. Well, Messire is a bachelor, as you naturally understand yourself. But he needs a hostess," Koroviev spread his arms. "You must agree, without a hostess. . ."

Margarita listened to Koroviev, trying not to miss a single word. There was a chill under her heart. The hope of happiness made her dizzy.

"By established tradition," Koroviev went on, "the mistress of the ball must bear the name of Margarita, and she must be a native. As you see, we are traveling, and at the present moment we are in Moscow. We have found one hundred and twenty-one Margaritas in Moscow. But, will you believe me," Koroviev slapped himself on the calf in despair, "not one is suitable! And finally, by a happy chance. . ."

Koroviev grinned expressively, bowing from his waist, and Margarita's heart was chilled again.

"In short!" cried Koroviev. "We'll make it very short: you will not refuse to assume the duties?"

"I will not refuse!" Margarita answered firmly.

"It's settled, then," said Koroviev, and raising the lamp, he added: "Follow me, please."

They walked among columns and finally came to another hall which, for some reason, smelled of lemons. Margarita heard strange rustlings and something brushed her head.

Koroviev blew out his lamp and it vanished from his hands. Now Margarita saw a strip of light before her, under a dark door. Koroviev knocked at the door. Margarita became so nervous that her teeth began to chatter and shivers ran down her back.

The door was opened. The room turned out to be quite small. Margarita saw a wide oak bed with crumpled dirty sheets and pillows. Before the bed stood an oak table with carved legs, which held a candelabrum with arms in the shape of birds' claws. Thick wax candles burned in these claws. Next to the candelabrum there was a large chessboard with cunningly fashioned chessmen. A low bench stood on a small worn rug. On another table stood a gold bowl and a second candelabrum, with branches in the form of serpents. The room smelled of sulphur and pitch. The shadows of the candleholders crisscrossed on the floor.

Among those present, Margarita immediately recognized Azazello, now dressed in a frock coat and standing at the head of the bed. In his gala outfit, Azazello no longer looked like the bandit in whose shape he had appeared to Margarita in the Alexandrovsky Garden. He bowed to her with utmost gallantry.

A naked witch, the same Hella who had embarrassed the estimable bar manager of the Variety Theater, and the same—alas!—who had fortunately been scared off by the rooster on the night of the famous performance, sat on a rug on the floor near the bed, stirring something in a pan which sent up sulphurous fumes.

Besides the people in the room, there was also an enor-

mous black tom who sat on a high stool before the chess table, with a knight in his right paw.

Hella rose slightly and bowed to Margarita. The tom jumped off the stool and did the same. As he scraped with his hind paw, he dropped the knight and crawled under the bed to recover it.

All of this the terrified Margarita managed somehow to make out in the deceptive shadows of the candles. But her eyes were drawn to the bed, occupied by him whom poor Ivan had only recently tried to convince at the Patriarchs' Ponds that the devil did not exist. This non-existent one was now sitting on the bed.

Two eyes fixed themselves on Margarita's face. The right, with a golden spark in its depths, piercing anyone it turned on to the bottom of his soul; and the left, empty and black like the narrow eye of a needle, like the opening to a bottomless well of darkness and shadows. Woland's face was twisted sideways, the right corner of his mouth was drawn down, the high bald forehead was cleft by deep lines running parallel to the pointed eyebrows. The skin on Woland's face seemed to have been forever darkened by some searing heat.

Woland sprawled on the bed, wearing only a long night-shirt, dirty and patched on the left shoulder. One bare leg was folded under him, the other was stretched out, rested on a bench. Hella was rubbing some smoking salve into the knee of this dark leg.

On Woland's bare, hairless chest Margarita made out a gold chain with a beetle artfully carved of dark stone, with some letters on its back. Next to Woland, on a heavy pedestal, stood a strange globe that seemed alive, with one side glowing in the sun.

The silence lasted several seconds. "He is studying me," thought Margarita and with an effort of will tried to still the trembling in her legs.

At last Woland spoke, with a smile that made his bright eye flash.

"I welcome you, Queen, and beg to be excused for my domestic attire."

Woland's voice was so low that it slipped into hoarseness now and then.

He took a long sword from the bed, bent down and poked it under the bed, saying:

"Come out! The game is off. Our guest is here."

"By no means," Koroviev hissed anxiously, like a prompter, into Margarita's ear.

"By no means. . ." Margarita began.

"Messire. . ." Koroviev breathed over her ear.

"By no means, Messire," Margarita said quietly but distinctly, mastering herself. She smiled and added, "I beg you not to interrupt your game. I imagine that the chess journals would pay great sums of money for the opportunity to publish it."

Azazello uttered a low grunt of approval, and Woland, after an attentive look at Margarita, beckoned to her. She approached him, not feeling the floor under her bare feet. Woland laid his hand, heavy as stone but hot as fire, on Margarita's shoulder, pulled her over sharply and seated her on the bed next to himself.

"Well, if you are so enchantingly gracious," he said, "and I expected nothing less, then let's not stand on ceremony." He bent down to the edge of the bed again and cried: "How long will this tomfoolery under the bed go on? Come out, blasted Hans!"

"I cannot find the knight," the tom replied from under the bed in a muffled, false voice. "He galloped off somewhere, and I keep picking up some infernal frog."

"Do you imagine that you are at a fair in some market place?" Woland pretended to be angry. "There are no frogs under the bed! Leave those cheap tricks for the Variety Theater. If you don't come out at once, we shall regard the game as conceded, you damned deserter!"

"Never, Messire!" the tom yelled and immediately crawled out from under the bed with the knight in his paw.

"May I present to you. . ." Woland began, and interrupted himself: "No, I can't stand this clown. Look what he did to himself under the bed!"

The tom, covered with dust and standing on his hind legs, was in the meantime bowing to Margarita. Now he had a white evening bow tie around his neck; a ladies' mother-of-pearl opera glass dangled from a ribbon on his chest. Besides, his whiskers were gilded.

"What's this now?" cried Woland. "Why did you gild your whiskers? And why the devil do you need a tie if you have no trousers?"

"A cat isn't supposed to wear trousers, Messire," the tom answered with great dignity. "You will tell me to put on boots next! Puss in Boots exists only in fairy tales, Messire. But have you ever seen anyone at a ball without a tie? I don't intend to make myself a laughing stock and risk being kicked out! Everyone adorns himself as best he can. You may consider this as applying to the opera glass, Messire!"

"But the whiskers? . . ."

"I don't understand," the tom objected drily. "Why could Azazello and Koroviev put white powder on their faces after shaving today, and in what way is white powder better than gold? I powdered my whiskers, that's all! It would be different if I had shaved! A shaven tom would indeed be outrageous, I agree a thousand times. But generally," and the tom's voice trembled with injured feelings, "I see that people are picking on me. I see that I am facing a serious problem: am I to attend the ball at all? What will you say to that, Messire?"

And the tom puffed himself up with chagrin to such a size that it seemed he would burst in another second.

"Oh, you swindler, you swindler," Woland said, shaking his head. "Every time he is about to lose a game, he'll try to pull the wool over your eyes, like the worst charlatan. Sit down at once and stop your jabbering."

"And so," Woland continued to Margarita, "may I present to you, Donna, my suite. This buffoon is the tom cat Behemoth. You have already met Azazello and Koroviev. I recommend to you my servant Hella: she is efficient, quick-witted, and there is no service she cannot perform."

The beautiful Hella smiled, turning her greenish eyes to Margarita as she went on dipping into the salve and rubbing it into Woland's knee.

"I guess that is all," Woland concluded, wincing when Hella pressed his knee too hard. "As you see, it is a small, mixed, and simple company." He fell silent and began to turn the globe before him. It was so cunningly constructed that the blue oceans on it stirred and the ice cap on the pole seemed to be truly made of ice and snow. "I see that you are intrigued by my globe?"

"Oh, I have never seen one like it."

"It's a clever little artifact. Frankly speaking, I don't like to listen to news reports on the radio. They are usually delivered by young women who don't articulate place names clearly. Besides, every third one stutters, as if they were chosen with this particular qualification in mind. My globe is much more convenient, especially since I must have exact information on events. Take, for example, this piece of land, lapped by the ocean on one side. Look, how it begins to glow. A war has started there. If you look closely, you will see the details as well."

Margarita bent over the globe and the square of land expanded, became infused with many colors and turned into something like a relief map. Then she saw a strip of river and a village beside it. A house, which at first had been the size of a pea, grew and became as big as a matchbox. Suddenly, its roof flew up into the air without a sound, together with a puff of black smoke, and the walls collapsed, so that nothing was left of the two-story box except a little pile with black smoke pouring from it. Bringing her eye still nearer, Margarita saw a tiny female figure lying on the ground, and near her, in a pool of blood, a baby with outflung arms.

"That's all," Woland said with a smile. "He had had no time to sin. Abaddon's work is flawless."

"I should not like to be on the side opposed by this Abaddon," said Margarita. "On whose side is he?"

"The more I speak to you," Woland replied amiably, "the more I am convinced of your intelligence. I will re-

assure you. He is remarkably impartial and sympathizes equally with both contending sides. Consequently, the results are always the same for both sides. Abaddon!" Woland called in a low voice, and the figure of a gaunt man in dark glasses stepped out of the wall. His glasses produced such a strong effect on Margarita that she whimpered and hid her face in Woland's leg. "Oh, stop it!" Woland cried. "These modern people with their nerves!" He landed a resounding slap on Margarita's back, so that her whole body seemed to ring. "Don't you see he is in his glasses? Besides, Abaddon has never appeared to anyone prematurely, and he never will. And then, I am here. You are my guest! I simply wanted to show him to you."

Abaddon stood motionless.

"Can he take his glasses off for a second?" asked Margarita, pressing herself to Woland and shivering, but now with curiosity.

"That is impossible," Woland answered seriously and waved his hand to Abaddon, who vanished. "What did you want to say, Azazello?"

"Messire," replied Azazello, "permit me to report that we have two outsiders here: a beauty who keeps sniveling and begging permission to remain with her mistress, and, if you will pardon my expression, her hog."

"How oddly these beauties behave!" remarked Woland.

"It's Natasha, Natasha!" Margarita exclaimed.

"Oh, well, let her stay with her mistress. And send the hog to the chefs."

"To be slaughtered?" Margarita cried in alarm. "Oh, no, Messire, it's Nikolay Ivanovich, our downstairs neighbor. There is a misunderstanding. You see, she dabbed him with the cream. . ."

"But wait," said Woland. "Who the devil would want to slaughter him, and what for? Let him sit it out with the chefs, that's all. You must agree, I cannot have him in the ballroom."

"Well, then. . ." said Azazello and announced: "Midnight is approaching, Messire!"

Chapter 23

SATAN'S GREAT BALL

Midnight approached, and it was necessary to hurry. Margarita was dimly aware of her surroundings. She remembered the candles and the jeweled indoor pool. When she stepped on the floor of the pool, Hella, and Natasha who was helping her, doused her with a hot, thick, red liquid. The salt taste on her lips told Margarita that she was being washed in blood. The bloody mantle was replaced by another—thick, transparent, pinkish, and Margarita's head began to turn from the heady scent of rose oil. Then Margarita was stretched out on a crystal couch and rubbed with some large green leaves until her body gleamed.

The tom burst in and began to help. He crouched at Margarita's feet and began to rub her soles with the air of a bootblack shining shoes in the street.

Margarita did not remember who made her slippers of the petals of a pale rose, or how these slippers fastened by themselves with gold clasps. Some power pulled her up and set her before a mirror. A diamond crown glistened in her hair. Koroviev appeared from somewhere and hung on Margarita's breast a heavy picture of a black poodle in an oval frame, suspended from a heavy chain. This adornment made the queen very uncomfortable. The chain immediately began to chafe her neck, and the picture weighed her down. But there was a compensation for the discomfort caused her by the chain with the black poodle—the deference with which Koroviev and Behemoth began to treat her.

"It's all right, it's all right!" Koroviev muttered at the door of the room with the pool. "It can't be helped, it's necessary. . . . Permit me, Queen, to give you one final bit of advice. There will be different people among the guests, oh, very different, but no one, Queen Margo, is to be shown any preferencel Even if you dislike someone . . . I know that you will not show it by your expression. No, no, don't even think of it! He'll notice it instantly! You must force yourself to love him, Queen, you must! The mistress of the ball will be rewarded for it a hundredfold. And also—no one is to be neglected! At least a smile, if there is no time for a word, at least a slight turn of the head! Anything but inattention, or they will sicken. . . ."

Margarita, accompanied by Koroviev and Behemoth, stepped out of the room with the pool into total darkness.

"I will, I will," the tom whispered, "I will give the signal!"

"Give it, then!" Koroviev answered in the dark.

"The ball!!!" the tom shrilled piercingly, and Margarita cried out and closed her eyes for a few seconds. The ball dropped on her suddenly in the form of light, and with it, sounds and smells. Carried off by Koroviev, who held her under the arm, Margarita found herself in a tropical forest. Red-breasted, green-tailed parrots cried, "I am delighted!" But the forest soon ended, and its humid heat gave way to the coolness of the ballroom with columns of some yellow, sparkling stone. Like the forest, the ballroom was empty, save for the naked Negroes with silver headbands by the columns. Their faces became mottled gray with excitement when Margarita flew into the room with her suite, which now included Azazello, who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Koroviev released Margarita's hand and whispered:

"Straight over the tulips!"

A low wall of white tulips rose before Margarita, and beyond it she saw innumerable lights under small shades, and the white chests and black shoulders of men in

evening dress. Now Margarita understood where the sounds of the ball were coming from. She was overwhelmed by the roar of trumpets, and a wave of violin music, breaking from under it, washed over her body like blood. The orchestra of about a hundred and fifty musicians was playing a polonaise.

The man in tails who was standing on a podium before the orchestra turned pale when he saw Margarita, smiled, and, with a wave of his hand, suddenly raised all the players to their feet. Without halting the music for a second, the standing orchestra drenched Margarita with sound. The man above the orchestra turned from it and made a low bow, spreading his arms wide. Margarita waved to him, smiling.

"No, not enough, not enough," Koroviev whispered. "He will not sleep all night. Cry to him, 'Greetings to you, King of the Waltz!'"

Margarita cried out the words and wondered when her voice, full as a bell, covered the howling of the orchestra. The man started with happiness and placed his left hand over his heart, while the right went on waving the white baton before the orchestra.

"Not enough, not enough," whispered Koroviev. "Look left, at the first violins, and nod to them so that each man will think you recognized him personally. These are all world celebrities. Smile at that one . . . behind the first stand, it's Vieuxtemps! . . . Good, very good . . . Now let's go on!"

"Who is the conductor?" Margarita asked as they flew away.

"Johann Strauss!" cried the tom. "And may I be hanged on a liana in a tropical forest if such an orchestra has ever played at any ball! I invited the musicians myself! And, mark it, not one fell sick, and not one refused!"

In the next hall there were no columns. Instead, there were walls of red, pink, and milk-white roses on one side, and a wall of double Japanese camelias on the other. Between these walls, tall fountains sent up their foaming jets, and champagne bubbled in three pools—the first

transparent violet, the second ruby colored, the third crystal. Negroes in red headbands ran about with silver dippers, filling shallow goblets with champagne from the pools. In the pink wall there was an opening, where a man in a red coat with swallow tails was furiously busy on a platform. A jazz band crashed and thundered before him. When the conductor saw Margarita, he bowed so low that his hand touched the floor. Then he straightened up and cried in a piercing voice:

"Hallelujah!"

He slapped himself on the knee once, then, crossing his hands, on the other, snatched the cymbals from the hands of the nearest musician, and struck them.

Flying away, Margarita could see the jazz virtuoso still fighting the polonaise, which blew at her back, and beating his musicians on the head with the cymbals, so that they ducked in comical terror.

At last they came to the landing where, as Margarita now surmised, Koroviev had first met her in the dark with the icon lamp. But now her eyes were dazzled by the blinding light pouring from clusters of crystal grapes. Margarita was led to her place, and saw a low amethyst column on her left.

"You can rest your hand on it if you get too tired," whispered Koroviev.

A black-skinned man placed a cushion with a gold poodle embroidered on it at Margarita's feet, and, obeying someone's hand, she raised her right knee and set her foot on the cushion.

Margarita tried to look around. Koroviev and Azazello stood beside her in gala poses. Next to Azazello were three young men who vaguely reminded her of Abaddon. She felt a chill at her back. Glancing behind her, Margarita saw a fountain of seething wine falling into a pool made of ice. At her left foot she felt something warm and shaggy. It was Behemoth.

Margarita stood at a great height. A grandiose stairway, covered with a rug, swept down before her. Below, so far that she might have been looking through the

wrong end of an opera glass, she saw a vast entrance hall with a fireplace so immense that a five-ton truck could easily ride into its cold, black maw. The hall and the staircase, lit so brightly that the eye was dazzled, were empty. The sound of trumpets now came to Margarita from afar. They stood so without motion for about a minute.

"But where are the guests?" Margarita asked Koroviev.

"They'll be here, Queen, they'll be here soon. There will be no shortage of guests. And, really, I would rather chop wood than receive them here on this landing."

"Chop wood?" echoed the loquacious tom. "I would work as a streetcar conductor, and there is nothing in the world that's worse than such a job!"

"It is no more than ten seconds to midnight," said Koroviev. "It will start right away."

Those ten seconds seemed extremely long to Margarita. They had evidently passed, and nothing happened. But suddenly something crashed below in the huge fireplace, and a gibbet jumped out of it, with a dangling corpse, one half of which had already crumbled away. The corpse broke from the rope, struck the floor, and an astonishingly handsome black-haired man in tails and patent leather shoes leaped out of it. Next, a half-decayed small coffin slid out of the fireplace, its lid fell off, and another corpse rolled out of it. The man stepped over gallantly and offered it his arm. The second corpse formed itself into a vivacious woman in black slippers and black feathers on her head. Then both hastened up the stairs.

"The first!" exclaimed Koroviev. "Monsieur Jacques with his wife. I commend to you, Queen, one of the most interesting men. A confirmed forger and a traitor to his country, but quite a good alchemist. He won fame," Koroviev whispered into Margarita's ear, "by poisoning his king's mistress. And that does not happen to everyone! Look how handsome he is!"

Margarita, grown pale, watched with an open mouth

as the gibbet and the coffin disappeared in a side door of the lobby.

"I am delighted!" the tom shouted straight into the face of Monsieur Jacques as he came up the staircase.

At this moment a headless skeleton with one arm torn off appeared from the fireplace, flung itself down and became a man in a dress coat.

Monsieur Jacques' wife dropped on her knee before Margarita and, pale with excitement, kissed her foot.

"Queen . . ." she muttered.

"The Queen is delighted!" cried Koroviev.

"Queen . . ." the handsome Monsieur Jacques said quietly.

"We are delighted," howled the tom.

The young men, Azazello's companions, with lifeless but welcoming smiles, were already guiding Monsieur Jacques and his wife aside, toward the goblets of champagne held out by the Negroes. A solitary man in a dress coat was ascending the staircase.

"Count Robert," Koroviev whispered to Margarita. "As attractive as ever. Note how amusing it is, Queen: this is a reverse case—he was the queen's lover, and he poisoned his wife."

"We are glad to see you, Count," cried Behemoth.

Three coffins tumbled out one after another from the fireplace. They cracked and fell apart. Then came someone in a black cloak, who was struck in the back with a knife by the man who followed him out of the fireplace. A stifled cry came from below. An almost disintegrated corpse ran out of the fireplace. Margarita closed her eyes, and someone's hand brought a bottle of smelling salts to her nose. It seemed to Margarita that it was Natasha's hand.

The stairway was becoming crowded. Now every step was occupied by men in dress coats, all of whom seemed alike from the distance, and by the naked women with them, distinguishable from one another only by the color of their slippers and the feathers in their hair.

Margarita saw a lady hobbling toward her with a strange

wooden boot on her left foot, with monastically lowered eyes, thin, modest, and for some reason wearing a wide green band on her neck.

"Who is this . . . green one?" Margarita asked mechanically.

"A most charming and respected lady," whispered Koroviev. "I commend her to you: Madame Tofana. She was extremely popular with young, lovely Neapolitans and also with the ladies of Palermo, especially those who were tired of their husbands. It happens, Queen, that women weary of their husbands. . . ."

"Yes," Margarita replied in a flat voice, at the same time smiling at two men in tails who bent before her one after the other, kissing her hand and knee.

"Well, then," Koroviev managed to whisper to Margarita while also shouting to someone: "Duke! A glass of champagne? Delighted! . . . Yes, Madame Tofana sympathized with those poor women and sold them a certain potion in vials. The wife would pour this potion into her husband's soup. He would eat the soup, thank his wife for her loving care, and feel fine. But several hours later he would become extremely thirsty. Then he would lie down in bed. And a day later the exquisite Neapolitan who had fed her husband soup would be as free as the winds of spring."

"And what is this on her foot?" asked Margarita, tirelessly offering her hand to the guests who had overtaken the hobbling Madame Tofana. "And why this green on her neck? A withered neck?"

"Delighted, Prince!" cried Koroviev, and whispered to Margarita: "A beautiful neck, but she had an unfortunate accident in prison. On her foot, Queen, she has a Spanish boot. As for the ribbon, this is why she wears it: when the jailers discovered that some five hundred badly chosen husbands had left Naples and Palermo forever, they strangled Madame Tofana in prison in a fit of rage."

"How happy I am, O kindest Queen, to have the high honor. . . ." Tofana whispered in a nunlike manner, try-

ing to lower herself on her knee. The Spanish boot interfered with her movement. Koroviev and Behemoth helped her to rise.

"I am pleased," replied Margarita, offering her hand to others.

A veritable stream of guests was rising up the staircase now. Margarita no longer saw what went on in the lobby. She mechanically raised and lowered her hand and monotonously smiled at the guests. The air hummed with talk, and the sounds of music came from the ballrooms like a beating sea.

"And here is a bore of a woman," Koroviev no longer whispered but spoke loudly, knowing that he could not be heard in the hubbub of voices. "She adores balls, but all she thinks of is complaining about her handkerchief."

In the crowd ascending the stairs, Margarita caught the eyes of the woman pointed out by Koroviev. She was about twenty years old—an extraordinary beauty, but with oddly restless and importunate eyes.

"What handkerchief?" asked Margarita.

"She has a chambermaid assigned to her," explained Koroviev, "who has been placing a handkerchief on her table every night. As soon as she awakens, there it is. She has tried to burn it in the stove and drown it in the river, but nothing helps."

"What handkerchief?" whispered Margarita, raising and lowering her hand.

"With a blue border. You see, she worked in a café, and one day the owner lured her into the pantry. Nine months later she gave birth to a boy. She took the infant to the woods and gagged him with her handkerchief. Then she buried him. She told the court that she could not feed the child."

"And where is the owner of the café?" asked Margarita.

"Queen," the tom suddenly wheezed from below. "Permit me to ask you: what has the owner to do with it? It was not he who smothered the infant in the woods!"

The somber, insistent eyes were now before Margarita.

"I am happy, Queen and hostess, to be invited to the great ball of the full moon!"

"And I am glad to see you," replied Margarita. "Very glad. Do you like champagne?"

"What are you doing, Queen?" Koroviev cried into her ear desperately, but soundlessly. "You'll cause a traffic jam."

"I like it," the woman said in pleading tones, and suddenly began to repeat mechanically, "Frieda, Frieda, Frieda! My name is Frieda, O Queen!"

"Get yourself drunk today, Frieda, and don't think of anything," said Margarita.

Frieda stretched both arms to Margarita, but Koroviev and Behemoth nimbly seized her by the elbows and she was carried away by the crowd.

A river flowed below. Its source—the huge fireplace—continued to feed it. An hour went by, two hours. Margarita began to notice that her chain had become still heavier. A sharp pain as of a needle suddenly pierced her right hand, and, clenching her teeth, she placed her elbow on the column beside her. A rustling, as of wings over the walls, now came from the ballrooms behind her, and she understood that hordes of guests were dancing there. It seemed to Margarita that even the massive marble, mosaic and crystal floors in this fantastic hall were throbbing rhythmically.

No one aroused Margarita's interests any longer—neither Gaius Caesar Caligula, nor Messalina, nor any of the kings, dukes, chevaliers, suicides, poisoners, hanged men, procuresses, jailers, card-sharps, executioners, informers, traitors, madmen, spies and seducers. All their names were confused in her head, the faces merged into one enormous blur, and only a single one remained to torment her memory—a face framed in a truly fiery beard, the face of Maliuta Skuratov. Margarita's legs buckled, and she was afraid that she would momentarily break down and cry. Her greatest suffering came from her right knee, which was kissed by the guests. It swelled and the skin on it turned blue despite the repeated ministrations of

Natasha, who washed it again and again with a sponge dipped in some fragrant liquid. At the end of the third hour, Margarita looked down hopelessly, and quivered with joy: the stream of guests was thinning.

A second later, without understanding how it happened, Margarita found herself in the room with the swimming pool. Breaking into tears from the pain in her hand, she dropped straight onto the floor. But Hella and Natasha drew her, with words of consolation, back to the bloody shower, rubbed her body, and Margarita recovered.

"There's more to do, Queen Margo," whispered Koroviev, who had reappeared beside her. "You must fly through the ballrooms so that the guests won't feel neglected."

And Margarita once again flew out of the room with the swimming pool. A monkey jazz band was now disporting itself frenetically on the stage behind the tulips, where the King of the Waltz had played before. A huge gorilla with shaggy side whiskers conducted with a trumpet in its hands, bobbing up and down clumsily. In one row, orangutans were blowing into gleaming trumpets. On their shoulders sat merry chimpanzees with accordions. Two baboons with manes like lions played pianos, which were not heard amidst the thunder and squeals and booming of saxophones, violins, and drums in the hands of gibbons, mandrills and marmosets. On the mirrored floor countless couples were whirling, as though merged into a single solid body, in one direction with amazing precision and skill. They moved like a wall, threatening to sweep everything in their way. Live satin butterflies dipped and fluttered over the dancing hordes. Flowers showered down from the ceilings. Whenever the electricity dimmed, myriads of fireflies glimmered in the capitals of the columns, and will-o'-the-wisps floated in the air.

After that Margarita found herself in an immense pool bordered by a colonnade. A huge black Neptune threw out a wide pink jet of liquid from his maw. The intoxicating odor of champagne rose from the pool.

Abandoned gaiety held sway here. Laughing ladies gave their handbags to their escorts or to the Negroes who hurried back and forth with sheets in their hands, and with a cry leaped down into the pool like swallows, sending up columns of foaming spray. The crystal floor of the pool glowed with the lights beneath it, illuminating the wine and the silvery bodies swimming in it. The swimmers jumped out of the pool completely drunk. Laughter rang under the columns, rolling like jazz.

Of all this pandemonium, Margarita remembered only one woman's face with utterly besotted, mindless eyes, still pleading in their mindlessness, and one word, "Frieda."

"One last appearance," Koroviev whispered in a worried tone, "and then we are free!"

Again she was in the ballroom, accompanied by Koroviev, but no one was dancing any longer. The countless guests were pressed in a dense crowd between the columns, leaving the center of the hall open. Margarita did not remember who helped her to ascend the dais which appeared in the middle of this empty space. When she was on the dais, she was amazed to hear a clock striking midnight, which, according to her calculation, had long gone. With the last stroke of the invisible clock a silence fell on the crowds of guests.

Then Margarita saw Woland again. He walked surrounded by Abaddon, Azazello, and several others who resembled Abaddon—but black and young. And now she noticed a second dais opposite hers, waiting for Woland. But he made no use of it. What astonished Margarita was that Woland came out during this last great entrance at the ball in the same dress that he had worn in the bedroom. The same dirty, patched shirt hung on his shoulders, and his feet were shod in worn bedroom slippers. Woland had a sword, but he used the bare sword as a cane, leaning on it.

Limping slightly, Woland approached his dais and stopped. And instantly Azazello was before him with a platter in his hands. On the platter Margarita saw a

severed head with broken front teeth. Total silence continued, broken only once by the sound of a distant bell as of a front door, incomprehensible under these circumstances.

"Mikhail Alexandrovich," Woland addressed the head in a low voice, and the dead man's eyelids opened and Margarita shuddered to see those living, thinking, suffering eyes on the dead face.

"Everything has come to pass, hasn't it?" Woland continued, looking into the eyes. "You were beheaded by a woman, the meeting was not held, and I am living in your apartment. That's a fact. And a fact is the most stubborn thing in the world. But now we are interested in something else, and not in the already accomplished fact. You have always been a fervent proponent of the theory that, once a head is severed, man's life ceases, he becomes ashes and sinks into nonbeing. I am pleased to inform you, in the presence of my guests—though, indeed, they serve as proof of a very different theory—that your idea is both solidly based and witty. However, one theory, on the whole, is about as good as another. There is even a theory which says that every man will be given according to his belief. May it be fulfilled, then! You will sink into nonbeing, and I shall be delighted to drink from the vessel into which you are transformed—to drink for being!"

Woland raised his sword. At once the flesh and skin of the head darkened and shriveled, then dropped away in pieces; the eyes disappeared; and soon Margarita saw on the platter a yellowish skull with emerald eyes and pearl teeth, mounted on a gold stem. The lid of the skull swung open on a hinge.

"In a moment, Messire," said Koroviev, catching Woland's questioning eye, "he shall appear before you. I hear the creaking of his patent shoes in this tomblike silence, and the ringing of the glass he put down on the table, having drunk champagne for the last time in his life. But here he is."

A solitary new guest entered the hall and walked toward

Woland. In appearance he did not differ in any way from the multitudes of other male guests, except for one thing: the new guest was literally rocked with agitation, which could be seen even from afar. Red spots burned on his cheeks, and he ran his eyes all over the room in utter alarm. He was overwhelmed, and quite naturally so: he was amazed at everything and chiefly, of course, at Woland's attire.

However, he was greeted with utmost cordiality.

"Ah, my dearest Baron Meigel," Woland turned a welcoming smile to the guest, whose eyes were literally coming out of his head.

Margarita was stunned, for she recognized this Meigel. She had seen him several times in Moscow theaters and restaurants. "Wait . . ." she thought, "So he is dead too? . . ." But the matter was soon explained.

"The dear Baron," Woland continued with a delighted smile, "was so enchanting. He telephoned me as soon as he learned of my arrival in Moscow, offering his services in the field of his specialization—showing me all the notable sights of the city. Naturally, I was happy to invite him here."

Margarita noticed Azazello passing the platter with the skull to Koroviev.

"And incidentally, Baron," Woland said suddenly, lowering his voice confidentially. "Your curiosity has become the subject of wide rumors. People say that, combined with your equally pronounced talkativeness, it has begun to attract general attention. Moreover, it is thought that this will bring you to a melancholy end within no more than a month. And so, in order to relieve you of this painful period of anticipation, we have decided to come to your aid. Particularly, since you have literally wangled an invitation—precisely with the aim of eavesdropping and spying out all you can."

The baron turned paler than Abaddon, who was exceptionally pale by nature. And then something strange took place. Abaddon stepped before the baron and removed his glasses for a second. At the same moment, something

flashed in Azazello's hands, there was a low sound as of a single handclap, and the baron began to topple backward. Scarlet blood spurting out of his chest and stained his starched shirt front and vest. Koroviev held a goblet under the pulsing stream and handed the full goblet to Woland. The baron's lifeless body was already on the floor.

"I drink your health, ladies and gentlemen," Woland said in a low voice, raised the goblet, and touched it to his lips.

And then a metamorphosis took place. The patched shirt and shabby slippers vanished. Woland was now clad in a flowing black garment, with a steel sword at his hip. He quickly approached Margarita, offered her the goblet and commanded imperiously:

"Drink!"

Margarita's head began to spin, she staggered, but the goblet was already at her lips, and voices—she could not tell whose—whispered into both her ears:

"Don't be afraid, Queen . . . Don't be afraid, Queen, the blood has long run down into the earth. And on the spot where it was spilled, grapevines are growing today."

Margarita swallowed a mouthful without opening her eyes, and a sweet current ran through her veins. Her ears began to ring. It seemed to her that roosters were crowing deafeningly, and that a march was playing somewhere. The crowds of guests began to lose their shape: the men in tails and the women scattered to dust. Corruption swept the hall as Margarita looked on, and the odor of the tomb flowed over it. The columns dissolved, the lights went out, everything shriveled, and there were no more fountains, camelias, tulips. What was left was simply what had been before: the modest parlor of the jeweler's lady, and a strip of light from the slightly opened door. And Margarita entered through this opened door.

Chapter 24

EVOCATION OF THE MASTER

In Woland's bedroom everything was as it had been before the ball. Woland sat on the bed in his shirt, but Hella was no longer rubbing down his knee; she was serving supper on the table which had held the chessboard. Koroviev and Azazello had removed their dress coats and sat at the table. Next to them was, of course, the tom who refused to part with his tie although it had by now been reduced to a dirty rag. Margarita staggered to the table and leaned on it. Then Woland beckoned to her, as he had the first time, and indicated that she was to sit beside him.

"Well, did they tire you out?" asked Woland.

"Oh, no, Messire," Margarita replied, just audibly.

"Noblesse oblige," remarked the tom. He poured some transparent liquid into a wine glass and offered it to her.

"Is it vodka?" Margarita asked weakly.

The tom jumped up in his seat, extremely offended.

"Why, Queen," he wheezed, "would I permit myself to offer a lady vodka? Pure spirits!"

Margarita smiled and tried to push away the glass.

"Drink it without fear," said Woland, and Margarita immediately picked up the glass.

"Sit down, Hella," Woland commanded, and explained to Margarita: "The night of the full moon is a holiday night, and I am dining in a close company of friends and servants. Well, how do you feel? How was this tiring ball?"

"Magnificent!" rattled Koroviev. "Everyone was en-

chanted, infatuated, crushed! So much tact, so much skill and charm and winning grace!"

Woland silently raised his glass and clinked with Margarita. She drank obediently, thinking that the spirits would make an instant end of her. But nothing untoward happened. A living warmth spread through her stomach, something hit her softly at the nape of the neck, her strength returned as though she had just arisen after a long, refreshing sleep, and she felt ravenously hungry. When she recalled that she had eaten nothing since the previous day, her hunger increased. . . . She greedily began to eat caviar.

Behemoth cut himself a slice of pineapple, salted and peppered it, and washed it down with a second glass of spirits with such a devil-may-care air that everyone applauded.

After Margarita's second glass, the candles in the candelabra became brighter, and the fire rose higher in the fireplace. She felt no trace of intoxication. Biting into the meat with her white teeth, Margarita savored the juice that ran from it and watched Behemoth spreading mustard on an oyster.

"Why don't you top it with grapes now?" Hella said in an undertone, nudging him with her elbow.

"I will thank you not to teach me," answered Behemoth. "I've sat at tables before, don't you worry, I've sat at tables!"

"Ah, how pleasant it is to dine like this, simply, by the fireside," quavered Koroviev, "in intimate company. . . ."

"I must say, Fagot," argued the tom, "that a ball has its own charm and sweep."

"There isn't any charm in it, and no sweep," said Woland.

"Tell me," Margarita, revived after the drink, asked Azazello, "did you shoot that former Baron?"

"Naturally," answered Azazello. "How else could he be dealt with? Such a man must be shot."

"Oh, I was so nervous when he fell!" said Margarita,

evidently still under the impression of the murder, the first she had ever witnessed. "You must shoot very well?"

"Suitably," answered Azazello.

"From how many steps away?" Margarita asked a rather unclear question.

"Depending," Azazello answered reasonably. "It's one thing to hit Latunsky's window with a hammer, but quite another to hit the critic's heart."

"His heart!" Margarita exclaimed, clutching at her own heart. "His heart!" she repeated in a flat voice.

"Who is this critic Latunsky?" asked Woland, staring at Margarita with a narrowed eye.

Azazello, Koroviev, and Behemoth looked down as though in embarrassment, and Margarita answered, blushing:

"There is a critic by that name. I wrecked his whole apartment this evening."

"Well! . . . But why?"

"He ruined a certain Master, Messire," explained Margarita.

"But why did you have to do it yourself?" asked Woland.

"Permit me, Messire!" the tom cried eagerly, jumping up.

"Oh, stay where you are," grumbled Azazello, rising. "I'll run over there myself. . . ."

"No!" cried Margarita. "No, I implore you, Messire, it isn't necessary!"

"As you wish, as you wish," answered Woland, and Azazello resumed his seat.

"What were we talking about, my precious Queen Margo?" asked Koroviev. "Oh, yes, hearts . . . He hits the heart," Koroviev pointed a long finger at Azazello. "In any place you name—any auricle, any ventricle."

Margarita did not understand at first, but when she did, she cried with amazement:

"But they are hidden!"

"My dear," quavered Koroviev, "of course they are hidden! That's the whole point! Anybody can hit an object that is exposed!"

Koroviev took a seven of spades from a box of cards and offered it to Margarita, asking her to scratch one of the spots with her nail. Margarita marked the top one on the right. Hella hit the card under the pillow and called out:

“Ready!”

Azazello, who sat with his back to the pillow, took a black automatic pistol from the pocket of his dress trousers, placed the barrel on his shoulder, and fired without turning. Margarita jumped in delicious fright. The seven was extracted from under the riddled pillow. The spot marked by Margarita was pierced by the bullet.

“I should not like to meet you with a gun in your hand,” Margarita said with a coquettish look at Azazello. She had a passion for all people who did anything to perfection.

“Precious Queen,” squealed Koroviev, “I should not advise anyone to meet him, even without a gun in his hands! I give you the word of a former choirmaster that no one would congratulate such a man.”

The gay dinner continued. The candles guttered in the candelabra, and waves of dry, fragrant warmth spread from the fireplace through the room. After eating, Margarita glowed with blissful relaxation. She watched the blue-gray smoke rings from Azazello’s cigar float into the fireplace, where the tom was catching them on the tip of a sword. She did not want to go anywhere, although, according to her calculation, it was very late. Judging from everything, the hour was probably close to six in the morning. Taking advantage of a pause, Margarita turned to Woland and said timidly:

“I guess it’s time for me . . . it’s late . . .”

“Where are you hurrying?” Woland asked politely, but rather drily. The others were silent, pretending to be absorbed in the smoke rings.

“Yes, it’s time,” Margarita repeated, totally abashed now, and turned as though looking for a cape or cloak. Her nakedness had suddenly become embarrassing. She rose from the table. Woland silently took his soiled and

threadbare bathrobe from the bed and Koroviev threw it over Margarita's shoulders.

"Thank you, Messire," Margarita breathed and threw a questioning look at Woland. He smiled in reply, politely and indifferently. Black anguish instantly rolled up to Margarita's heart. She felt deceived. No one showed any intention of rewarding her for all her services at the ball, just as no one tried to detain her. Yet it was entirely clear to her that there was nowhere for her to go now. The fleeting thought that she would have to return to her house threw her into despair. Perhaps she ought to ask for what she wanted herself, as Azazello had advised her in the Alexandrovsky Garden? "No, never!" she said to herself.

"Good-by, Messire," she said aloud, and thought: "Just to get out of here! Then I will find my way to the river and drown myself."

"Sit down," Woland suddenly commanded.

Margarita turned pale and sat down.

"Is there anything you would like to say in parting?"

"No, Messire, nothing," Margarita said proudly. "Except one thing: if you still need me, I am ready to do anything you wish. I am not in the least bit tired, and I enjoyed the ball very much."

Margarita saw Woland as through a veil. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"We have been testing you," said Woland. "You never ask for anything! Never, especially of those who are stronger than you. They will offer everything themselves, and they will give everything themselves. Sit down, proud woman." Woland tore off the heavy bathrobe from Margarita's shoulders, and once again she was seated beside him on the bed. "And so, Margo," continued Woland, softening his voice, "what do you want for serving as my hostess today? Speak! Now you can speak freely, for I have made the offer myself."

Margarita's heart hammered, she sighed deeply, and began to think.

"Well, boldly now!" Woland encouraged her. "Waken

your imagination, spur it on! Witnessing the killing of that hopeless reprobate, the baron, is in itself enough to deserve reward, especially if the witness is a woman. Well?"

It took away her breath. She was already on the point of uttering the cherished words she had prepared, when suddenly she turned pale, opened her mouth and stared with wide-open eyes. "Friedal . . . Frieda, Friedal!" an insistent, pleading voice cried in her ears. "My name is Friedal!" And Margarita stumblingly began to speak:

"So I may . . . ask . . . for one thing?"

"Demand, demand, my Donna," answered Woland, with a sympathetic smile. "Demand one thing."

How cleverly and clearly he stressed it, repeating Margarita's own words—"one thing."

Margarita sighed again and said:

"I want them to stop bringing Frieda the handkerchief with which she smothered her baby."

The tom turned his eyes to the ceiling and sighed noisily, but said nothing.

"In view of the fact," said Woland with a wry smile, "that you could not possibly have been bribed by that fool Frieda—this, after all, would be incompatible with your royal dignity—I really don't know what to do. The only answer is, perhaps, to acquire a pile of rags and stuff them into all the cracks in my bedroom."

"What do you mean, Messire?" Margarita asked in wonder at these truly incomprehensible words.

"I quite agree with you, Messire," the tom broke into the conversation. "Precisely, rags!" and he banged his paw on the table with irritation.

"I am talking about mercy," Woland explained his words, without turning his fiery eye away from Margarita. "It sometimes unexpectedly and slyly creeps through the narrowest cracks. That's why I speak of rags. . . ."

"And I am talking of the same thing!" cried the tom.

"Silence," Woland ordered, and, turning to Margarita, he asked: "Judging by everything, you are an exceptionally kind person? A person of high morals?"

"No," Margarita answered forcefully. "I know that one must speak to you with complete frankness, and I shall tell you frankly: I am a frivolous woman. I asked you to help Frieda only because I was careless enough to give her hope. She is waiting, Messire, she believes in my powers. And if she is disappointed, I shall be in a terrible position. I shall have no rest as long as I live. It can't be helped, it turned out this way."

"Ah," said Woland, "that's understandable."

"So you will do it?" Margarita asked quietly.

"Certainly not," said Woland. "The point is, dear Queen, that there has been a slight confusion here. Every department must take care of its own affairs. I wouldn't argue, our possibilities are quite extensive. They are far greater than is assumed by certain nearsighted people. . . ."

"Oh, yes, far greater," the tom put in, unable to restrain himself and evidently proud of these possibilities.

"Shut up, the devil take you!" said Woland, and continued, addressing Margarita: "What sense is there in doing what is properly the task of another . . . department, as I put it? And hence, I shall not do it. You will do it yourself."

"But will it be fulfilled at my word?"

Azazello squinted his eye ironically at Margarita, imperceptibly shook his red head, and snorted.

"Well, do it, such a bother," Woland muttered and, turning the globe he began to study a certain detail on it, evidently preoccupied with other matters as well, even during his conversation with Margarita.

"Oh . . . Frieda . . ." prompted Koroviev.

"Frieda!" Margarita cried shrilly.

The door was flung open and a woman with frenzied eyes, disheveled, naked, but now without any signs of intoxication, burst into the room and stretched her arms to Margarita, who said majestically:

"You are forgiven. They will not bring you the handkerchief any longer."

Frieda screamed, fell prone on the floor and flung out

her arms, lying like a cross at Margarita's feet. Woland waved his arm, and Frieda vanished.

"Thank you. Good-by," said Margarita, getting up.

"Well, Behemoth," said Woland, "Let's not take advantage of the action of an impractical person on this holiday night." He turned to Margarita: "And so, this does not count. After all, I did not do anything. What do you wish for yourself?"

There was a silence. It was broken by Koroviev, who whispered into Margarita's ear:

"My diamond Donna, this time I advise you to be more sensible! Fortune may slip away, you know."

"I want my beloved, the Master, to be returned to me at once, this very second," said Margarita, and she was convulsed with a spasm.

A wind burst into the room, flattening the flames of the candles in the candelabra. The heavy curtain over the window moved aside. The window opened, revealing a full moon in the distant sky—not a morning, but a midnight moon. A square of greenish light fell from the window sill on the floor, and in it stood Ivan's nocturnal visitor who called himself Master. He was in his hospital attire—a bathrobe, slippers, and the black cap from which he never parted. His unshaven face twitched with a grimace, he squinted with unreasoning fear at the lights of the candles, and the torrent of moonlight seethed around him.

Margarita recognized him at once. She moaned, clasped her hands, and ran to him. She kissed his lips and forehead, pressing herself to his prickly cheek, and the long-restrained tears streamed down her face. She spoke only one word, repeating it senselessly:

"You . . . you . . . you . . ."

The Master gently pushed her away and said dully:

"Don't cry, Margo, don't torment me, I am very sick." He grasped the window sill with his hand, as if preparing to jump up and flee, and, peering at the sitting company, he cried: "I am afraid, Margol My hallucinations are beginning again. . . ."

Sobs choked Margarita. She whispered brokenly:

"No, no, no . . . don't be afraid of anything . . . I am with you . . . I am with you. . . ."

Koroviev nimbly and unnoticeably pushed a chair over to the Master, who lowered himself into it, and Margarita dropped on her knees, pressed herself to the sick man's side and sat in silence. In her excitement, she never noticed that she was no longer naked, but wore a black silk cloak. The sick man lowered his head and stared at the ground with somber eyes.

Woland commanded Koroviev:

"My knight, give this man something to drink."

Margarita pleaded with the Master in a trembling voice:

"Drink, drink! You are afraid? No, no, believe me, they will help you!"

The sick man took the glass and drank what was in it, but his hand shook, he dropped the glass, and it broke at his feet.

"A good luck sign, a good luck sign!" whispered Koroviev to Margarita. "Look, he is already recovering."

And, indeed, the sick man's glance was no longer as wild and troubled as before.

"Is it you, Margo?" asked the moonlit guest.

"It's I, don't doubt it," answered Margarita.

"More!" commanded Woland.

After he drained the second glass, the Master's eyes became alive and comprehending.

"That's better," said Woland, narrowing his eyes. "Now we can talk. Who are you?"

"I am no one today," answered the Master, and a smile twisted his lips.

"Where are you from?"

"From the house of sorrow. I am mentally ill," replied the visitor.

Margarita could not bear these words and cried again. Then, drying her eyes, she exclaimed:

"Terrible words! Terrible words! He is a Master, Messire! Heal him, he is worthy of it!"

"Do you know to whom you are speaking now?" Woland asked the guest. "Do you know whom you are visiting?"

"I know," answered the Master. "My neighbor in the insane asylum was that boy, Ivan Homeless. He told me about you."

"Of course, of course," replied Woland. "I had the pleasure of meeting the young man at the Patriarchs' Ponds. He almost drove me insane, proving to me that I do not exist. But you—you believe that this is indeed I?"

"I have to believe," said the visitor. "But, of course, it would be less disturbing to regard you as the product of hallucination. Forgive me," the Master recollected himself.

"Oh, well, if it is less disturbing, you may regard me so," Woland answered civilly.

"No, no!" Margarita cried in alarm and shook the Master's shoulder. "Bethink yourself! It's really he before you!"

The tom broke in again:

"And I am certainly like a hallucination. Note my profile in the moonlight." The tom stepped into the column of moonlight and wanted to add something else, but he was asked to keep quiet, and he said: "Very well, very well, I'm ready to keep silent. I shall be a silent hallucination." And he fell silent.

"Tell me, why does Margarita call you Master?" asked Woland.

The guest smiled bitterly and said:

"A pardonable weakness. She has too high an opinion of the novel I wrote."

"What was the novel about?"

"About Pontius Pilate."

The tongues of flame on the candles swayed again, and the dishes rattled on the table. Woland burst into a thunderous laugh, but his laughter neither frightened, nor astonished anyone. Behemoth, for some reason, began to applaud.

"About what, about what? About whom?" Woland said after he stopped laughing. "But that's marvelous! Let me see it." Woland stretched out his hand, palm upward.

"Unfortunately, I cannot do it," answered the Master. "I burned it in the stove."

"Forgive me, but I won't believe it," said Woland. "This cannot be, manuscripts don't burn." He turned to Behemoth and said: "Come on, Behemoth, let us have the novel."

The tom instantly jumped off the chair, and everyone saw that he had been sitting on a thick stack of manuscripts. He gave Woland the top one with a bow. Margarita trembled and cried out, shaken to tears again:

"There it is, there is the manuscript! There!"

Woland took the copy he was offered, turned it, put it aside and stared at the Master silently, without a smile. But the guest, for some unknown reason, fell into a state of anguish and anxiety, rose from the chair, wrung his hands and, speaking to the distant moon, began to mutter:

"Even at night, in moonlight, I have no rest. . . . Why did they trouble me? Oh, gods, gods. . . ."

Margarita clutched at the hospital robe, pressed herself to him, and began to mutter herself in sorrow and tears:

"God, why does not the medicine help you?"

"It's nothing, it's all right," whispered Koroviev, puttering around the Master. "It's all right. . . . Another glass, and I shall join you for company. . . ."

The glass winked and glinted in the moonlight, and this glass helped. The Master was seated again, and the sick man's face assumed a calm expression.

"Well, Margarita," Woland entered the conversation once more. "Say everything you have to say."

Margarita's eyes flashed, and she turned to Woland pleadingly:

"Allow me to whisper it to him."

Woland nodded, and Margarita bent to the Master's ear and whispered something to him. His answer was heard by everyone:

"No, it is too late. I want nothing further from life

except to see you. But I advise you once again to leave me, or you will perish with me."

"No, I will not leave you," answered Margarita and turned to Woland: "I ask you to return us to the basement in the lane near the Arbat, with the lamp burning, and everything as it was."

The Master laughed and, embracing Margarita's head, he said:

"Ah, don't listen to the poor woman, Messire! The basement is long occupied by another man, and, generally, things never return to what they were." He pressed his cheek to his beloved's head, put his arm around Margarita, and began to mutter: "My poor dear, my poor dear . . ."

"They never do, you say?" said Woland. "That is true. But we shall try." And he called: "Azazello!"

At once, a man dropped from the ceiling on the floor—distracted and almost beside himself, in nothing but underwear, but for some reason with a suitcase in his hands and in a cap. The man trembled and bobbed up and down with terror.

"Mogarych?" Azazello asked the citizen who had dropped down from the sky.

"Aloisy Mogarych," he answered, quaking.

"Was it you who wrote a denunciation of this man after reading Latunsky's article about his novel?" asked Azazello.

The citizen turned blue and burst into tears of repentance.

"You wanted to move into his rooms?" Azazello drawled as soulfully as he could.

"I added a bathroom. . . ." Mogarych cried, his teeth chattering. Then, in sheer terror, he began to rant utter nonsense: "The whitewash alone . . . the vitriol . . ."

"You built a bathroom? That's good," Azazello said approvingly. "He has to take baths." And he shouted: "Out!"

Mogarych was turned upside down and swept out of Woland's bedroom through the open window.

The Master stared with wide-open eyes, whispering:

"This is even neater than the things Ivan told me about!" Thoroughly shaken, he looked around him and finally said to the tom: "Excuse me, was it you. . . ." He broke off, not knowing how to address the tom. "Are you the tom cat who tried to board the streetcar?"

"I am," the flattered tom confirmed, and added: "It is pleasant to hear you addressing a tom so courteously. For some reason cats are usually treated with excessive familiarity, although no cat has ever drunk *bruderschaft* with anyone."

"It seems to me that you are not very much a tom cat. . . ." the Master answered hesitantly. "But they'll miss me at the hospital," he added timidly to Woland.

"No, why would they miss you!" Koroviev reassured him, and suddenly he had some papers and books in his hands. "The history of your illness?"

"Yes. . . ."

Koroviev threw the case history into the fireplace.

"And this is your landlord's house registry book?"

"Ye-es. . . ."

"Who is registered in it? Aloisy Mogarych?" Koroviev blew at one of the pages of the registry book. "One! And he is gone. And, I beg you to note, he never was here. And if this landlord of yours seems astonished, tell him that he dreamed of Aloisy. Mogarych? Who is Mogarych? There was never any Mogarych!" The book evaporated from Koroviev's hands. "And now it is back in the landlord's desk. And here is your property, Margarita Nikolayevna," and Koroviev handed Margarita the manuscript with the charred edges, the dried rose, the photograph, and, with particular care, the savings bank book. "Ten thousand, just as you deposited it, Margarita Nikolayevna. We don't need what belongs to others."

"I'd rather see my paws wither than touch someone else's property," the tom exclaimed, puffing up and dancing on the suitcase, to tamp down all the copies of the ill-starred novel.

"Your document, too," continued Koroviev, giving

Margarita the document, and then, turning to Woland, he reported deferentially: "All is done, Messire!"

"No, not all," answered Woland, tearing himself away from the globe. "Where do you want me to send your retinue, my dear Donna? I personally don't need it."

At this point Natasha ran into the open door and cried to Margarita:

"Good luck to you, Margarita Nikolayevna!" She nodded to the Master and turned to Margarita once more: "I knew everything, I knew where you were going all the time."

"Maids know everything," remarked the tom, raising his paw significantly. "It's a mistake to think they're blind."

"What do you want, Natasha?" asked Margarita. "Go back to the house."

"Darling Margarita Nikolayevna," Natasha said pleadingly and dropped to her knees. "Persuade them," she looked sideways at Woland, "to let me remain a witch. Monsieur Jacques made me an offer yesterday at the ball." Natasha opened her fist and showed her some gold coins.

Margarita turned a questioning eye to Woland. He nodded. Then Natasha threw herself at Margarita's neck, kissed her loudly, and flew out of the window with a triumphant cry.

In Natasha's place there was now Nikolay Ivanovich. He had regained his former human shape, but was extremely gloomy and even, perhaps, irritated.

"This one I shall be particularly delighted to dismiss," said Woland, looking at Nikolay Ivanovich with revulsion. "He is so totally out of place here."

"I beg you to give me a certificate," Nikolay Ivanovich said, looking around him wildly, but nevertheless with great insistence, "stating where I spent last night."

"To what end?" the tom asked sternly.

"To the end of presenting it to my wife," Nikolay Ivanovich said firmly.

"We do not usually issue certificates," replied the tom, scowling. "But for you we shall make an exception."

Before Nikolay Ivanovich knew it, the naked Hella was already sitting at a typewriter, and the tom was dictating to her.

"Herewith we certify that the bearer of same, Nikolay Ivanovich, spent the said night at Satan's ball, having been brought there in the capacity of a transportation facility . . . in parentheses, Hella, put in 'hog.' Signed, Behemoth."

"And the date?" squeaked Nikolay Ivanovich.

"We never put in dates. A date will make the document invalid," said the tom, signing the paper with a flourish. Then he took a seal from somewhere, breathed on it according to all rules, printed the word "Paid" on the paper and handed it to Nikolay Ivanovich. The latter then vanished without a trace, but in his place stood a new, unexpected guest.

"Who's that?" Woland asked squeamishly, shading his eyes with his hand against the candlelight.

Vareukha hung his head, sighed and said quietly:

"Let me go back, I cannot be a vampire. I almost did Rimsky in that night with Hella. And I am not blood-thirsty. Let me go!"

"What's he ranting about?" Woland asked, wrinkling his face. "What Rimsky? What's this folderol?"

"Do not trouble yourself about it, Messire," said Azazello, and turned to Vareukha: "You should not be rude over the telephone. You should not lie over the telephone. Is that clear? You won't do it any more?"

Everything became scrambled with joy in Vareukha's head. His face shone and he muttered without knowing what he was saying:

"Truly and honestly . . . I mean . . . your High . . . immediately after dinner . . ." Vareukha pressed his hands to his chest, and looked at Azazello pleadingly.

"All right. Back home!" the other said, and Vareukha dissolved.

"Now you will leave me alone with them," Woland commanded, pointing at the Master and Margarita.

He was obeyed instantly. After a silence, Woland said to the Master:

"So it's to the basement near Arbat? And your novel? Pilate?"

"I hate that novel," replied the Master.

"I implore you," Margarita begged piteously, "don't speak like that. Why do you torment me? You know that I put my whole life into this work of yours." Turning to Woland, Margarita added, "Don't listen to him, Messire."

"But one must still write about something, no?" said Woland. "If you have exhausted the Procurator, why not write, let's say, oh, even about this Aloisy. . . ."

The Master smiled.

"That is not interesting."

"And how will you live?"

Margarita stepped away from the Master and spoke heatedly:

"I did everything I could, I whispered to him the most tempting thing I knew. And he refused."

"I know what you whispered to him," replied Woland, "but this is not the most tempting thing. And to you I will say," he turned to the Master, smiling, "that your novel will yet bring you some surprises."

"That's very sad," answered the Master.

"No, no, it isn't sad," said Woland. "There is nothing to worry about. Well, Margarita Nikolayevna, everything is done. Do you have any complaints?"

"Oh, no, oh, no, Messire! . . ."

"Then take this from me as a memento," said Woland and drew a small gold horseshoe covered with diamonds from under the pillow.

"No, no, how can I?"

"Do you want to argue with me?" Woland asked, smiling.

Since she had no pocket in her cloak, Margarita put the horseshoe into a napkin and tied it with a knot. Then

something made her wonder. She glanced at the window where the moon was shining and said:

"But this is something I don't understand. . . . How can it be—midnight, and still midnight, when it should have been morning long ago?"

"It's pleasant sometimes to detain a holiday midnight for a while," said Woland. "I wish you happiness!"

Margarita prayerfully stretched both hands to Woland, but did not dare to approach him and exclaimed softly: "Farewell! Farewell!"

"Good-by," said Woland.

And Margarita in the black cloak, with the Master in his hospital robe, stepped out into the hallway, where a candle was burning and where Woland's retinue awaited them. As they walked toward the door, Hella carried the suitcase with the novel and Margarita Nikolayevna's small treasure, and the tom was helping her.

At the door, Koroviev bowed and disappeared, while the rest escorted the visitors down the stairs. The staircase was empty. As they passed the third floor landing, there was a soft thud, but no one paid any attention. At the very door Azazello blew into the air, and when they stepped into the dark yard, where the moonlight did not penetrate, they saw a large black car waiting with its lights out. Through the front window they could dimly see the silhouette of the rook.

Just as they were about to get in, Margarita cried in dismay:

"Oh, God, I've lost the horseshoe!"

"Get into the car," said Azazello, "and wait for me. I shall return in a moment, I'll just find out what happened." And he went back into the house.

Now, what happened was this: a little while before Margarita, the Master, and their escort left the fifth floor apartment, a wizened little woman came out of apartment Number 48, just below. She had a can and a shopping bag in her hands. It was the same Annushka who had spilled the sunflower oil on the turnstile the previous Wednesday, to Berlioz' misfortune.

No one knew, and no one is ever likely to learn, what this woman did in Moscow and how she earned her livelihood. The only thing known about her is that she was seen daily either with the can or with her bag, or with both—now in the kerosene store, now in the market, now in a gateway or on a staircase, but most often in the kitchen of apartment Number 48, where she was one of the tenants. What was best known about her, however, was that wherever she was, and wherever she appeared, there was always sure to be a scandal, and also that she was nicknamed “The Plague.”

For some reason, Annushka the Plague always got up very early, but on this day something roused her at the unearthly hour of just past midnight. A key was turned in the door, Annushka’s nose peeped out, then the rest of her followed, she slammed the door and was already on the point of going somewhere, when a door crashed on the upper landing and someone hurtled down the stairs. Colliding with Annushka, he flung her aside so violently that her head struck the wall.

“Where does the devil carry you in underpants?” Annushka shrieked, claspng the back of her head.

The man in underwear, in a cap, with a suitcase in his hands and with his eyes closed, answered her in a wild, sleepy voice:

“The boiler . . . the vitriol . . . the cost of the white-wash alone . . .” and, bursting into sobs, he barked: “Out!”

Then he rushed on, not down the stairs, but up to where the windowpane was broken, and through this window he flew out, upside down, into the yard. Annushka forgot about her head, gasped, and ran to the window herself. She flung herself down on her stomach on the landing and stuck her head out, expecting to see on the asphalt, illuminated by the light in the yard, the crumpled body of the man with the suitcase. But the asphalt floor of the yard was utterly bare.

Nothing remained but to assume that the strange and sleepy individual had flown away from the house like a

bird, without leaving any trace. Annushka crossed herself and thought: "Oh, yes, it's some apartment, that Number 50! No wonder people are talking . . . Some apartment! . . ."

She had barely finished the thought, when the door upstairs was slammed again and somebody else ran down. Annushka pressed herself to the wall and saw a respectable looking citizen with a beard, but, as it seemed to her, with a somewhat porcine face, slip past her and also leave the house—like the first one—through the window, again without smashing himself on the asphalt. Annushka had by now forgotten the initial purpose of her outing and remained on the staircase, crossing herself, groaning, and talking to herself.

Very soon a third man, without a beard, with a round clean-shaven face and in a Tolstoy blouse, came running down from the upstairs apartment and also fluttered out of the window.

To her honor it must be said that Annushka had a love of knowledge, and she decided to wait a little longer and see if she would see some new wonders. The door upstairs opened again, and now a whole company began to come down. But these did not run; they walked ordinarily, like everybody else. Annushka ran back from the window and down to her own door, opened it quickly and hid behind it, leaving a slight crack, through which her eye glinted with frenzied curiosity.

Somebody who looked sick, or perhaps not sick, but strange, pale, his face overgrown with stubble, in a black cap and a robe, was coming down with unsteady steps. He was lovingly led under the arm by a lady in a black cassock, or so it seemed to Annushka in the dim light. The lady was either barefoot, or she wore transparent, evidently foreign, shoes, torn to shreds. "Some apartment! . . ." Annushka's soul sang with anticipation of the stories she would tell her neighbors tomorrow.

Behind the strangely dressed lady walked another, completely naked, with a small suitcase in her hand, and near

the suitcase a huge black tom cat hung around. Annushka almost squealed aloud, rubbing her eyes.

The procession was closed by a short, lame foreigner, blind in one eye, without a coat, in a white evening vest and tie. The entire company marched down past Annushka. As they were going by, something made a soft thud on the landing.

When the steps died out, Annushka slipped out like an eel, set down her can by the wall, stretched out on her stomach and began to feel around the floor with her hands. She found a napkin with something heavy in it. Her eyes nearly came out on her forehead when she unwrapped the bundle. Annushka brought the precious find up to her very eyes, and those eyes burned with a wolflike fire. A storm swept through Annushka's head:

"I don't know nothing, I didn't see nothing! . . . Take it to my nephew? Or break it up into pieces? . . . The stones could be pried out, then I can get rid of them one by one—one on Petrovka, another on Smolensky . . . And I don't know a thing, I didn't see a thing! . . ."

Annushka hid her find in her bosom, seized the can and wanted to slip back into her apartment, postponing her trip to town, when suddenly she saw before her—the devil knows where he had come from—the man with the white shirtfront, without a coat, who whispered to her:

"Hand over the horseshoe and the napkin!"

"What horseshoe-napkin?" asked Annushka, pretending quite skilfully. "I don't know of no napkins. What's the matter, citizen, you drunk or what?"

Without another word, the white-chested one squeezed Annushka's throat with fingers as hard as the handrails of a bus, and just as cold, so that no air could reach her lungs. The can dropped from her hands onto the floor. After holding Annushka for a time without air, the foreigner removed his fingers from her neck. Gulping down some air, Annushka smiled.

"Ah, the horseshoe?" she said. "Right away! So it's your horseshoe? And I look, there it lies in the napkin . . . I

picked it up on purpose, so nobody would take it, and then go whistle after it!"

Taking the horseshoe and the napkin, the foreigner began to scrape and bow before Annushka, pressing her hand and thanking her fervently, with the strongest foreign accent:

"I am most deeply grateful to you, Madame. This little horseshoe is very precious to me as a memento. And permit me to offer you two hundred rubles for saving it for me." And he drew the money from his vest pocket and handed it to Annushka.

With a distracted smile, she cried out:

"Ah, but thank you most kindly! Mercil Mercil!"

The generous foreigner slipped down a whole flight of stairs in a breath, but before disappearing completely, he shouted from below, this time without an accent:

"You old witch, if you ever pick up somebody else's property again, turn it in to the militia instead of hiding it!"

Her head still ringing and befuddled from all these happenings on the staircase, Annushka stood on the same spot, still crying by inertia "Mercil Mercil Merci . . ." long after the foreigner was gone.

The car was gone from the yard too. Its lights were lost among the other lights on the sleepless and noisy Sadovaya.

An hour later everything in the basement of the little house in one of the Arbat lanes was exactly the same as it had been before that dreadful autumn night of the previous year. Margarita sat at the table covered with a velvet cloth, near the shaded lamp and the bowl of lilies of the valley, and wept quietly, still shaken by her recent tribulations, but happy. The pages mutilated by fire lay before her, and next to them rose a stack of untouched manuscripts. The house was silent. In the small room the Master lay on the sofa, covered with the hospital robe. He slept deeply, and his even breathing was soundless.

After crying her fill, Margarita picked up the intact manuscript and found the place she had been reading

before her meeting with Azazello by the Kremlin wall. Margarita was not sleepy. She stroked the paper lovingly as though it were a favorite cat, and turned it in her hands, examining it from all sides, now looking at the title page, now opening the end. She was suddenly chilled by the dreadful thought that all of this was only witchcraft, that in a moment the manuscript would vanish from sight, that she would find herself in her own bedroom, and she would have to go and drown herself when she woke up. But this was the last frightening thought she had—an echo of her past ordeals. Nothing disappeared. The omnipotent Woland was indeed omnipotent, and Margarita could go on turning the pages of the manuscript as long as she wished, even till dawn, and look at them, and kiss them, and read and reread the words:

“The darkness which had come from the Mediterranean shrouded the city hated by the Procurator . . .”

Chapter 25

HOW THE PROCURATOR TRIED TO SAVE YEHUDAH OF KERIOTH

The darkness which had come from the Mediterranean shrouded the city hated by the Procurator. The hanging bridges connecting the Temple with Anthony's dreaded tower disappeared. The abyss that had descended from the heavens engulfed the winged gods over the Hippodrome, the crenellated Hasmonaean Palace, the bazaars, the caravansaries, the alleys, ponds . . . The great city of Yershalayim had vanished as though it had never been. Everything was swallowed by the darkness that threw fear into every living heart in Yershalayim and the surrounding countryside. The strange cloud had come from the sea toward evening, on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan.

With its belly, it had already covered the Bald Skull, where the executioners were hastily piercing the hearts of the victims; its weight fell on the Temple in Yershalayim, it crept down the hill in smoking streams and flooded the Lower City. It poured into the windows and drove the people from the crooked streets into the houses. It did not hurry to discharge its moisture and merely gave off light. Whenever the black steamy mass was ripped by fire, the great bulk of the Temple with its glittering scaly roof would fly up from the solid murk. But the fire would go out in an instant, and the Temple would sink back into a dark abyss. Over and over, it rose and dropped

again, and every disappearance was attended by the crashing of catastrophe.

Other quivering flashes called forth from the abyss the palace of Herod the Great on the western hill, opposite the Temple, and its sinister eyeless gold statues flew up to the black sky, stretching their arms to it. But again the heavenly fire hid itself, and the blasts of thunder drove the golden idols into the dark.

The downpour came suddenly, and then the storm turned into a hurricane. In the very place where the Procurator and the High Priest had conversed at noon-time, near the marble bench in the garden, a burst of thunder like a cannon shot broke a cypress as though it were a slender cane. Along with the watery dust and hail, torn roses, magnolia leaves, twigs, and sand were carried onto the balcony under the columns. The hurricane was tormenting the garden.

At this time there was only one man under the columns. This man was the Procurator.

Now he was not sitting in the chair, but reclining on a couch near a small low table set with viands and jugs of wine. Another couch, unoccupied, stood on the opposite side of the table. At the Procurator's feet there was a spreading puddle, red as blood, and the floor was littered with fragments of a broken jug. The servant who was setting the table for the Procurator before the rainstorm had lost his courage under the Procurator's glance, alarmed lest he displease in some way, and the Procurator, flying into a rage, had smashed the jug on the mosaic floor and shouted:

"Why don't you look me in the face when you serve? Did you steal something?"

The African's black face turned gray, his eyes filled with mortal terror, he trembled and almost broke a second jug, but the Procurator's anger went as quickly as it came. The African hurriedly began to gather up the shards and dry the puddle, but the Procurator waved him away, and the slave ran out. The puddle remained.

Now, during the hurricane, the African was hiding near

the niche with the statue of a white naked woman with a bowed head, terrified of showing himself at the wrong moment, and at the same time fearful of missing the moment when the Procurator might call him.

Reclining on the couch in the stormy twilight, the Procurator poured wine into the goblet for himself and drank it in long draughts. From time to time he touched the bread, crumbled it and swallowed little pieces. Now and then he would suck an oyster, chew a slice of lemon, and take another drink.

Were it not for the roar of the water, the thunderclaps that seemed about to crush the palace roof, and the hammering of the hail on the balcony steps, it might have been possible to hear that the Procurator was muttering something, talking to himself. And had the fitful quivering of heavenly fire turned into steady light, the observer could see that the Procurator's face, with eyes inflamed by wine and recent sleepless nights, expressed impatience, that the Procurator was not only looking at the two white roses drowned in the red puddle, but was constantly turning his face to the garden, toward the watery dust and sand, that he was waiting for someone, waiting impatiently.

Some time passed, and the sheet of water before the Procurator's eyes began to thin. The raging hurricane was beginning to slacken. Branches no longer cracked and fell. The thunderclaps and flashes were becoming more infrequent. What floated over Yershalayim now was no longer a blanket of violet edged with white, but an ordinary gray rear-guard cloud. The storm was sweeping out to the Dead Sea.

Now it was possible to distinguish the noise of the rain and the sounds of the water rushing down the gutters and directly down the steps that the Procurator had walked on earlier that day to proclaim the sentence in the square. And finally, the sounds of the fountain, drowned out until now, were heard. It was growing lighter. Blue windows appeared in the gray veil running eastward.

Now, breaking through the tapping of the thinning

rain, the faint sounds of trumpets and the clattering of several hundred hooves reached the Procurator's ears. He stirred and his face brightened. The ala was returning from Bald Mountain. Judging from the sound, it was now crossing the square where the sentences had been pronounced.

At last, the Procurator heard the long-awaited footsteps and a sloshing up the steps leading to the upper level of the garden facing the balcony. The Procurator stretched his neck, and his eyes glittered with an expression of joy.

Between two marble lions there first appeared a cowed head, and then an utterly drenched man in a cloak that clung to his body. It was the man who had had a whispered conversation with the Procurator in the darkened palace room before the sentencing, and who had sat on a three-legged stool during the execution, playing with a twig.

Ignoring puddles, the cowed man crossed the upper terrace of the garden and stepped onto the mosaic floor of the balcony. Raising his hand, he said in a pleasant high voice:

"Health and joy to the Procurator!" The man spoke in Latin.

"Gods!" Pilate exclaimed. "You are wet to the bone! What a hurricane! Eh? Please go to my room at once. Do me a favor, change your clothes."

The visitor threw back the cowl, exposing his wet head with hair clinging to his forehead, and, with a civil smile on his shaven face, began to refuse the invitation to change, assuring the Procurator that a little rain could not harm him in any way.

"I won't listen," answered Pilate and clapped his hands. This called out the hiding servants, whom he commanded to look after the new arrival and then to serve hot food at once.

The visitor did not take much time to dry his hair, change his clothes, and generally put himself in order. Very soon he appeared on the balcony in dry sandals, a dry purple military cloak, and with smoothed hair.

At this time the sun returned to Yershalayim. Before departing and drowning in the Mediterranean, it sent its farewell rays to the city hated by the Procurator and gilded the balcony steps. The fountain revived and sang with all its strength. The doves came out on the sand, cooed, leaped over broken twigs, pecked at something in the wet sand. The red puddle had been dried, the shards swept out, and hot meat was steaming on the table.

"I am ready to hear the Procurator's commands," said the visitor, approaching the table.

"But you shall hear nothing until you sit down and drink some wine," Pilate replied graciously, pointing to the second couch.

The guest reclined, and the servant poured him a goblet of thick red wine. Another servant, bending cautiously over Pilate's shoulder, filled the Procurator's goblet. Then, with a gesture, the Procurator dismissed both servants.

While the new arrival drank and ate, Pilate sipped his wine and looked at his guest with narrowed eyes. The visitor was a man of middle age, with an extremely pleasant, round, tidy face and a fleshy nose. His hair was of an indeterminate color. As it dried, it became lighter. It was difficult to judge his nationality. The principal characteristic of his face was perhaps its expression of good humor, which was, however, contradicted by the eyes, or rather by his manner of looking at those he spoke to. Ordinarily, he kept his small eyes covered by his rather strange, somewhat puffy eyelids. At such times the narrow slits shone with a not unkindly slyness. The Procurator's guest was probably inclined to humor. But at times, banishing the glints of humor from the slits, he opened his eyelids wide and suddenly looked straight at his interlocutor with a hard stare, as though trying to discover some almost invisible spot on his nose. This lasted a moment, and after that the lids dropped, the slits narrowed, and shone again with good will and sly intelligence.

The guest did not refuse a second goblet of wine, swallowed several oysters with obvious pleasure, tasted the

cooked vegetables, and ate a piece of meat. Having eaten, he praised the wine:

"An excellent wine, Procurator, but it is not Falerno?"

"Caecubus, thirty years old," the Procurator replied affably.

The guest placed a hand over his heart and refused to eat any more, declaring that he had had enough. Pilate refilled his goblet and the guest did likewise. Both diners poured off some wine from their goblets into the platter with the meat, and the Procurator proclaimed loudly, raising his goblet:

"For us, for thee, Caesar, father of the Romans! . . ."

They drank the wine, and the Africans removed the viands from the table, leaving the fruit and the jugs. Once more the Procurator gestured to them to withdraw, and remained alone with his guest under the colonnade.

"And so," Pilate said in a low voice, "What can you tell me about the temper of this city?"

Involuntarily, he turned his glance to where the colonnades and flat roofs glowed in the valley beyond the terraces of the garden, gilded by the last rays.

"I think that the Lightning-Swift Cohort can leave," replied the guest.

"A good idea," approved the Procurator. "The day after tomorrow I shall release it and shall also leave myself. And—I swear by the feast of the twelve gods, I swear by the lares—I should give much if I could do it today!"

"The Procurator does not like Yershalayim?" the guest asked with good humor.

"Why," the Procurator exclaimed, smiling, "there is no place on earth more hopeless. Apart from the climate—I am ill every time I come, but this is not the worst! . . . The holidays here! . . . The magicians, wonder-workers, sorcerers, the hordes of pilgrims! . . . Fanatics, fanatics! . . . Take this messiah they have suddenly begun to await this year! Every moment you expect to witness most unpleasant bloodshed. . . . All the time you must shift troops, read slanders and denunciations, half of them di-

rected against yourself! You must agree it is a bore. Ah, if it were not for the Emperor's service!"

"Yes, the holidays are difficult here," agreed the guest.

"I wish with my whole heart they were over quickly," Pilate added energetically. "I shall be able then at last to return to Caesarea. Would you believe it, this nightmare erected here by Herod," the Procurator waved his hand at the colonnade, and it was clear that he was speaking of the palace, "drives me insane! I cannot sleep here. The world has never seen stranger architecture! . . . But let's return to business. First of all, this damned Bar-Rabban, does he worry you?"

The guest shot his special glance at the Procurator's cheek. But the latter gazed into the distance with bored eyes. His face gathered into a squeamish grimace as he looked down at the parts of the city lying at his feet and dimming in the approaching twilight. The guest's glance was also extinguished as his eyelids dropped.

"I believe that Bar-Rabban has now become as harmless as a lamb," the guest said, and wrinkles appeared on his round face.

"In any case," the Procurator remarked with a concerned air, and raised a thin, long finger adorned with a black stone of a ring, "it will be necessary . . ."

"Oh, the Procurator may rest assured that, while I am in Judea, Bar-Rabban will not make a step without someone at his heels."

"Now I am calm. But, then, I am always calm when you are here."

"The Procurator is too kind!"

"And now I should like to hear about the execution," said the Procurator.

"What is it precisely that interests the Procurator?"

"Were there any attempts on the part of the crowd to express indignation? This, of course, is the main thing."

"None," replied the guest.

"Very good. You made sure yourself that death took place?"

"The Procurator may rest assured."

"And tell me . . . was the drink given to them before they were hanged on the posts?"

"Yes. But he," the guest closed his eyes, "refused it."

"Who?" asked Pilate.

"Forgive me, Hegemon!" cried the guest. "Did I not name him? Ha-Nozri!"

"Madman!" said Pilate, grimacing. A vein twitched under his left eye. "To die of the burning sun! Why refuse what is offered under the law! What words did he use?"

"He said," the guest replied, closing his eyes again, "that he was grateful and did not blame . . . for taking his life."

"Whom?" Pilate asked tonelessly.

"That, Hegemon, he did not say . . ."

"Nothing else?" asked the hoarse voice.

"Nothing else."

The Procurator's goblet clinked as he poured himself wine. Draining it to the bottom, he said:

"The point is this: although we cannot find any of his admirers or followers—at least at this time—no one can guarantee that there are none."

The guest listened attentively, inclining his head.

"Therefore, to avoid surprises of any kind," continued the Procurator, "I beg you immediately and without ado to remove the bodies of all three from the face of the earth and bury them quietly in secret. They must vanish utterly, without a trace."

"I hear you, Hegemon," said the guest and rose, saying: "In view of the difficult and responsible assignment, permit me to go immediately."

"No, sit down for a moment longer," said Pilate, stopping his guest with a gesture. "There are two other matters. First—your great accomplishments in the most demanding post of chief of the secret service under the Procurator of Judea give me the pleasant opportunity to report them to Rome."

The guest's face flushed pink. He rose and bowed to the Procurator, saying:

"I am merely doing my duty in the Emperor's service."

"However," continued the Hegemon, "if you are offered a transfer from here, with a promotion, I should like to ask you to refuse it and remain here. I would not like to part with you for anything. Let them reward you in some other way."

"I am happy to serve under you, Hegemon."

"I am pleased to hear it. And now to the second matter. It concerns that . . . whatever's his name . . . Yehuda of Kerioth."

The guest sent another of his glances at the Procurator, but, as usual, extinguished it at once.

"It is said," the Procurator continued, lowering his voice, "that he received some money for welcoming this madman so warmly in his home."

"He will receive," the chief of the secret service corrected Pilate quietly.

"A large sum?"

"No one knows, Hegemon."

"Even you?" the Hegemon asked, flattering the guest with his astonishment.

"Alas, even I," the guest replied calmly. "But I know that he will receive the money this evening. He is being summoned today to Kaiyapha's palace."

"The avaricious old man of Kerioth!" the Procurator remarked, smiling. "He is an old man?"

"The Procurator is never mistaken, but this time he is mistaken," the guest answered civilly. "The man of Kerioth is a young man."

"Really! Can you describe him? Is he a fanatic?"

"Oh, no, Procurator."

"So. Anything else?"

"He is extremely handsome."

"What else? Has he any passions, perhaps?"

"It is difficult to know everyone in this huge city, Procurator. . . ."

"Oh, no, no, Aphranius! Do not belittle yourself."

"He has one passion, Procurator." The guest made a tiny pause. "A passion for money."

"And what is his occupation?"

Aphranius raised his eyes to the ceiling, thought, and answered:

"He works in a moneychanging shop for one of his relatives."

"Ah, so, so, so." The Procurator fell silent, glanced around him to make sure no one was on the balcony, then said in a low voice: "Well, the point is this: I received information today that he will be murdered this evening."

The guest not only shot his glance at the Procurator, but even held it a moment. Then he answered:

"You spoke of me too flatteringly, Procurator. I do not deserve your report. I have not received such information."

"You merit the highest reward," replied the Procurator. "But such information exists."

"May I venture to ask who supplied it?"

"Allow me to refrain from telling you at present, especially since it is accidental, vague and unauthenticated. But it is my duty to foresee everything. Such is my position. But more than anything else, I trust my presentiment, for it has never deceived me. As for the information, it is that one of Ha-Nozri's secret friends, incensed at the monstrous treachery of this moneychanger, is plotting with his accomplices to kill him tonight, and to return the money paid for the betrayal to the High Priest with a note, 'Take back the accursed money.'"

The chief of the secret service threw no more of his glances at the Hegemon, but went on listening with narrowed eyes. And Pilate continued:

"You can imagine how pleased the High Priest will be to receive such a present on the holiday eve."

"It will not only be unpleasant," the guest replied, smiling, "but I imagine, Procurator, that it will create a serious scandal."

"I am of the same opinion. This is why I ask you to

deal with this matter—to take every precaution for the safety of Yehuda of Kerioth.”

“The Hegemon’s command will be fulfilled,” said Aphranius. “But I must reassure the Hegemon: the plot of the assassins is extremely difficult to carry out. After all,” the guest turned as he spoke, “it means tracking him down, finding out how much he had received, murdering him, and then managing to return the money to Kaiyapha—and all of this in a single night! Tonight!”

“Nevertheless, they will kill him today,” Pilate repeated obstinately. “I have a premonition, I tell you! It has never deceived me.” A spasm ran across the Procurator’s face, and he rubbed his hands briefly.

“Yes,” the guest replied obediently. He got up, straightened himself, and suddenly asked grimly, “So they will kill him, Hegemon?”

“They will,” answered Pilate. “And all hope rests only on your universally admired skill and efficiency.”

The guest adjusted the heavy belt under his cloak and said:

“I have the honor of wishing you health and joy!”

“Oh, yes,” Pilate exclaimed in a low voice. “I’ve almost forgotten! I owe you . . .”

The guest was astonished.

“But really, Procurator, you owe me nothing.”

“Why, surely! Don’t you remember, there was a mob of beggars when I rode into Yershalayim. . . . I wanted to throw them some money, but I had none with me, and I borrowed from you.”

“Oh, such a trifle, Procurator!”

“Trifles should be remembered too.” Pilate turned, raised his cloak, which lay on the chair behind him, drew a leather pouch from under it and held it out to the guest. The other bowed, accepting it, and hid it under his cloak.

“I am waiting,” said Pilate, “for a report on the burial, as well as in the matter of Yehuda of Kerioth. I shall expect it this very night, do you hear me, Aphranius, this

very night. The convoy shall be instructed to waken me as soon as you appear. I shall expect you."

"I have the honor," said the chief of the secret service. He turned and left the balcony. The wet sand crunched under his feet, then his steps could be heard on the marble between the lions. Then his feet disappeared, his body, and, finally, his cowl. The Procurator now saw that the sun was already gone and twilight had fallen.

Chapter 26

THE BURIAL

The twilight might have been responsible for the sharp change in the Procurator. He seemed to have aged suddenly, his shoulders slumped, he became uneasy. Once he glanced back and started at the sight of the empty chair over which his cloak was thrown. The holiday night was approaching, the evening shadows played their game, and the weary Procurator must have imagined that someone was sitting in the empty chair. Yielding to anxiety, he touched the cloak, then left it and rapidly began to pace the balcony, now rubbing his hands, now hurrying to the table and taking up the goblet, now stopping and staring vacantly at the mosaic of the floor, as though trying to read something in it. . . .

At one of the turns, he stopped abruptly and whistled. In answer to his whistle, a low barking shattered the twilight. A huge gray dog with sharp ears and a collar set with gold studs leaped out of the garden onto the balcony.

"Banga, Banga," the Procurator cried weakly.

The dog rose on his hind legs, placing the front paws on his master's shoulders so that he nearly toppled him, and licked his cheek. The Procurator sat down in the chair. Banga settled at his master's feet with hanging tongue, panting. Joy shone in his eyes because the storm, the one thing in the world that terrified the fearless dog, was over, and also because he was here again, next to the man he loved, respected, and considered the mightiest in the world, the lord over all men, thanks to whom the dog regarded his own self a privileged being, superior and special. However, lying at his master's feet and look-

ing at the darkening garden, the dog immediately knew, even without seeing his master's face, that he was deeply troubled. He stirred, rose, came to the Procurator's side, and placed his front paws and muzzle on his knees, smudging the cloak with wet sand. Banga's actions were probably intended to console his master, to let him know that he was ready to meet misfortune with him. He tried to express this with his eyes, which squinted up at his master, and with his pricked-up ears. And it was thus that both the dog and the man who loved one another, met the holiday night on the balcony.

The Procurator's guest meantime had his hands full. After he left the upper terrace of the garden before the balcony, he walked down the stairs to the lower level, turned right and came to the barracks on the palace grounds. These barracks housed the two centuries which had arrived with the Procurator for the holidays in Yer-shalayim, as well as the Procurator's secret guard, commanded by the guest. He spent a short time in the barracks, not more than ten minutes, but at the end of those ten minutes three carts loaded with entrenching tools and a barrel of water rolled out of the yard. The carts were escorted by fifteen mounted men in gray cloaks. They all left the grounds through the rear gate, turned west, came to the city wall and followed the path to the Bethlehem road. Along that road they went north, reached the crossing at the Hebron Gate, and then turned up the Jaffa road taken earlier that day by the procession with the condemned men. By this time it was already dark and the moon appeared on the horizon.

Soon after the departure of the carts and their escort, the Procurator's visitor, who had changed to an old dark chiton, also rode out of the palace grounds. But he rode into town, not out of it. Some time later he could be seen approaching Anthony's fortress, situated in the north, in the immediate vicinity of the great Temple. He did not linger in the fortress either, proceeding thence to the Lower City with its tangle of crooked streets. Here he had come mounted on a mule.

Thoroughly familiar with the city, he easily found the

street he needed. It bore the name of Greek Street, since several Greek shops were to be found there, including one owned by a rug merchant. At this shop he halted his mule, dismounted and tied him to a ring at the gate. The shop was closed. He walked through the gate next to the shop entrance into a small square courtyard lined with sheds. Turning around a corner in the yard, he came to the stone terrace of a small house overgrown with ivy, and looked around. The house and the sheds were still dark; the lights had not yet been lit. The guest called quietly:

“Niza!”

A door creaked, and a young woman without a veil appeared in the evening dusk. She bent over the balcony railing, peering anxiously to see who the visitor was. Recognizing him, she nodded with a welcoming smile and waved her hand.

“Are you alone?” Aphranius asked quietly in Greek.

“Yes,” whispered the woman on the terrace. “My husband left for Caesarea this morning.” The woman glanced back at the door and added in a whisper, “But the servant is here.” She gestured for him to come in.

Aphranius looked around and stepped on the stone stairs. After that he and the woman disappeared inside the house. With the woman Aphranius spent very little time, no more than five minutes. Then he left the house and terrace. Pulling his cowl still lower over his eyes, he went out into the street. Lamps were already being lighted in the houses. The holiday crowds were still milling in the streets, and Aphranius on his mule was lost in the stream of pedestrians and riders. His subsequent movements are not known to anyone.

The woman he called Niza began to dress hurriedly as soon as she was alone. But difficult as it was for her to find the needed things in the dark room, she did not light the lamp and did not call her servant. It was only after she was ready and her head was covered with a dark veil that her voice was heard in the house:

“If anyone asks for me, say that I went to visit Enanta.”

The grumbling of the old maidservant was heard in the dark:

"Enanta? Oh, that Enantal! Didn't your husband forbid you to visit her? She is a procuress, this Enanta of yours! Wait till I tell your husband. . . ."

"Oh, keep quiet, keep quiet," answered Niza and slipped out of the house like a shadow. Her sandals tapped across the flagstones in the yard. The servant closed the door to the terrace, still grumbling.

At the same time, a young man with a neatly trimmed beard, in a white kaffiyeh falling to his shoulders, a new, pale-blue holiday tallith with tassels dangling below it, and creaking new sandals came out of the gate of an unprepossessing house in another alley in the Lower City. The house, with windows opening on the yard, turned a blank wall to the alley, which ran down, twisting and turning in a series of rocky terraces to one of the city ponds. The young man, strikingly handsome, with an aquiline nose, walked briskly, overtaking other pedestrians hurrying home to the solemn feast and looking at the lights which went on in one window after another. He followed the road leading past the market place to the palace of the High Priest Kaiyapha, which stood at the foot of the Temple hill.

Some time later he could be seen entering the gate of Kaiyapha's courtyard. And a short time later, leaving the courtyard.

After his visit to the palace, already illuminated with lamps and torches and alive with holiday activities, the young man walked still more briskly and cheerfully, hurrying back to the Lower City. On the corner where the street opened on the market square, he was overtaken in the jostling, seething crowd by a slender woman in a black veil down to her eyes. She walked with a light, dancing tread. As she passed him, the woman threw back her veil for a moment and flashed a look at the young man, but did not slow her pace. In fact, she walked still faster, as if intent on escaping the man she overtook.

The young man not only noticed the woman, he rec-

ognized her with a start. For a moment he halted and looked at her back with puzzled eyes, but then he hurried after her. Nearly knocking down a passer-by with a pitcher in his hands, the young man caught up with the woman and, breathing heavily with agitation, he called her:

"Niza!"

The woman turned, narrowed her eyes, and answered drily in Greek, her face expressing cold annoyance:

"Ah, it is you, Yehudah! I did not recognize you at once. That's a good omen, though. We have a saying that the man who is not recognized will be rich. . . ."

So agitated that his heart was jumping like a bird covered with a black cloth, Yehudah asked in a breaking whisper, afraid of being overheard by others:

"But where are you going, Niza?"

"And why do you have to know?" answered Niza, slowing down and looking at Yehudah haughtily.

Childish intonations came into Yehudah's voice as he whispered in confusion:

"But you. . . But we agreed. . . I was coming to see you, you said you would be home all evening. . . ."

"Ah, no, no," said Niza and pouted capriciously, which made her face—a face, Yehudah felt, more beautiful than any he had ever seen—still lovelier in his eyes. "I was bored. You have a holiday, but what shall I do? Sit and listen to you sighing on the terrace? And be afraid, too, that the maid will tell him about it? No, no, I decided to take a walk out of town and listen to the nightingales."

"What do you mean, out of town? . . ." asked Yehudah, bewildered. "Alone?"

"Of course, alone," answered Niza.

"Let me come with you," Yehudah asked breathlessly. His head was in a fog, he forgot everything in the world, and looked with pleading eyes into Niza's blue ones, which now seemed black.

Niza said nothing and walked faster.

"Why don't you speak, Niza?" Yehudah asked plaintively, increasing his own pace.

"I shan't be bored with you?" Niza asked suddenly, and stopped. Yehudah's thoughts were thrown into utter confusion.

"Oh, well," Niza finally relented, "come along."

"But where, where?"

"Wait . . . let us step into this yard and decide. I am afraid some acquaintance will see me and tell my husband that I was with my lover in the street."

Niza and Yehudah vanished from the market place; they whispered together in one of the gateways.

"Go to the olive grove," whispered Niza, pulling her veil down over her eyes and turning away from some man who was entering the gate with a pail, "to Gethsemane, beyond the Kidron, you know the place I mean?"

"Yes, yes, yes. . ."

"I shall go ahead," continued Niza, "but do not follow in my footsteps, walk separately. I shall go ahead. . . . When you cross the stream. . . you know where the grotto is?"

"I know, I know. . ."

"Walk past the olive press, then up and turn toward the grotto. I shall be there. But don't dare to follow me now, have patience, wait here a while." With these words, Niza walked away from the gateway as though she had never spoken to Yehudah.

He stood for a time alone, trying to collect his scattered thoughts. Among these was the thought of how he would explain his absence from the holiday meal at home. Yehudah stood there, trying to invent a plausible lie, but could not think of anything in his excitement, and, still without plan in mind, he slowly walked out of the gateway.

Now he changed his direction, no longer hurrying to the Lower City but turning back toward Kaiyapha's palace. The holiday had arrived in the city. The windows around him glittered with lights, and he heard the sound of prayers. Late passers-by whipped their donkeys, shouting and urging them on. Yehudah's feet carried him by themselves, and he never noticed Anthony's dreaded,

moss-grown towers fly past him, nor did he hear the trumpet blasts in the fortress or pay attention to the mounted Roman patrol with a torch that poured a troubled, quivering light upon the road.

Passing the tower, Yehudah turned and saw two giant five-point candelabra light up at a tremendous height above the Temple. But even this he saw dimly. It seemed to him that ten enormous lamps were lit over Yershalayim, vying with the light of the single lamp which rose higher and higher over the city—the moon.

Yehudah cared about nothing now, he hurried toward the Gethsemane Gate, eager to get out of the city as quickly as possible. At times it seemed to him that he caught sight of a small dancing figure far ahead, flickering in and out among the backs and faces of passers-by, leading him on. But it was a mirage. Yehudah knew that Niza had far outdistanced him. He hurried past the moneychangers' shops and finally found himself at the Gethsemane Gate. There, though burning with impatience, he was compelled to wait. A caravan of camels was entering the gate, followed by a Syrian military patrol, which Yehudah cursed mentally. . . .

But everything ends. The impatient Yehudah was already outside the city wall. To the left of him, he saw a small cemetery and near it, several striped tents put up by pilgrims. Crossing the dusty moonlit road, Yehudah hastened toward the Kidron brook, intending to cross it. The water murmured quietly at his feet. Leaping from stone to stone, he finally came out on the Gethsemane bank and found to his joy that the road along the gardens was quite empty. A short way ahead he could already see the half-ruined gate of the olive grove.

After the sultry air of the city, Yehudah was overwhelmed by the intoxicating smells of the spring night. A wave of myrtle and acacia fragrance came pouring from the Gethsemane fields across the fence.

No one guarded the gate. There was no one there, and several minutes later Yehudah was already running

beneath the mysterious shadows of the huge, spreading olive trees. The road was uphill. Yehudah ascended, breathing heavily, at times emerging out of the darkness onto patterned moonlit carpets which reminded him of the carpets he had seen in the shop of Niza's jealous husband.

Soon the olive press with a heavy stone wheel and a pile of barrels appeared in a clearing on Yehudah's left. The grove was deserted. All work had stopped at sunset, and now choirs of nightingales trilled and thundered over Yehudah.

His goal was near. He knew that in a moment he would hear the low whisper of falling water in the grotto in the darkness on his right. And now he heard it. It was getting cooler. He slowed his steps and called quietly:

"Niza!"

But instead of Niza, a stocky masculine figure separated itself from the thick trunk of an olive tree and sprang out on the road. Something flashed in its hand and went out at once. With a faint cry, Yehudah rushed back, but a second man barred his way.

The first man, before him, asked Yehudah:

"How much did you receive just now? Tell me, if you want to stay alive!"

Hope flared up in Yehudah's heart and he cried out desperately:

"Thirty tetradrachmas! I have it all with me! Here is the money! Take it, but spare my life!"

The man before him instantly snatched the purse from Yehudah's hand. At the same moment the knife flew up behind him and struck the enamored man under his shoulder blade. Yehudah was flung forward, and he threw up his hands into the air. The man in front caught him on his knife and plunged it to the hilt into his heart.

"Ni . . . za . . ." Yehudah cried, not in his high and clear young voice, but hoarsely and reproachfully, and made no further sound. His body struck the ground so hard that the earth hummed.

Then a third figure appeared on the road. This third one wore a cowed cloak.

"Don't delay," he commanded. The assassins quickly wrapped the purse with the note provided by the third one into a skin and tied it crosswise with a cord. The second man put the bundle into his bosom, and the two assassins hurried away in different directions. The darkness swallowed them among the olives. The third man crouched near the body and glanced into its face. In the shadow it seemed white as chalk and somehow filled with spiritual beauty.

A few seconds later none of the living was on the road. The body lay with outflung arms. The left foot was caught in a spot of moonlight, so that each thong of the sandal was clearly visible. The Gethsemane garden thundered with nightingale song.

No one knows where Yehudah's two assassins went, but the path of the third man in the cowl is known. Leaving the road, he walked into the thick of the olive grove, making his way south. He climbed over the fence far from the main gate, in the southern corner, where the upper stones had fallen out. Soon he was on the bank of the Kidron. He entered the water and waded for a time, until he saw in the distance the silhouettes of two horses and a man. The horses were also standing in the stream. The water washed around their hooves. The man who held the horses mounted one, the cowed man leaped upon the other, and the two slowly walked through the water, the stones crunching under the horses' hooves. Then the riders left the stream, came out on the Yer-shalayim bank and continued at a slow pace along the city wall. Here the man who had held the horses galloped away and disappeared. The cowed man stopped his horse, dismounted on the deserted road, slipped off his cloak and turned it inside out. From under the cloak he took out a flat helmet without feathers and put it on. Now the horse was mounted by a man in a military chlamys with a short sword at his hip. He touched the reins, and the spirited cavalry horse went at a trot, shak-

ing the rider. The road was short—the rider was approaching the southern gate of Yershalayim.

Under the archway of the gate the restless flames of torches leaped and danced. The patrol of the second century of the Lightning-Swift Legion sat on stone benches, playing dice. Seeing the military rider, the soldiers jumped up. He waved to them and entered the city.

Yershalayim was flooded with festive lights. The flames of lamps played in all windows, and hymns were heard from all directions, merging into a discordant chorus. Occasionally, glancing into windows facing the street, the rider saw people around tables set with platters with the meat of kids and goblets of wine among bowls with bitter herbs. Whistling a quiet tune, the rider went along the deserted streets of the Lower City at an unhurried trot, making his way toward Anthony's tower, glancing up from time to time at the five-pointed candelabra—not to be seen anywhere else in the world—as they flared over the Temple, or at the moon which hung still higher than the lights.

The palace of Herod the Great took no part in the celebration of the Passover night. The auxiliary quarters of the palace facing south, which housed the officers of the Roman cohort and the legate of the legion, were lit and gave a sense of life and movement. But the front section, occupied by the sole, involuntary resident of the palace—the Procurator—seemed blind, with all its colonnades and golden statues, under the dazzling moon. Here, in the interior of the palace, all was darkness and silence.

And the Procurator, as he had told Aphranius earlier, refused to go within. He had ordered his bed made on the balcony, where he had dined, and where he had conducted the interrogation in the morning. The Procurator lay down, but sleep evaded him. The naked moon stood high in the clear sky, and the Procurator stared at it fixedly for several hours.

At midnight sleep at last took pity on the Hegemon. With a spasmodic yawn, the Procurator undid the clasps of his cloak and threw it off. Then he removed his belt

with the wide steel knife in the sheath and placed it on the chair by the couch, removed his sandals, and stretched out. Banga immediately climbed up on the bed and lay down next to him, head to head, and the Procurator, putting his hand on the dog's neck, closed his eyes at last. Only then did the dog fall asleep as well.

The couch was in semidarkness, shaded from the moon by a column, but a ribbon of moonlight stretched from the staircase to the bed. And the moment the Procurator lost contact with surrounding reality, he started out along the gleaming road and went up and up, directly toward the moon. He even laughed in his sleep with happiness, for everything was ineffably beautiful on the pale-blue, transparent road. He walked with Banga, and next to him walked the wandering philosopher. They argued about something extremely complicated and important, and neither was able to convince the other. They did not agree on any point, and this made their dispute interminable and particularly interesting. Needless to say, today's execution turned out to have been a sheer misunderstanding, for the philosopher, who had invented the incredibly absurd idea that all men were good, walked by his side; hence, he was alive.

They had all the time they wanted, and the storm would not come till evening, and cowardice, Yeshua Hanozri said, was unquestionably one of the most terrible vices. No, philosopher, I disagree: it is the most terrible vice!

No one could have accused the present Procurator of Judea and former tribune of the legion of cowardice on that occasion, for example, in the Valley of the Maidens, when the furious Germans had almost hacked the giant Rat-Killer to death. But you must pardon me, philosopher! Can you, with your intelligence, suppose that the Procurator of Judea would ruin his career over a man who had committed a crime against Caesar?

"Yes, yes. . ." Pilate moaned and sobbed in his sleep.

"Now we shall always be together," the ragged wander-

ing philosopher, who had in some inexplicable way arisen in the path of the Rider of the Golden Spear, said to him in his sleep. "If one is here, the other shall be too! Whenever I am remembered, you shall be remembered! I, a foundling, son of unknown parents, and you, the son of an astrologer-king and a miller's daughter, the beautiful Pila."

"Yes, don't forget, remember me, the son of an astrologer," Pilate begged in his sleep. And, at a nod from the beggar of En-Sedud who walked next to him, the cruel Procurator of Judea wept and laughed with joy in his sleep.

This was beautiful, but it made the Hegemon's awakening all the more terrible. Banga growled at the moon, and the pale-blue road before the Procurator, as slippery as though it had been slicked with oil, disappeared. He opened his eyes and gripped Banga's collar with an accustomed gesture. Then he sought the moon with his inflamed eyes and found that it had moved a little and turned silver. But its light was encroached on by the unpleasant, troubling light playing on the balcony before him. A torch flared and smoked in the hand of Centurion Rat-Killer. The man squinted with fear and hatred at the dangerous beast crouching for a leap.

"Don't touch, Banga," said the Procurator in a sick voice and coughed. Shielding his face from the flame, he continued: "Even at night in the moonlight I have no rest! . . . Oh, gods. . . You have a bad job too, Mark. You maim the soldiers. . ."

Mark stared at the Procurator in utter astonishment, and the latter recollected himself. To make up for the words spoken while half-asleep, the Procurator said:

"Take no offense, Centurion. My position, I repeat, is still worse. What is it?"

"The chief of the secret service is here to see you," Mark reported calmly.

"Call him, call him," the Procurator said, clearing his throat, and his bare feet began to feel for his sandals.

The flame played on the columns and the centurion's steps clattered on the mosaic. The centurion went out into the garden.

"Even in the moonlight I have no rest," the Procurator said to himself, gritting his teeth.

In place of the centurion, a man in a cowl appeared on the balcony.

"Don't touch, Banga," the Procurator said quietly and gripped the dog behind the head.

Before he spoke, Aphranius looked around, as he always did, and drew into the shadow. Seeing that no one else but Banga was on the balcony, he said quietly:

"I beg you to turn me over for trial, Procurator. You were right. I did not succeed in protecting Yehudah of Keriioth—he was killed. I submit for trial and retirement."

It seemed to Aphranius that four eyes looked at him—a dog's and a wolf's.

Aphranius took a bloodstained purse, sealed with two seals, from under his chlamys.

"The assassins left this bag of money at the house of the High Priest. The blood on it is the blood of Yehudah of Keriioth."

"How much is there, I wonder?" asked Pilate, bending over the bag.

"Thirty tetradrachmas."

The Procurator said with a crooked smile:

"Not much."

Aphranius was silent.

"Where is he?"

"I do not know," the man who never parted from his cowl replied with calm dignity. "We shall begin an investigation this morning."

The Procurator started, dropping the sandal strap which refused to be tied.

"But are you certain he was killed?"

The Procurator received a dry answer:

"I have worked in Judea for fifteen years, Procurator. I began under Valerius Gratus. I do not have to see a corpse to know that a man was killed. And I report to

you that he who was called Yehudah of Kerioth was murdered several hours ago."

"Forgive me, Aphranius," answered Pilate. "I am not yet properly awake, that is why I said it. I sleep badly," the Procurator grinned wryly. "And all the time I see a moonbeam in my sleep. Ridiculous. Imagine, I seem to be walking on this moonbeam. . . Well, then, I should like to hear your ideas on this case. Where do you intend to look for him? Sit down, chief of the secret service."

Aphranius bowed, moved a chair nearer the bed, and sat down, his sword clinking.

"I intend to look for him in the vicinity of the olive press in the garden of Gethsemane."

"So, so. And why there?"

"Hegemon, I am inclined to think that Yehudah was killed not in Yershalayim proper, and not somewhere far away; he was killed just outside Yershalayim."

"I consider you one of the eminent experts in your field. I do not know about Rome, of course, but in the colonies you have no equal. . . . Oh, yes! I forgot to ask you," the Procurator rubbed his forehead, "how did they manage to get the money into Kaiyapha's palace?"

"You see, Procurator. . . This is not too difficult. The avengers went to the back of the palace, where the alley rises over the backyard. They threw the bundle over the fence."

"With a note?"

"Yes, just as you thought, Procurator."

"I can imagine what went on at Kaiyapha's!"

"Yes, Procurator, it caused a great deal of excitement. They called me immediately."

Even in the semidark Pilate's eyes could be seen as they flashed.

"That's interesting, very interesting. . ."

"I take the liberty of disagreeing, Procurator. It was not interesting. A most boring and tiresome affair. When I asked whether anyone had been paid at Kaiyapha's palace, I received a categorical denial."

"Ah, so? Well, then, if no one was paid, then no one

was paid. That would make it all the more difficult to find the murderers."

"Quite so, Procurator."

"Enough, Aphranius, the matter is clear. And now the burial."

"The executed men have been buried, Procurator."

"Oh, Aphranius, it would be criminal to place you on trial. You deserve the highest reward. How did it go?"

Aphranius began to tell about the burial. While he was busy with Yehudah's case, a unit of the secret guard, commanded by his assistant, went up the hill that evening. One of the bodies was missing on the hilltop. Pilate started and said hoarsely:

"Ah, I should have foreseen it! . . ."

"Do not worry, Procurator," said Aphranius and went on: the bodies of Dismas and Gestas with eyes picked out by carrion birds were taken up and a search for the third body was begun at once. It was found very soon. A certain man. . .

"Matthu Levi," Pilate said, affirmatively rather than questioningly.

"Yes, Procurator. . . Matthu Levi had been hiding in a cave on the northern slope of the Bald Skull, waiting for darkness. The naked body of Yeshua Ha-Nozri was with him. When the guards entered the cave with a torch, Levi flew into rage and despair. He shouted that he had not committed any crime, and that, under the law, any man had the right to bury an executed criminal if he wished to do so. Matthu Levi said he did not want to part with the body. He was excited, shouted incoherently, begged, threatened, cursed. . ."

"They had to seize him?" Pilate asked, scowling.

"No, Procurator, no," Aphranius replied reassuringly. "They managed to quiet the impertinent madman, explaining that the body would be buried. When Levi grasped the meaning of the words, he calmed down, but declared that he would not leave and wished to take part in the burial. He said he would not leave even if they

tried to kill him, and offered them a bread knife he had with him for the purpose."

"Was he driven away?" Pilate asked in a constricted voice.

"No, Procurator, no. My assistant permitted him to take part in the burial."

"Which of your assistants was in command?" asked Pilate.

"Tolmai," replied Aphranius, and added anxiously: "Did he make a mistake?"

"Continue," said Pilate. "There was no mistake. I am, generally, beginning to wonder, Aphranius. I am evidently dealing with a man who never makes mistakes. This man is you."

"Matthu Levi was taken in the cart together with the bodies, and two hours later they reached a deserted gorge north of Yershalayim. There the men took turns at digging, and in an hour they had dug a deep pit, where they buried the three bodies."

"Naked?"

"No, Procurator, the unit brought chitons with it for this purpose. Rings were placed on the fingers of the bodies. Yeshua's ring has one mark on it; Dismas' has two, and Gestas', three. The pit is covered with a pile of rocks. Tolmai knows the identifying mark."

"Ah, if I had foreseen it!" Pilate said, wrinkling his face. "I have to speak to this Matthu Levi. . . ."

"He is here, Procurator."

Pilate stared at Aphranius for a few moments with wide open eyes, then he said:

"I thank you for everything that was done in this matter. Please send Tolmai to me tomorrow, and tell him in advance that I am pleased with him. As for you, Aphranius," the Procurator took a ring from the pocket of the belt lying on the table, and gave it to the chief of the secret service. "Please accept it as a memento."

Aphranius bowed, saying:

"I am greatly honored, Procurator."

"The men who took part in the burial should be re-

warded. The men of the secret service who lost Yehudah from sight should be reprimanded. And send Matthu Levi to me at once. I must have some details on Yeshua."

"Yes, Procurator," said Aphranius and began to back out and bow. The Procurator clapped his hands and cried:

"Here, now! Bring lamps to the colonnade!"

As Aphranius was walking away through the garden, lamps flickered behind Pilate in the hands of servants. Three lamps were set on the table before the Procurator, and the moonlit night immediately withdrew into the garden, as though Aphranius had led it away with him. Instead of Aphranius, an unknown small, lean man stepped onto the balcony next to the giant centurion. The latter caught the Procurator's glance and instantly turned and disappeared in the garden.

The visitor, about forty years old, was black, ragged, covered with caked mud, with a wolflike, glowering look. In a word, he was most unprepossessing and resembled those city beggars who swarmed on the Temple terraces and in the market places of the noisy and dirty Lower City.

The silence lasted a long time and was broken at last by the strange conduct of the man brought before Pilate. He changed in the face, swayed, and would have fallen if he had not caught at the edge of the table with a dirty hand.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Pilate.

"Nothing," answered Matthu Levi and made a movement as of swallowing something. The thin, bare, gray neck swelled out and sank again.

"What is the matter, answer me," repeated Pilate.

"I am tired," said Levi, looking sullenly at the floor.

"Sit down," said Pilate, pointing at the chair.

Levi looked up at the Procurator distrustfully, moved toward the chair, threw a sidelong, frightened glance at the gold arms, and sat down on the floor next to the chair.

"Tell me why you did not sit down in the chair?" asked Pilate.

"I am dirty, I might soil it," said Levi, looking down.

"They will give you something to eat right away."

"I do not want to eat," answered Levi.

"Why lie?" Pilate asked quietly. "You have not eaten all day, and perhaps longer. Very well, don't eat. I called you because I wanted you to show me the knife you had with you."

"The soldiers took it from me when they brought me in," said Levi, adding glumly, "give it back to me, I must return it to its owner. I stole it."

"What for?"

"To cut the ropes," answered Levi.

"Mark!" cried the Procurator, and the centurion stepped under the columns. "Give me his knife."

The centurion took a muddy bread knife from one of the two sheaths at his belt and handed it to the Procurator, then withdrew.

"Where did you get the knife?"

"In the bread shop at the Hebron Gate, just as you enter the city, on the left."

Pilate looked at the wide blade, then, for some reason, tried it with his finger for keenness, and said:

"Don't worry about the knife, it will be returned to the shop. And now I want another thing: let me see the parchment you carry with you, the one on which you wrote down Yeshua's words."

Levi looked at Pilate with hatred and smiled such a vicious smile that his face became altogether repulsive.

"You want to take it away?" he asked.

"I did not say, give me," answered Pilate. "I said, let me see."

Levi fumbled at the front of his garment and pulled out a roll of parchment. Pilate took it, unrolled it, spread it out between the lights and, narrowing his eyes, began to study the illegible ink marks. It was difficult to understand those crooked lines, and Pilate wrinkled his face and bent down to the parchment, following the lines with his finger. In the end he managed to make out that the notes were an incoherent chain of sayings, dates, household notations, and poetic fragments. Some

of them Pilate was able to read. ". . . there is no death . . . yesterday we ate sweet spring figs . . ."

Grimacing with the effort, Pilate squinted and read: ". . . we shall see the pure stream of the water of life . . . mankind shall look at the sun through a transparent crystal . . ."

Pilate rolled up the parchment and gave it to Levi with a sharp movement.

"Take it," he said, and added after a silence: "As I see, you are a bookish man and there is no reason for you to wander alone, in a beggar's clothes, without a home. I have a large library in Caesarea, I am very rich and would like to employ you. You will arrange and guard the papyri, you will have food and clothing."

Levi rose and answered:

"No, I do not want it."

"Why?" the Procurator asked, his face darkening. "You do not like me? . . . You are afraid of me?"

The same ugly smile twisted Levi's face as he said:

"No, but you will be afraid of me. It will not be too easy for you to look me in the face after you killed him."

"Be still," said Pilate. "Take some money."

Levi shook his head, refusing, and the Procurator went on:

"I know that you consider yourself a disciple of Yeshua, but I can tell you that you did not learn anything of what he taught you. For if you had, you would surely accept something from me. Remember, he said before he died that he blamed no one." Pilate raised his finger significantly, his face was twitching. "And he himself would certainly have accepted something. You are cruel, and he was not cruel. Where will you go?"

Levi suddenly approached the table, rested both hands on it and, staring at the Procurator with burning eyes, whispered to him:

"Know, Hegemon, that I shall kill a certain man in Yershalayim. I want to tell you this, so that you know there will be more blood."

"I also know there will be more blood," replied Pilate.

"Your words did not surprise me. You intend to kill me, of course?"

"No, I shall not succeed in killing you," Levi answered, baring his teeth and smiling. "I am not fool enough to expect that. But I shall kill Yehudah of Kerioth. I shall devote the remainder of my life to this."

The Procurator's eyes glowed with pleasure. Motioning to Matthu Levi with his finger to come nearer, he said:

"Do not trouble yourself, you will never be able to do this. Yehudah was already killed tonight."

Levi sprang back from the table, looking around wildly and crying:

"Who did it?"

Pilate answered:

"I did it."

Levi opened his mouth and stared at the Procurator, who said quietly:

"This, of course, is not much, but nevertheless I did it." And he added: "Well, will you accept something now?"

Levi thought a while, then he relented and said:

"Tell them to give me a piece of clean parchment."

An hour passed. Levi was no longer in the palace. Now the silence of dawn was broken only by the quiet footsteps of the sentry in the garden. The moon was blanching rapidly, and the whitish spot of the morning star could be seen at the opposite edge of the sky. The lamps had long gone out. The Procurator lay on his couch. With his hand under his cheek, he slept, breathing soundlessly. Next to him slept Banga.

And this was how the dawn of the fifteenth day of Nisan was met by the fifth Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

Chapter 27

END OF APARTMENT NUMBER 50

When Margarita reached the final words of the chapter, "And this was how the dawn of the fifteenth day of Nisan was met by the fifth Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate," it was morning.

The sparrows held their gay, excited morning colloquy in the willow and linden branches.

Margarita rose from the chair, stretched, and only now realized how her body ached and how sleepy she was. It is interesting to note that Margarita's soul was in perfect order. Her thoughts were not scattered, and she was not in the least shocked or startled at having spent the night supernaturally. She was not perturbed by the memory of having been at Satan's ball. She did not wonder at the miracle which returned the Master to her, or the recovery of the novel from the ashes. It did not seem strange to find everything back in its place in the basement in the alley, from which the informer Aloisy Mogarych had been expelled. In short, her meeting with Woland had caused her no psychic damage. She felt as though everything was as, indeed, it should have been.

She walked into the next room and saw that the Master slept soundly and serenely. She turned out the unnecessary table lamp and stretched out on the sofa at the opposite wall, covered with an old, torn sheet. A moment later she was asleep, and saw no dreams that morning. The basement rooms were silent, the whole little house was silent, and everything was quiet in the deserted alley.

But at the same hour, at dawn on Saturday, an entire floor of one of the Moscow government departments was awake. The floor was busy with the investigation of the

Woland affair, and the lights were on all night in ten offices.

Properly speaking, the affair had become quite clear on the previous day, when the Variety Theater had to be closed down in view of the disappearance of its administrative personnel and of the scandalous events during the notorious black magic act the day before. But new information was steadily pouring in.

Now the investigators in this strange case, which manifestly smacked of diabolic powers with an admixture of hypnotic tricks and obvious criminal elements, had to unravel the diverse and tangled events in various parts of Moscow and mold them into some sort of coherent whole.

The first to visit this sleepless floor, aglow with electricity, was Arkady Apollonovich Sempleyarov, chairman of the Acoustical Commission.

The conversation was difficult and most unpleasant, since he had to tell with utmost frankness not only about the outrageous performance and the fight in the loge, but also—and this was indeed unavoidable—about Militsa Andreyevna Pokobatko of Yelokhovskaya Street, and the Saratov niece, and many other things that were extremely painful to reveal.

Naturally, the testimony of Arkady Apollonovich, an intelligent and cultivated man and a clear-headed and reliable witness who had been present at the outrageous séance, who provided an excellent description both of the mysterious masked magician and his two scoundrelly assistants, and who remembered perfectly that the magician's name was Woland, helped the investigation very substantially. And the collation of his testimony with those of others—including certain of the ladies who had been victims of the performance (the one in violet underwear who had astonished Rimsky and, alas, many others), and the messenger Karpov who had been sent to apartment Number 50 on Sadovaya—immediately established the place where those responsible for all the misadventures were to be looked for.

Apartment Number 50 was visited, more than once. It

was scrutinized with extreme care, the walls were tapped, the chimneys examined, secret passages were sought. But none of this had brought any results, and none of the visits led to the discovery of any residents, although it was entirely clear that there was someone there. And this, despite the fact that everyone dealing with foreign artists in Moscow insisted decisively and flatly that there was no black magician by the name of Woland in Moscow, and that, indeed, there could be none.

He had definitely not registered anywhere on arrival, he showed no one his passport or any other documents, contracts or agreements, and no one had heard anything about him! The chief of the program section of the Entertainment Commission, Kitaitsev, swore that the vanished Styopa Likhodeyev had never submitted for his approval any program for performance by anyone called Woland, and that Styopa had never telephoned him concerning Woland's arrival. So that Kitaitsev was totally at a loss to understand how Styopa could have permitted such an act at the Variety Theater. When he was told that Arkady Apollonovich had seen this magician during the performance at the Variety Theater, Kitaitsev merely spread his hands in perplexity and raised his eyes to heaven. And it was clear from his eyes, and could therefore safely be asserted, that Kitaitsev was as pure as crystal.

And Prokhor Petrovich, the chairman of the Entertainment Commission. . .

Incidentally, he had returned to his suit immediately after the militia entered his office, to the stormy joy of Anna Richardovna and the great puzzlement of the militiamen who had been disturbed for no good reason.

And incidentally, too, when he returned to his usual place, into his gray striped suit, Prokhor Petrovich accepted all the resolutions the suit had written during his brief absence with full approval.

. . . Well, this Prokhor Petrovich knew absolutely nothing about any Woland.

In justice to the man who headed the investigation,

it must be said that the lost Rimsky was found with astonishing speed. All it needed was to consider the behavior of the Ace of Diamonds near the taxi stand by the motion-picture house in the light of certain time data, such as the hour when the performance ended and the time when Rimsky could have disappeared. A telegram was then dispatched to Leningrad. An hour later (this was toward evening on Friday), the answer came that Rimsky had been discovered in room 412 of the Astoria Hotel, on the fourth floor, next to the room of the repertory chief of one of the Moscow theaters which was then doing guest performances in Leningrad—in the room famed for its gold and gray-blue furniture and excellent bathroom.

Found hiding in the dress closet of room 412 at the Astoria, Rimsky was interrogated at once. After that a telegram reached Moscow, stating that the financial manager Rimsky was in a state of disorientation, that he either could not or would not give sensible answers to questions, and kept begging to be hidden in an armored room and assigned an armed guard.

By the same evening, the investigators traced Likhodeyev's movements. Telegrams of inquiry were sent to every city, and an answer came from Yalta that Likhodeyev had been there, but had left by plane for Moscow.

The only man whose traces were not discovered was Varenuvka. The famous theatrical manager, known to all Moscow, seemed to have vanished like a stone dropped into water.

In the meantime, the investigation had to deal with events in other parts of Moscow, outside the Variety Theater. It was necessary to look into the extraordinary incident with the singers of "Glorious Sea" (incidentally, Professor Stravinsky brought about a complete recovery in two hour's time—by some subcutaneous injections). It was also necessary to interview the individuals who had given other individuals or government institutions the devil knows what trash in place of money, as well as those who had been victimized by such payments.

Obviously, the most unpleasant, the most scandalous and insoluble of all these incidents was the theft of the head of the late editor Berlioz directly from his coffin in the Griboyedov hall, perpetrated in broad daylight.

Twelve persons were conducting the investigation, gathering—as on a knitting needle—all the infernal stitches of this complicated affair, scattered throughout Moscow.

One of the investigators visited Professor Stravinsky's hospital and asked, to begin with, for a list of patients who had come within the last three days. Thus, he found Nikanor Ivanovich Bosoy and the unfortunate master of ceremonies whose head had been detached from his body. However, little time was spent on them. It was easy to establish by now that those two were victims of the same gang, headed by the mysterious magician. But Ivan Nikolayevich Homeless interested the investigator a great deal.

The door of Ivan's room opened on Friday evening. The investigator introduced himself amiably and said that he had come to have a chat with Ivan Nikolayevich about the events at the Patriarchs' Ponds the day before yesterday.

How Ivan would have rejoiced had the investigator appeared sooner, even on Thursday night, when Ivan had fought so wildly and passionately to tell his story of the Patriarchs' Ponds! Now his dream of helping in the capture of the consultant was being realized. He no longer had to run after anyone. They had come to him, precisely to hear his account of what had taken place on Wednesday evening.

But, alas, Ivan had changed completely since the moment of Berlioz' death: he was willing to answer readily and courteously to all of the investigator's questions, but his indifference was clear both from his eyes and from his intonations. The poet was no longer concerned with Berlioz' fate.

Before the investigator's arrival, Ivan had been dozing on his bed, and certain visions passed before him. He saw a strange, incomprehensible, nonexistent city, with

hulks of marble, weather-worn colonnades, roofs gleaming in the sun, Anthony's tower, black, gloomy and pitiless, a palace on the western hill sunk almost to the roof in the tropical greenery of a garden, bronze statues over the greenery burning in the sunset; he saw armor-clad Roman centuries marching along the walls of the ancient city.

In his dozing state, Ivan saw a man sitting motionless in an armchair, with a clean-shaven nervous yellow face, in a white cloak with a red lining, looking with hatred at the luxuriant and alien garden. He also saw a naked, treeless yellow hill, and vacant posts with crossbars.

And what had happened at the Patriarchs' Ponds no longer interested the poet Ivan Homeless.

"Tell me, Ivan Nikolayevich, were you far from the turnstile when Berlioz fell under the streetcar?"

A faintly noticeable, indifferent smile touched Ivan's lips, and he answered:

"I was far."

"And that checkered one, was he right by the turnstile?"

"No, he was sitting on a bench nearby."

"You clearly remember that he did not come near the turnstile at the moment when Berlioz fell?"

"I remember. He did not come near. He was sitting sprawled on the bench."

Those were the investigator's last questions. He rose, held out his hand to Ivan, wished him a speedy recovery, and expressed the hope that he would soon be reading Ivan's poems again.

"No," Ivan answered quietly, "I shall write no more poems."

The investigator allowed himself, with a civil smile, to express his certainty that, while the poet was currently in a state of slight depression, it would soon pass.

"No," replied Ivan, looking not at the investigator but into the distance, at the darkening horizon, "this will never pass. The poems I wrote were bad poems, and now I understand it."

The investigator left Ivan with rather important infor-

mation. By following the thread of events from end to beginning, it was finally possible to get to the source of all the subsequent events. The investigator did not doubt that they had begun with the murder at the Patriarchs' Ponds. Of course, neither Ivan nor that checkered individual had pushed the unfortunate chairman of MAS-SOLIT physically, so to speak, under the wheels. But the investigator was certain that Berlioz had either thrown himself or fallen under the streetcar in a state of hypnosis.

Yes, there was already a mass of information, and the investigation knew whom it had to catch, and where. But the trouble was that it proved quite impossible to catch anyone. Undoubtedly, someone lived in the thrice-accursed apartment Number 50. At times, the telephone was answered either in a chattering, or a nasal voice. Occasionally, a window was opened, or sounds of a phonograph were heard from the apartment. Yet every time it was visited, no one was there. Yes, apartment Number 50 was acting up, but nothing could be done about it.

This went on until midnight between Friday and Saturday, when Baron Meigel, dressed in an evening suit and patent-leather shoes, solemnly entered apartment Number 50 as a guest. It was heard how the baron was admitted within. Exactly ten minutes later, the investigators entered the apartment without ringing; they not only failed to find any occupants, but—which was altogether incredible—they discovered no trace of Baron Meigel.

And so, as we have said, the affair dragged out until dawn on Saturday. Then new and highly interesting facts were added. A six-passenger plane, arriving from the Crimea, landed on the Moscow airfield. Among the passengers there was one who seemed very strange. He was a young man, wildly overgrown with stubble, covered with three-days' unwashed grime, and with inflamed and frightened eyes. He had no luggage, and was dressed in a rather fantastic outfit. He wore a fur hat, a felt cloak over a nightshirt, and blue leather bedroom slippers, evidently just bought. He was approached as soon as he

stepped off the gangway. He was expected, and a short time later the unforgettable director of the Variety Theater, Stepan Bogdanovich Likhodeyev, stood before the investigators. He added new data. It now became clear that Woland had wormed his way into the theater under the guise of an artist by hypnotizing Styopa Likhodeyev, and had then managed to throw Styopa out of Moscow and send him shooting across God knows how many kilometers. Thus, the information was expanded, but this did not make things any easier. In fact, the situation became even more difficult, for it was obvious that an individual capable of performing such tricks would not be so easy to capture. Meantime, Stepan Bogdanovich was, at his own request, placed in a safe cell, and the investigators went on to question Varenuhka, who had just been arrested at home, where he returned after an unexplained absence of almost two days.

Despite his promise to Azazello never to lie again, the house manager began precisely with a lie. However, he should not be judged too harshly for it. Azazello had forbidden him to lie and speak rudely over the telephone, and in this case the house manager was conversing without the aid of that device. With shifting eyes, Ivan Savelievich declared that he had gotten drunk last Thursday in his office at the Variety Theater, after which he wandered off somewhere—he did not remember where, drank some more—he did not remember where, lay under a fence somewhere . . . again he did not remember where. After he was told that his stupid and thoughtless behavior interfered with the investigation of an important case, and that he would naturally be held responsible, Varenuhka burst into sobs and whispered in a shaking voice, looking all around him, that he was lying solely because of fear, because he was terrified of the vengeance of Woland's gang, in whose clutches he had already been, and that he begged, implored, longed to be locked in an armored cell.

"What the devil! Both of them harping on that armored cell!" grumbled one of the investigators.

"They were badly scared by those scoundrels," said the investigator who had visited Ivan.

Varenuvka was quieted a little and assured that he would be protected even without a cell. Then he revealed that he had never drunk anything under any fences, but that he had been given a beating by two individuals, one with a fang and red hair, and the other round and fat. . . .

"Ah, resembling a tom cat?"

"Yes, yes, yes," the house manager whispered, numb with terror and constantly glancing over his shoulder. After that he gave further details concerning his two-day stay in apartment Number 50 in the capacity of a procurer-vampire, who had nearly put an end to the life of the financial manager, Rimsky.

At this time, Rimsky, who had been brought by train from Leningrad, was led into the room. However, this trembling, terrified, psychically unhinged, gray-haired old man, in whom it would have been difficult to recognize the former financial manager, refused to tell the truth and turned out to be most stubborn. Rimsky insisted that he had not seen any Hella at his office window at night. Nor had he seen Varenuvka. He had simply felt ill, and had gone to Leningrad in delirium. The sick financial manager concluded his testimony with a request to be locked up in an armored cell.

Annushka was arrested while attempting to hand the cashier of the department store on Arbat Square a ten-dollar bill. Annushka's story about people flying out of the window on Sadovaya and about the horseshoe, which, according to her, she had picked up to bring to the militia, was heard attentively.

"Was the horseshoe really gold with diamonds?" they asked Annushka.

"Wouldn't I know diamonds?" answered Annushka.

"But he gave you chervontsy, as you say?"

"Wouldn't I know chervontsy?" answered Annushka.

"And when did they turn into dollars?"

"I don't know a thing about any dollars, I've never

seen any dollars!" Annushka shrilled. "I have my rights! I got a reward, and I was buying cotton for it." And she went into a noisy rigmarole, crying that she was not responsible for the house management which gave the fifth floor over to unholy powers who wouldn't let a body live in peace.

The investigator waved his pen at Annushka, for everybody had had enough of her by then, and wrote out a pass on a green slip of paper, allowing her to leave the building. And Annushka promptly made herself scarce, to everyone's relief.

She was followed by a long string of witnesses, including Nikolay Ivanovich, arrested solely through the stupidity of his jealous wife who had notified the militia toward morning that her husband had disappeared. Nikolay Ivanovich did not surprise the investigators when he put down on the table before them the preposterous certificate that he had spent the night at Satan's ball. In telling how he carried the naked maid through the air somewhere to the devil's own backyard, how she swam in the river, and how the naked Margarita Nikolayevna had first appeared in her bedroom window, Nikolay Ivanovich allowed himself some slight deviations from the truth. Thus, for instance, he did not deem it necessary to mention his visit to the bedroom with the discarded shift in his hands. According to him, Natasha flew out of the window, straddled him, and dragged him out of Moscow.

"I was compelled by superior force to obey," said Nikolay Ivanovich, closing his testimony with a plea that none of this be revealed to his spouse. Which was duly promised.

The information provided by Nikolay Ivanovich led to the discovery that Margarita Nikolayevna, as well as her maid Natasha, had vanished without trace, and steps were taken to search for them.

Saturday morning was thus marked by tireless and unremitting investigation of the case. Utterly impossible rumors were meanwhile springing up and circulating in the city, embellishing the grain of truth at the core with

the most luxuriant inventions. It was said that there had been a strange performance at the Variety Theater, after which the entire audience of two thousand persons ran out into the street stark naked; that a printing shop which manufactured counterfeit money of magical qualities had been discovered on Sadovaya; that some gang had kidnapped the five directors of the Entertainment Sector, but the militia had found them at once; and many other stories that I would not even wish to repeat.

Meantime, the dinner hour was approaching when a telephone rang in the building where the investigation was being conducted. It was reported from Sadovaya that the infernal apartment was again showing signs of life. Windows had been opened from within, the sounds of a piano and singing were coming from it, and a black tom was seen sunning himself on the window sill.

At about four in the afternoon of that hot Saturday a large company of men in civilian clothes alighted from three cars a little distance away from Sadovaya No. 302-b. The large group broke up into two small ones. One walked through the gateway and the yard directly to the sixth front entrance, while the other opened the little door to the back entrance, usually boarded up. Then the two groups proceeded to mount the stairways to apartment Number 50.

At this time Koroviev and Azazello were sitting in the dining room, finishing their breakfast. Koroviev had already taken off his evening suit and was dressed in his everyday attire. Woland was in the bedroom, as usual, and the tom's whereabouts are unknown. However, judging from the clattering of pots and pans in the kitchen, it might have been assumed that Behemoth was there, engaged in his customary antics.

"What are those steps on the staircase?" asked Koroviev, playing with his spoon in the cup of black coffee.

"Oh, they're coming to arrest us," answered Azazello and drank down a glass of cognac.

"Ah . . . well, well . . ." answered Koroviev.

In the meantime, the men who were climbing up the front staircase were already on the third floor landing. Two plumbers were busy there, repairing the steam radiator. The men and the plumbers exchanged knowing glances.

The man in front openly took a black Mauser from under his coat, and the one next to him prepared his passkeys. Generally, the group advancing on apartment Number 50 was properly equipped. Two of the men had fine, easily opened silk nets in their pockets. Another had a lasso, and still another, cheesecloth masks and ampules with chloroform.

The front door to apartment Number 50 was opened in a second, and all the visitors piled into the foyer. The door slammed in the kitchen at that moment indicated that the other group had also arrived.

This time they met, if not with a full, at least with a partial success. Men scattered instantly through all the rooms and found no one anywhere, but in the dining room they discovered the remnants of a breakfast that had obviously been hastily abandoned, and on the mantelpiece in the parlor, next to the crystal vase, they saw a huge black tom. He held a primus stove in his paws.

The visitors contemplated the tom in total silence for a long time.

"Mmm, yes . . . that's a good one . . ." whispered one of the men.

"I'm doing no mischief, I don't bother anyone, I'm repairing the primus," the tom said frigidly, with a scowl. "And I must warn you that a cat is an ancient and inviolable animal."

"Extraordinarily clean work," whispered one of the men, and another said loudly and clearly:

"Well, then, inviolable and ventriloquist tom, come over here!"

A net unfolded and flew up, but, to everyone's astonishment, it missed and caught only the vase, which fell crashing on the floor.

"Forfeit!" yelled the tom. "Hurrah!" And, putting aside the primus, he seized a Browning from behind his back. He aimed it instantly at the nearest man, but before the tom managed to fire, the gun in the man's hand flashed, and the tom tumbled head down on the floor, dropping the Browning and also bringing the primus after him.

"It's all over," the tom said in a weak voice and sprawled languidly in the puddle of blood. "Step aside for a moment, let me say good-by to the earth. Ah, my friend Azazello," the tom moaned, bleeding profusely, "where art thou? Thou hast not come to my aid in the unequal battle, thou hast abandoned poor Behemoth, exchanging him for a glass of cognac—very good cognac, it must be said! Oh, well, then, let my death be on thy conscience, I bequeath my Browning to thee. . . ."

"The net, the net. . ." the men around the tom whispered. But the net, for some unknown reason, had got caught in someone's pocket and refused to be extracted.

"The only thing that can save the mortally wounded tom," said the tom, "is a sip of benzine." And, taking advantage of the delay, he put his lips to the round opening in the primus stove and gulped down some benzine. Immediately the blood stopped gushing from his upper left paw. The tom sprang up, alive and merry, caught the primus under his arm, and leaped up to the mantel. Then, ripping the wallpaper, he clambered up the wall and two seconds later was sitting on the metal cornice over the window, high above the visitors.

Hands seized the drapes and tore them down together with the cornice. The sun flooded the dim room. But neither the shamming tom, nor the primus stove fell on the floor. Without letting the primus go, the tom managed to swing across the air and alight on the chandelier hanging in the center of the room.

"A stepladder!" someone cried below.

"I challenge you to a duell" bawled the tom, flying over the heads of the men on the swinging chandelier,

and now again he had a Browning in his paws, having found a spot for the primus in the branches of the chandelier. The tom took aim and opened fire, flying like a pendulum over the visitors. The blasts shook the apartment. Crystal splinters hailed on the floor, the mirror over the mantel blossomed with stars, plaster dust filled the air, empty cartridge cases bounced on the floor, the windowpanes cracked, a jet of benzine shot out of a bullet hole in the primus.

However, the skirmish was brief and the firing soon died down by itself. The point is that neither the tom, nor the visitors suffered any ill effects from it. No one was killed; in fact, no one was even wounded. Everyone was safe and sound. To make entirely sure, one of the visitors sent five bullets straight at the head of the damned animal, and the tom promptly emptied a whole cartridge clip in reply. But the same thing happened—the bullets produced no effect whatsoever. The tom swayed on the chandelier in constantly diminishing arcs, for some reason blowing into the muzzle of the Browning and spitting on his paw.

The faces of the men below expressed utter bafflement. This was the only, or one of the only, cases when bullets were entirely without effect. Of course, it might have been assumed that the tom's Browning was only a toy, but this certainly could not be said of the visitors' Mausers. As for the tom's first wound, it was entirely clear that it was nothing but a trick and shameless faking, as was his pretense at drinking benzine.

They made another attempt to capture the tom, using a lasso. But it caught one of the lamps, and the chandelier crashed down, shaking—it seemed—the whole building, and still without result. The men were showered with flying splinters, while the tom flew across the air and settled on top of the gilded frame of the mantel-piece mirror, right under the ceiling. He showed no intention of escaping anywhere, but, sitting in relative safety, launched into another speech:

"I am totally at a loss to understand," he said from his perch, "the reasons why I am being treated so rudely. . . ."

At this point, his speech was interrupted by a heavy low voice coming from heaven knows where:

"What's going on in this house? They don't let me work. . . ."

Another voice, nasal and unpleasant, answered:

"But, of course, it's Behemoth, the devil take him!"

A third, quavering voice said:

"Messire! It is the Sabbath. The sun is sinking. Time for us to go."

"Forgive me, I cannot talk to you any more," said the tom from the mirror. "It's time for us to go." He threw his Browning and shattered both panes in the window. Then he splashed the benzine, and it flared up by itself, sending up a wave of flame to the ceiling.

The blaze spread with unusual speed and violence, rare even with the use of benzine. The wallpaper immediately began to smoke, flames rose from the drapery on the floor, and the window frames began to smolder. The tom poised himself for a leap, miaowed, swung from the mirror to the window sill and vanished together with his primus. Shots were heard outside. A man sitting on the iron fire escape on the level of the apartment windows sprayed the tom with bullets as he flew from window sill to window sill toward the drainpipe at the corner of the building, then clambered up the pipe to the roof. There he was fired on—unfortunately, equally without effect—by the guards stationed at the chimneys, and disappeared in the light of the setting sun which was flooding the city at that hour.

Meantime, the floor of the apartment caught fire under the feet of the visitors, and in the flames, on the very spot where the tom had sprawled with his sham wound, there gradually materialized the corpse of the former Baron Meigel with upturned chin and glassy eyes. It was no longer possible to pull him out.

Hopping over the burning parquet squares and slapping

their smoking shoulders and chests, the visitors backed out from the parlor into the study and the foyer. Those in the dining room and bedroom ran out through the hallway. Others came rushing from the kitchen into the foyer. The parlor was already filled with smoke and flames. Someone managed to get the number of the fire department and shout into the receiver:

"Sadovaya, 302-b. . ."

It was impossible to delay any longer. The fire swept out into the foyer. It was becoming difficult to breathe.

As soon as the first wisps of smoke appeared from the broken windows of the bewitched apartment, desperate cries arose in the yard:

"Fire! Fire! We're burning!"

In various apartments people began to shout into telephones:

"Sadovaya! Sadovaya, 302-b!"

As the heart-chilling clanging of the long red engines roaring in from every part of the city converged on Sadovaya, the people rushing about in the yard saw three dark, apparently masculine, silhouettes and one silhouette of a naked woman fly out of the fifth-floor windows amid the blasts of smoke.

Chapter 28

THE LAST ADVENTURES OF KOROVIEV AND BEHEMOTH

Of course, we cannot say with certainty whether the silhouettes were really there or were merely imagined by the panic-stricken residents of the ill-starred house on Sadovaya. If they were really there, their immediate destination also remains unknown. Nor can we say where they separated, but we do know that approximately fifteen minutes later Behemoth and Koroviev were already on the boulevard sidewalk just outside the house once owned by Griboyedov's aunt. Koroviev stopped by the railing and said:

"Ah! But this is the writers' house! You know, Behemoth, I have heard a great many favorable comments on this house. Look at it, my friend. It is a pleasant thought that a veritable horde of talents is sheltered and nurtured to maturity under this roof."

"Like pineapples in a greenhouse," said Behemoth, climbing up the concrete base of the cast-iron railing for a better view of the cream-colored building.

"Perfectly true," Koroviev agreed with his inseparable companion. "And a sweet chill numbs your heart to think that a future author of a *Don Quixote* or a *Faust*, or, the devil take me, a *Dead Souls* may be ripening here, right before your eyes! Eh?"

"A horrible thought," Behemoth agreed.

"Yes," Koroviev went on. "Marvelous things can be expected from the hotbeds of this house, which has gathered under its roof thousands of votaries who have

selflessly dedicated their lives to the service of Melpomene, Polyhymnia, and Thalia. Can you imagine the furore when one of them will, as a starter, present the reading public with an *Inspector General* or, if worst comes to worst, a *Yevgeny Onegin*?"

"By the way," inquired Behemoth, pushing his round head through a hole in the railing, "what are they doing on the veranda?"

"They're dining," explained Koroviev. "I shall add, my dear, that there is quite a decent and inexpensive restaurant here. And, like every tourist, I languish for a bite of food and a large mug of ice-cold beer before continuing our journey."

"Me too," said Behemoth, and the two rogues marched up the asphalt path under the lindens straight to the veranda of the unsuspecting restaurant.

A pale, bored woman in white socks and a white beret with a tassel sat on a Viennese chair in the corner near the entrance to the veranda, where an opening had been left in the trellis to admit the guests. On a plain kitchen table before her was a thick ledger of the kind used in offices in which, for some unknown reason, she entered the names of all who entered the restaurant. The woman stopped Koroviev and Behemoth.

"Your identification cards?" she demanded, looking suspiciously at Koroviev's pince-nez and Behemoth's primus stove, as well as Behemoth's torn elbow.

"A thousand pardons, what cards?" asked Koroviev with astonishment.

"Are you writers?" the woman asked in turn.

"Most assuredly," Koroviev answered with dignity.

"Your cards?" the woman repeated.

"My sweet. . ." Koroviev began tenderly.

"I am not sweet," she interrupted him.

"Oh, what a pity," Koroviev said with disappointment and continued: "Well, if you do not choose to be sweet, which would have been most pleasant, you do not have to. Well, then, in order to convince yourself that Dostoevsky is a writer, must you ask to see his identification

card? Why, take any five pages from any of his novels and you will see without any cards that you are dealing with a writer. Besides, I imagine he never had any card anyway! What do you think?" Koroviev turned to Behemoth.

"I'd bet he had none," Behemoth answered, placing the primus on the table next to the ledger and wiping the sweat from his sooty brow with his hand.

"You are not Dostoevsky," said the woman, somewhat rattled by Koroviev's logic.

"You never can tell, you never can tell," he answered.

"Dostoevsky is dead," the woman said, a bit uncertainly.

"I protest!" Behemoth exclaimed with heat. "Dostoevsky is immortal!"

"Your cards, citizens," said the woman.

"But this is ridiculous, after all!" Koroviev would not submit. "A writer must be judged by what he writes, not by any cards. How do you know what ideas and plots teem in my brain? Or in this brain?" and he pointed at Behemoth's head, from which the latter immediately removed the cap, as if to let the woman have a better look at it.

"Step aside, citizens," she said, becoming nervous.

Koroviev and Behemoth stepped aside to make way for a writer in a gray suit and a white tieless shirt with a wide, open collar resting over the collar of the jacket, and with a newspaper under his arm. The writer gave the woman a friendly nod, dashed off a flourish in the book as he walked by, and went on to the veranda.

"Alas, it's not for us, it's not for us," Koroviev spoke sadly. "He is the one who'll get the icy mug of beer that we, poor wanderers, were dreaming of. Our position is melancholy and difficult, and I don't know what to do."

Behemoth bitterly spread his arms and put the cap back on his round head, covered with thick hair that bore a striking resemblance to cat's fur.

At that moment a low but imperious voice sounded over the woman's head:

"Let them in, Sofya Pavlovna."

The woman with the ledger looked up in wonder. Amid the greenery of the trellis appeared the white dress shirt and wedge-shaped beard of the buccaneer. He looked at the ragged pair with an affable smile and even gestured to them to come in. The authority of Archibald Archibaldovich was a thing not to be questioned in the restaurant he managed, and Sofya Pavlovna obediently asked Koroviev:

"Your name?"

"Panayev," he answered civilly. The woman wrote the name down and raised a questioning glance at Behemoth.

"Skabichevsky," he squealed, for some reason pointing at his primus. Sofya Pavlovna wrote it down, and moved her ledger over to the visitors for signature. Koroviev wrote "Skabichevsky" opposite "Panayev," and Behemoth wrote "Panayev" opposite "Skabichevsky."

With a ravishing smile, which utterly bewildered Sofya Pavlovna, Archibald Archibaldovich escorted the guests to the best table at the opposite end of the veranda, where the shade was densest and the sun played gaily in an opening cut in the green trellis. Blinking with astonishment, Sofya Pavlovna stared for a long time at the strange signatures of the unexpected visitors in her ledger.

The waiters were no less amazed at Archibald Archibaldovich's conduct than was Sofya Pavlovna. He personally moved the chair away from his table, inviting Koroviev to sit down. Then he winked to one waiter, whispered something to another, and the two busied themselves with the new guests, one of whom set his primus down on the floor next to his rusty old shoe.

The old tablecloth with yellow stains immediately disappeared from the table, and a new one, whiter than a Bedouin's burnoose, flew up in the air, rustling with starch. And Archibald Archibaldovich was already whispering softly, but very expressively, into Koroviev's ear:

"What may I serve you? I have some very special sturgeon. . . Saved it from the architects' convention . . ."

"You . . . uhm . . . just give us a snack . . . uhm . . ."

Koroviev mumbled benevolently, sprawling in his chair.

"I understand," Archibald Archibaldovich answered significantly, closing his eyes.

Seeing their chief's treatment of the rather dubious visitors, the waiters abandoned their suspicions and went to work in earnest. One was offering a match to Behemoth, who had taken a butt from his pocket and stuck it into his mouth; another came flying with a clinking tray and began to set the table with an assortment of cool green wine and liqueur glasses and those thin goblets from which it is so pleasant to sip Narzan under the awning . . . no, let us anticipate the future and say: was so pleasant to sip Narzan under the awning of the unforgettable Griboyedov veranda.

"Fillet of grouse, perhaps?" Archibald Archibaldovich purred musically. The guest in the cracked pince-nez fully approved of the suggestion of the brig commander and looked at him graciously through the useless lens.

With a writer's observing eye, the novelist Petrakov-Sukhovey, sitting at the next table with his wife who was just finishing her scalloped pork, noticed the attentions lavished by Archibald Archibaldovich on his strange guests and was extremely astonished. And his wife, a most dignified lady, simply became jealous of Koroviev and even tapped her spoon on the table, as if to say: why are we being neglected? . . . It's time for our ice cream. What's the matter? . . .

However, sending Petrakova a beguiling smile, Archibald Archibaldovich dispatched a waiter to look after her, but did not abandon his dear guests. Ah, but he was clever, Archibald Archibaldovich! And certainly no less observant than the writers themselves! Archibald Archibaldovich knew about the performance at the Variety Theater and about many other events that had transpired during those days. He had heard, but, unlike others, had not allowed the words "checkered" and "tom" to slip past his ears. He guessed immediately who his visitors were. And, having guessed, he naturally did not wish to quarrel with them. But that Sofya Pavlovna was a fine

one! Imagine—to bar the pair from the veranda! But what can you expect of her! . . .

Haughtily poking her spoon in the melting ice cream, Petrakova looked on with a sour expression as the table before the two oddly dressed mountebanks was sprouting delicacies as by magic. Salad greens, washed till they shone, were already gleaming around the bowl of fresh roe. . . a moment, and a chilled, sweating silver bucket appeared on a separate table pulled over especially for the guests. . . .

Only after making sure that everything had been done to perfection, only after a covered pan with something gurgling in it had come flying in the waiter's hands, did Archibald Archibaldovich permit himself to leave the two mysterious guests. And even then, he whispered first:

"Excuse me! Just a moment! I want to look after the fillets myself!"

He hurried away from the table and disappeared in the passage leading to the interior of the restaurant. If an observer were able to follow the subsequent movements of Archibald Archibaldovich, they would undoubtedly strike him as somewhat puzzling.

Instead of going to the kitchen to watch over the fillets, the chief went to the restaurant pantry. He opened it with his own key, locked the door and, careful not to soil his cuffs, took from the ice chest two heavy rolls of sturgeon, packed them in newspapers, tied them neatly with a string, and put them aside. Then he checked in the next room to see whether his hat and silk-lined spring coat were in place, and only then proceeded to the kitchen, where the cook was diligently preparing the fillets promised the guests by the buccaneer.

It must be said that there was nothing in the least bit strange or incomprehensible in Archibald Archibaldovich's actions, and that they could have seemed strange only to a superficial observer. These actions followed quite logically from everything that had gone before. Knowledge of recent events and, most of all, his phenomenal instinct, told the chief of the Griboyedov Res-

restaurant that, though the dinner of his two visitors would be lavish and extravagant, it would be extremely short. And his instinct, which never deceived the former buccaneer, did not mislead him this time either.

While Koroviev and Behemoth clinked their second glasses of excellent cold double-distilled Moscow vodka, three men with tightly belted waists, in leggings, and with revolvers in hand, rapidly walked out on the veranda from the interior of the restaurant. The first cried in a terrifying, ringing voice:

"Don't move!" And at once the three opened fire on the veranda, aiming at Behemoth's and Koroviev's heads. The targets immediately dissolved in the air, and a column of flame rose from the primus to the awning. A gaping black-rimmed maw appeared in the awning and began to spread in all directions. Leaping through it, the fire rose to the very roof of the Griboyedov House. The folders with papers lying on the second floor windows in the editorial room suddenly flared. Then the fire caught the drapery and booming, as though someone were fanning it, swept in columns toward the interior of the aunt's house.

A few seconds later, writers who had not finished their dinners, Sofya Pavlovna, Petrakov and Petrakova were running down the asphalt paths to the wrought-iron railing and the boulevard whence the first harbinger of misfortune, Ivanushka, had come on Wednesday with warnings understood by no one.

Archibald Archibaldovich, who had come out through a side entrance beforehand, stood without running or hurrying anywhere, like a captain who must be the last to abandon his burning brig. He stood calmly in his silk-lined spring coat, with two logs of sturgeon under his arms.

Chapter 29

THE FATE OF THE MASTER AND MARGARITA IS DECIDED

At sunset, two figures sat high above the city on the stone terrace of one of the most beautiful buildings in Moscow, erected about one hundred and fifty years ago. Those two were Woland and Azazello. They could not be seen from below, from the street, since they were shielded from unnecessary glances by a balustrade with plaster vases and plaster flowers. But they could see the city almost to its very boundaries.

Woland sat on a folding chair, dressed in his black soutane. His long, wide sword stood vertically in a crevice between two cracked tiles on the terrace floor, forming a sun clock. The shadow of the sword lengthened slowly and inexorably, creeping up to the black slippers on Satan's feet. Resting his sharp chin on his fist, doubled up on the stool, with one leg folded under him, Woland stared at the endless multitude of palaces, huge buildings and small hovels doomed to the wrecker's hammer.

Azazello, divested of his modern attire—coat, derby and patent shoes—and dressed in black like Woland, stood motionless not far from his master, his eyes also fixed on the city.

Then something made Woland turn his attention to the circular turret behind him on the roof. From its wall stepped out a ragged, mud-stained, gloomy man in a chiton and homemade sandals, with a black beard.

"Hal" exclaimed Woland, looking mockingly at the newcomer. "You are the last one I would expect here! What brings you, uninvited guest?"

"I am here to see you, spirit of evil and ruler of shadows," answered the visitor with a sullen look under his brow.

"If you have come to me, why don't you wish me a good evening, former tax collector?" Woland asked sternly.

"Because I do not wish you a good evening," the newcomer answered insolently.

"Nevertheless, you will have to bear with it," said Woland and a dry smile twisted his lips. "No sooner do you appear on the roof than you put your foot in it. And I'll tell you just what it is—it is your tone. You spoke the words as though you did not recognize the existence of either shadows or evil. But would you be kind enough to give some thought to this: what would your good be doing if there were no evil, and what would the earth look like if shadows disappeared from it? After all, shadows are cast by objects and people. There is the shadow of my sword. But there are also shadows of trees and living creatures. Would you like to denude the earth of all the trees and all the living beings in order to satisfy your fantasy of rejoicing in the naked light? You are a fool."

"I will not dispute with you, old sophist," answered Matthu Levi.

"You cannot dispute with me, for the reason which I have just mentioned: you are a fool," replied Woland, and asked: "Now tell me, but briefly, without wearying me, why you have come."

"He sent me."

"What did he bid you tell me, slave?"

"I am not a slave," Matthu Levi answered with growing rage, "I am his disciple."

"We speak different languages, as usual," responded Woland, "but this does not change the things we speak about. Well? . . ."

"He read the Master's work," said Matthu Levi, "and he asks you to take the Master with you and reward him with peace. Is that so difficult for you, spirit of evil?"

"Nothing is difficult for me," answered Woland, "and you know it very well." He was silent a while, and added: "And why don't you take him with you, into the light?"

"He has not earned light, he earned peace," Levi answered sadly.

"Tell him it will be done," said Woland and added, his eye flashing, "And leave me at once."

"He asks you also to take along the one who loved him and suffered because of him," Levi spoke to Woland for the first time in pleading tones.

"We'd never think of it without you. Begone."

Matthu Levi disappeared, and Woland called Azazello and commanded:

"Fly over to them and arrange everything."

Azazello left the terrace, and Woland remained alone.

But his solitude did not last. He heard the sound of steps on the terrace floor and animated voices, then Behemoth and Koroviev stood before him. But now the roly-poly did not have his primus; he was loaded with other objects. Under his arm he carried a small landscape in a gold frame, thrown over one arm was a half-burnt cook's smock, and in his other hand he had a whole salmon, complete with skin and tail. Koroviev and Behemoth reeked of smoke, Behemoth's face was sooty, and his cap badly singed.

"Salute, Messire!" cried the irrepressible pair, and Behemoth waved the salmon.

"A fine pair," said Woland.

"In any case, we've come, Messire," reported Koroviev, "and we are waiting for your orders."

Woland rose from his stool, went to the balustrade, and for a long time gazed into the distance silently, alone, with his back to his suite. Then he left the edge of the roof, returned to his seat, and said:

"There are no more orders now. You have done all you could, and I no longer require your services, for the time being. You may rest. A storm will break soon, and we shall be on our way."

"Very well, Messire," the two buffoons answered and

disappeared behind the circular turret in the middle of the terrace.

The storm Woland spoke of was already gathering on the horizon. A black cloud rose in the west and cut off half the sun. Then it covered the entire sun. The air grew chilly on the terrace. A little later it turned dark.

Chapter 30

TIME! TIME!

"You know," said Margarita, "when you fell asleep last night I read about the darkness which had come from the Mediterranean . . . and those idols, ah, those golden idols! For some reason they haunt me all the time. It seems to me that it will rain now too. Do you feel the air getting chilly?"

"All this is fine and charming," said the Master, smoking and breaking up the smoke with his hand, "As for those idols—forget them . . . But I cannot imagine what will happen next!"

This conversation took place at sunset, just at the time when Matthu Levi appeared before Woland on the terrace. The basement window was open, and if anyone looked in, he would have been astonished at the strange appearance of the man and the woman conversing within. Margarita wore a black cloak over her naked body, and the Master was in his hospital clothes. This was because Margarita had nothing to put on, since all her things remained in her house, and though it was not far, there was, of course, no question of her going there to take her clothes. And the Master, whose suits were all in the closet as though he had never left, simply had no wish to dress; he was too busy developing to Margarita his idea that something utterly preposterous was about to happen any moment. He was, however, clean-shaven now, for the first time since that autumn night (at the hospital his beard had been trimmed with a barber's clippers).

The room also looked strange, and it was difficult to

make anything out in the chaos. Manuscripts were scattered on the rug and sofa. A book lay humped, with its back up, on the armchair. And the round table was set for dinner, with several bottles of wine among the plates. Where all these delicacies and wines had come from was a mystery both to Margarita and the Master. When they awakened, they found everything already on the table.

Having slept until sunset on Saturday, the Master and his beloved felt entirely restored, and only one thing reminded them of the previous night's adventures: each had a slight ache in the left temple. As for their psyche, it had undergone great changes, as anyone who took the trouble to listen in to the conversation in the basement would have found. But there was no one to listen in. The best thing about the little yard was that it was always empty. The lindens and the willow outside, turning more luxuriantly green from day to day, gave off the fragrance of spring, and the rising breeze brought it into the basement.

"What the devil!" the Master exclaimed suddenly. "Why, just to think of it. . ." He stamped out his cigarette in the ash tray and pressed his head with his hands. "No, listen, you are an intelligent woman, and you were not mad. . . . Are you quite certain that we visited Satan the other night?"

"Quite," answered Margarita.

"Of course, of course," the Master said ironically. "Now there are two lunatics instead of one—the husband and the wife!" He raised his hands to heaven and cried: "No, no, the devil alone can tell what it is all about! The devil, the devil. . ."

Margarita brought her lips to the Master's ear and whispered:

"I swear to you by your life, I swear by the son of the astrologer whom you have divined so well that everything will be fine!"

At this moment a nasal voice drawled at the window: "Peace to you."

The Master started, and Margarita, already accustomed to the extraordinary, exclaimed:

"It's Azazello! Ah, how lovely, how delightful!" She whispered to the Master, "You see, you see, we're not being abandoned," and rushed to open the door.

"Close your robe at least," the Master cried after her.

"Who the hell cares," answered Margarita from the foyer.

And now Azazello was bowing and greeting the Master, flashing his one eye, while Margarita cried:

"Ah, how glad I am! I've never been so glad in my whole life!"

Margarita poured Azazello a glass of cognac, and he drank it with pleasure. The Master stared at him and quietly pinched himself on the left wrist under the table from time to time. But the pinches did not change anything. Azazello did not dissolve in the air and, to tell the truth, there was no need for it. There was nothing frightening in the short, reddish man, except perhaps the cataract in his eye. But cataracts happened without sorcery as well. The only strange thing was, perhaps, his garb—a kind of cassock or cloak. But even that, if you thought of it, was not so extraordinary either. As for the cognac, he drank it like an expert, like all red-blooded men, by the glass and without a chaser. The Master's head swam from the cognac, and he began to think:

"No, Margarita is right. . . . Of course, this is the devil's emissary before me. Why, only the night before I was trying to convince Ivan that it was Satan he had met at the Patriarchs' Ponds. And now I get cold feet at the idea and start babbling about hypnotists and hallucinations. . . . What kind of hypnotists are they, the devil take it! . . ."

He looked at Azazello closely and detected some constraint in the expression of his eyes, some idea, perhaps, that he was keeping back for the time being. "He has not come simply to visit us. He is here on some assignment," the Master thought.

"Why do you trouble me, Azazello?" asked Margarita.

"Why no, no!" cried Azazello. "I wouldn't dream of troubling you. But I've almost forgotten . . . Messire sent you his greetings and asked me to convey to you his invitation to take a short trip with him—if you wish to, of course. What would you say to that?"

Margarita nudged the Master's foot with hers under the table.

"With great pleasure," answered the Master, studying Azazello, who went on:

"We hope that Margarita Nikolayevna will not refuse the invitation either?"

"I certainly shall not," said Margarita, and her foot slid over the Master's foot again.

"Excellent," cried Azazello. "That's what I like! One, two, and ready! Not like that first time, in the Alexandrovsky Garden!"

"Ah, don't remind me, Azazello, I was foolish then. But, then, you cannot blame me too severely—it isn't every day that one runs into unholy powers!"

"I'll say it isn't," Azazello agreed. "Would be a fine thing if it were every day!"

"I like speed myself," said Margarita excitedly, "I like speed and nakedness. . . . Like a shot from a Mauser—boom! Ah, how he shoots!" cried Margarita, turning to the Master. "A seven under a pillow—and any spot! . . ." Margarita was becoming drunk, which made her eyes blaze.

"Again I've forgotten," exclaimed Azazello, slapping himself on the forehead. "With all the business to attend to! Messire sent you a present," he addressed the Master, "a bottle of wine. I beg you to note, it is the same wine that the Procurator of Judea was drinking. Falernian."

Naturally, such a rare gift excited both the Master and Margarita. Azazello drew a completely mildewed jug from a dark piece of ancient burial brocade. They smelled the wine, then poured it into glasses and looked through it at the light in the window, which was swiftly disappearing before the storm.

"Woland's health!" cried Margarita, raising her glass.

All three put their lips to the glasses and took a long sip. What was left of the light immediately began to go out in the Master's eyes, his breath was stopped, he felt his end was coming. He saw Margarita, deathly pale, helplessly stretching her arms to him, dropping her head on the table and slipping down to the floor.

"Poisoner . . ." the Master still had time to cry out. He wanted to seize a knife from the table and strike Azazello, but his strengthless hand slid off the tablecloth, everything around the Master turned black, then vanished altogether. He fell backward and struck the corner of the bureau with his head, cutting his temple.

When the poisoned pair was still, Azazello began to act. To begin with, he rushed out of the window and a few seconds later was in the house where Margarita Nikolayevna had lived. Always prompt and thorough, Azazello wanted to make sure that everything had been done properly. Everything turned out to be perfectly in order. Azazello saw the gloomy woman who was awaiting the return of her husband come out of her bedroom, grow pale, clutch at her heart, and cry out helplessly:

"Natasha . . . someone . . . here. . ."

Then she fell on the floor in the living room without reaching the study.

"Everything is as it should be," said Azazello. A moment later he was with the fallen lovers. Margarita lay with her face in the rug. With his iron hands, Azazello turned her like a doll with her face toward him and stared at her. As he looked, the face of the poisoned woman was changing. Even in the gathering dusk of the coming storm Azazello could see the gradual disappearance of the witch's cast in her eye and the transient cruelty and wildness of her features. The dead woman's face brightened and softened, and her grin was no longer predatory, but simply a woman's suffering smile. Then Azazello forced open her clenched white teeth and poured into her mouth a few drops of the wine with which he had poisoned her. Margarita sighed and began to rise without Azazello's help. She sat up and asked weakly:

"Why, Azazello, why? What have you done to me?"

She saw the prostrate Master, and whispered with a shudder:

"This I did not expect . . . murderer!"

"Why, no, no," answered Azazello. "He will get up in a moment. Ah, why are you so nervous!"

Margarita believed him at once, so convincing was the voice of the red demon. She sprang up, strong and alive, and helped Azazello to give more wine to the man stretched on the floor. Opening his eyes, the Master glanced up darkly and repeated his last word with hatred:

"Poisoner. . ."

"Ah, an insult is the usual reward for good work!" answered Azazello. "Are you blind? Then recover your sight, but quickly!"

The Master raised himself, looked around with eyes that were alive and clear, and asked:

"But what is the meaning of this new state?"

"It means," replied Azazello, "that it is time for us to start. The storm is thundering already, do you hear? It is growing dark. The horses paw the earth, the little garden shivers. Say your farewells, hurry, hurry."

"Ah, I understand. . ." said the Master, looking about him, "you killed us, we are dead. Now I understand everything."

"Please," said Azazello, "is it you I hear? Your beloved calls you Master, you think, how then can you be dead? Ridiculous! . . ."

"I understand everything you say," cried the Master. "Don't go on! You are a thousand times right!"

"Great Woland!" Margarita echoed him. "Great Woland! His solution is so much better than anything I could have thought of! But the novel, the novel," she cried to the Master. "Take the novel with you, wherever you might go!"

"There is no need," the Master answered. "I remember it by heart."

"But you won't . . . you won't forget a single word?" asked Margarita, pressing herself to her lover and wiping the blood from his temple.

"Don't worry. I shall never forget anything again," he answered.

"And now, fire!" cried Azazello. "Fire, from which everything began and with which we end everything."

"Fire!" Margarita cried in a terrifying voice. The basement window slammed, the wind blew away the blind. A short, gay thunderclap came from the sky. Azazello put his claws into the stove, pulled out a smoking log and set fire to the tablecloth. Then he set fire to a bundle of old newspapers on the sofa, the manuscript, and the curtain over the window.

The Master, already intoxicated by the coming ride, threw a book from the shelf on the table, ruffled its pages on the burning tablecloth, and the book flared up gaily.

The room was rocking with crimson columns. The three ran out through the door together with the smoke, ascended the stone stairway and found themselves in the yard. The first thing they saw was the builder's cook sitting on the ground, surrounded by scattered potatoes and several bunches of scallions. The cook's condition was understandable. Three black horses snorted by the shed, quivered and pawed the ground, sending up fountains of earth. Margarita mounted first, then Azazello, and last, the Master. The cook moaned and wanted to raise her hand to make the sign of the cross, but Azazello cried sternly from the saddle:

"I'll cut your hand off!" He gave a whistle, and, crashing through the branches of the lindens, the horses rose and plunged into the low black cloud. Smoke immediately began to pour out of the basement window. From below came the weak, pathetic cry of the cook:

"Fire. . ."

The horses were already speeding above the roofs of Moscow.

"I want to say good-by to the city," the Master cried to Azazello, who was riding first. The thunder swallowed the end of the Master's sentence. Azazello nodded and set his horse at a gallop. The cloud rushed to meet the riders, but it was not yet spraying any rain.

They flew over the boulevard and saw tiny figures of

people running to hide from the rain. The first drops were beginning to fall. They flew over a smoking pile—all that remained of the Griboyedov House. They flew over the city, which was being flooded by darkness. Lightning flashed over them. The roofs below gave way to greenery. And it was only then that the downpour began and turned the flying figures into three huge bubbles in the streaming water.

Margarita was familiar with the sensation of flight, but the Master, who was not, wondered to find how quickly they had reached their destination—the only man to whom he wanted to bid good-by, for he was leaving no one else behind. Through the curtain of rain, he recognized at once Stravinsky's hospital, the river, and the wood across the river which he had come to know so well. They came down in a clearing in the wood, not far from the hospital.

"I shall wait for you here," shouted Azazello through folded hands, now lit up by the lighting flashes, now disappearing in the gray curtain of water. "Say your good-bys, but quickly!"

The Master and Margarita leaped down from their saddles and flew across the hospital garden, flickering like watery shadows. A moment later, with a practiced movement, the Master pushed aside the balcony grating of room 117. Margarita followed him. They entered Ivanushka's room invisible and unnoticed, while the storm was crashing and howling. The Master stopped by the bed.

Ivanushka lay motionless, as he had the first time, watching the storm in his house of rest. But he was not crying, as he had then. He took a close look at the dark silhouette that had burst in from the balcony, raised himself a little, stretched his arms and said happily:

"Ah, it is you! I have waited and waited for you! And now you're here, my neighbor!"

The Master answered him:

"I am here, but unfortunately I can no longer be your neighbor. I am flying away forever, and I have come to you only to say good-by."

"I knew it, I guessed it," Ivan said quietly, and asked: "You met him?"

"Yes," said the Master. "I have come to say good-by to you, because you are the only man to whom I have spoken lately."

Ivanushka brightened and said:

"How good it is that you have come here. I will keep my word, you know, I will write no more poems. Something else interests me now." Ivanushka smiled and looked with demented eyes somewhere past the Master. "I want to write something else."

The Master became agitated and began to speak, sitting down on the edge of Ivan's bed:

"That's good, that's good. Write the continuation about him."

Ivanushka's eyes lit up.

"But won't you do it yourself?" He bowed his head and added pensively: "Of course . . . what am I asking." Ivanushka threw a sidelong look at the floor, a frightened look.

"Yes," said the Master, and his voice seemed unfamiliar and muffled to Ivanushka, "I shall not write about him any longer. I shall be busy with other things."

A distant whistle cut through the noise of the storm.

"Do you hear it?" asked the Master.

"The storm. . ."

"No, I am being called, it's time for me to go," explained the Master and rose from the bed.

"Wait! One more word," begged Ivan. "Did you find her? Was she true to you?"

"Here she is," answered the Master and pointed at the wall. A dark Margarita stepped out of the white wall and approached the bed. She looked at the youth, and there was sorrow in her eyes.

"Poor dear, poor dear . . ." Margarita whispered soundlessly, bending over the bed.

The youth encircled her neck with his arms, and she kissed him.

"Farewell, my disciple," the Master said just audibly

and began to dissolve in the air. He vanished, and with him, Margarita. The balcony grating slid back.

Ivanushka became restless. He sat up in bed, looked around him anxiously and even moaned. He rose and spoke to himself. The storm was raging with increasing violence and evidently alarmed him. He was also disturbed because his ear, already accustomed to constant quiet, caught the sound of hasty steps and muffled voices behind the door. He called out, nervous and shivering:

"Praskovya Fyodorovna!"

Praskovya Fyodorovna was already coming into the room, looking at Ivanushka with anxious inquiry.

"What? What is it?" she asked. "The storm disturbs you? It's all right, it's all right . . . we'll help you right away . . . I'll call the doctor. . ."

"No, Praskovya Fyodorovna, don't call the doctor," said Ivanushka with a troubled glance, not at her, but at the wall. "There is nothing wrong with me. I understand things now, don't worry. But tell me," Ivan asked quietly, "what has happened there, in room 118?"

"Eighteen?" Praskovya Fyodorovna repeated, and her eyes became restless. "Nothing happened there." But her voice was false. Ivanushka noticed it at once and said:

"Ah, Praskovya Fyodorovna! You are such an honest person. . . . You think I'll turn violent? No, Praskovya Fyodorovna, that won't happen. You had better tell me straight, I feel everything through the wall anyway."

"Your neighbor has just died," whispered Praskovya Fyodorovna, unable to violate her truthfulness and goodness, and threw a frightened look at Ivanushka as she stood clad in the brightness of a lightning flash. But nothing terrible happened to Ivanushka. He merely raised his finger significantly and said:

"I knew it! I can tell you, Praskovya Fyodorovna, that another person has just died in the city. I even know who," Ivan smiled mysteriously. "A woman!"

Chapter 31

ON THE VOROBIEV HILLS

The storm was swept away without a trace, and a multicolored rainbow arched over Moscow, drinking water from the Moskva River. High on a hill between two copses loomed three dark silhouettes. Woland, Koroviev and Behemoth sat in the saddles on black horses, gazing at the city spread beyond the river, with the fragmented sun glittering in a thousand windows looking west, toward the gingerbread towers of the Devichy Convent.

There was a noise in the air, and Azazello, with the Master and Margarita flying in the black tail of his cloak, descended near the waiting group.

"We had to trouble you, Margarita Nikolayevna and Master," said Woland after a silence. "But don't resent me for it. I do not think you will regret it. Well," he turned to the Master, "say good-by to the city. It's time for us," Woland pointed with his hand in the black gauntlet to where innumerable suns were melting the glass across the river under the pall of mist, smoke, and steam hanging over the city, scorched to white heat during the day.

The Master leaped out of the saddle, left the group and ran to the sheer edge of the hill. The black cloak trailed on the ground after him. The Master turned his eyes to the city. At first his heart contracted with an aching sadness, but soon this gave way to sweet disquiet, a Gypsy's wandering unrest.

"Forever! . . . This must be grasped," the Master whispered and licked his dry, cracked lips. He listened

within and took careful note of everything transpiring in his soul. It seemed to him that his excitement turned to a sense of profound and mortal wrong. But this feeling did not last, it vanished and gave way for some strange reason to a proud indifference, which in turn was replaced by premonitions of eternal peace.

The group of riders waited for the Master silently. The riders watched the long black figure on the edge of the hill gesticulating, now raising his head as though striving to encompass the whole city with his eyes, to see beyond its boundaries, now bowing his head on his chest, as if studying the trampled yellow grass underfoot.

Then the Master clutched his head and strode back to his waiting companions.

"Well," Woland asked him from above, "your leave-taking is finished?"

"Yes, it is finished," the Master answered and, calm now, looked boldly and directly into Woland's face.

Then Woland's awful voice rolled like a trumpet over the hills:

"Time!"

Behemoth's sharp whistle and laughter echoed him.

The horses plunged forward, the riders rose and galloped in the air. Margarita felt her wild horse champing and pulling at the bit. Woland's cloak filled with wind and floated over the heads of the cavalcade, spreading over the darkening evening sky. When the black cloak was blown aside for an instant, Margarita looked back in mid-gallop. The multicolored towers were no longer there. The city itself had long disappeared. . . .

Chapter 32

FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL REFUGE

Gods, gods! How sad the evening earth! How mysterious the mists over the bogs! Whoever has wandered in these mists, whoever suffered deeply before death, whoever flew over this earth burdened beyond human strength knows it. The weary one knows it. And he leaves without regret the mists of the earth, its swamps and rivers, and yields himself with an easy heart to the hands of death, knowing that it alone can bring surcease.

Even the magical black horses tired and bore their riders slowly, and the inevitable night was catching up with them. Sensing it behind his back, even the irrepressible Behemoth grew quiet and flew, clutching the saddle with his claws, silent and serious, with his tail fluffed out.

Night began to cover forests and fields with its black shawl, night kindled melancholy little lights somewhere far below—alien lights, uninteresting now and unnecessary either to Margarita or the Master. Night overtook the cavalcade, spread itself above them and threw out here and there in the saddened sky white specks of stars.

Night grew more dense, flew side by side with the riders, catching their cloaks, pulling them off, uncovering deceptions. When Margarita, washed by the cool wind, opened her eyes, she saw the gradual change in the appearance of her companions, flying to their goal. And when the full scarlet moon began to rise over the rim of the wood to meet them, all deception vanished, and the fragile vestments of enchantment dropped into the swamp, and drowned in the mists.

It would be difficult now to recognize Koroviev-Fagot, the self-styled interpreter of the mysterious consultant who needed no interpreters, in him who was now flying directly beside Woland, on the right of the Master's beloved. In place of the one who had left the Vorobiev Hills in the torn garb of a circus clown under the name of Koroviev-Fagot, there galloped, clinking delicately with the golden chain of his reins, a purple knight with a somber, never-smiling face. His chin rested on his chest, he did not look at the moon and cared nothing for the earth, he was thinking his own thoughts as he flew at Woland's side.

The night had torn off Behemoth's fluffy tail, pulled off his pelt and scattered the pieces in the swamps. He who had been a tom cat, amusing the Prince of Darkness, now turned out to be a slender youth, a demon page, the best jester who had ever existed in the world. Quiet now, he flew without a sound, giving his young face to the light streaming from the moon.

At the end of the line flew Azazello, gleaming with the steel of his armor. The moon had altered his face as well. The absurd, revolting fang had disappeared without a trace, and his blindness turned out to have been false. Both of his eyes were the same, empty and black, and his face was white and cold. Now Azazello was flying in his true shape, the demon of the waterless desert, the killer-demon.

Margarita could not see herself, but she could see the change in the Master. His hair, gleaming white now in the moon, was gathered in the back into a queue, flying in the wind. When the wind blew the ends of the cloak away from the Master's feet, Margarita saw the glimmering little stars of the spurs on his jack boots. Like the demon youth, the Master flew with his eyes fixed on the moon, but he smiled to it as though he knew and loved it well, and muttered something to himself by force of habit acquired in room 118.

And finally, Woland himself was also flying in his true shape now. Margarita would have found it difficult to

say what his horse's reins were made of. She thought they might be chains of moonlight, and the horse itself might only be a hulk of darkness, his mane—a cloud, and the rider's spurs—white blurs of stars.

For a long time they flew in silence, until the land below them began to change as well. The melancholy forests drowned in the darkness of the earth, taking with them the dully glinting blades of rivers. Huge boulders began to flash below, with black gaps between them where the moonlight did not penetrate.

Woland reined in his horse on a flat, rocky, joyless mountaintop, and the riders moved at a slow pace, listening to their horses' hooves crushing stones and flints. The moon flooded the small plateau with bright green light, and Margarita soon discerned in the wasteland an armchair and the white figure of a man sitting in it. This man might have been deaf, or else he was too deeply sunk into his thoughts. He never heard the shuddering of the stony land under the weight of the horses, and the riders approached him without disturbing him.

The moon helped Margarita well, it was brighter than the best electric light, and Margarita saw that the sitting man, whose eyes seemed blind, rubbed his hands with short, quick movements and stared at the disk of the moon with his unseeing eyes. She saw now that next to the massive stone chair, glittering with strange sparks in the moonlight, there lay a dark, huge, sharp-eared dog, looking at the moon with the same troubled eyes as his master. At the feet of the sitting man lay scattered shards of a broken jug, and an undrying, red-black puddle spread before him.

The riders stopped their horses.

"Your novel was read," said Woland, turning to the Master. "And the only comment on it was that, unfortunately, it was not finished. And so, I wanted to show your hero to you. For nearly two thousand years he has sat, sleeping, on this mountaintop. But when the moon is full, he is tormented, as you see, with insomnia. And it torments not only him, but also his faithful guardian,

the dog. If it is true that cowardice is the greatest sin, the dog is not guilty of it. The only thing the brave dog feared was storm. But, then, those who love must share the fate of those they love."

"What is he saying?" asked Margarita, and her utterly calm face was darkened by a veil of compassion.

"He says," Woland answered, "the same words over and over again. He says that even in the moonlight he has no rest, and that he has a bad job. He says this always, when he is not sleeping, and when he sleeps he always sees the same thing: a path of moonlight. And he wants to climb it and talk to the prisoner Ha-Nozri because, he insists, he had not said all that he wanted to say at that time, long ago, on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. But for some reason, alas, he never succeeds in coming out on this road, and no one comes to him. And then he has no choice but to talk to himself. But, after all, there must be some variety, and in his speech to the moon he often adds that the things he hates most in the world are his immortality and fame. He says that he would gladly exchange lots with the ragged wanderer Matthu Levi."

"Twelve thousand moons for one moon long ago—is it not too much?" asked Margarita.

"Repeating the business with Frieda?" asked Woland. "But this time, Margarita, you need not trouble yourself. Everything will turn out right. That's what the world is built on."

"Let him go!" Margarita suddenly uttered a shrill cry, as she had cried once when she was a witch, and the cry made a stone roll from its place on a mountain slope and plunge down the cliffs into a deep abyss, filling the mountains with crashing thunder. But Margarita could not say whether this was the crashing of stone or the thunder of Satanic laughter. Whatever it might be, Woland laughed, glancing at Margarita and saying:

"You must not shout in the mountains. He is used to avalanches and will not be roused anyway. You need not ask for him, Margarita, for he with whom he longs

to speak has already asked for him." Woland turned once more to the Master and said: "Well, now you can finish your novel with a single phrase!"

The Master seemed to have waited for this as he stood motionless and looked at the sitting Procurator. He folded his hands at his mouth and shouted so that the echo leaped up and down the deserted, treeless cliffs:

"You are free! You are free! He waits for you!"

The mountains transformed the Master's voice into thunder, and this thunder destroyed the mountains. The accursed rocky walls collapsed, leaving only the mountaintop with the stone chair. Over the black abyss that swallowed the walls there gleamed a vast city crowned with glittering idols above a garden grown to wild luxuriance during thousands of moons. The moonlit path so long awaited by the Procurator stretched directly to this garden, and the first to run out on it was the sharp-eared dog. The man in the white cloak with the bloody lining rose from the chair and shouted something in a hoarse, broken voice. It was impossible to tell whether he was crying or laughing. All that could be seen was that he ran out onto the road after his faithful guardian.

"Am I to follow him there?" the Master asked anxiously, touching his reins.

"No," said Woland. "Why follow in the steps of that which is already finished?"

"That way, then?" asked the Master, turning and pointing back, to where the recently abandoned city with its gingerbread monastery towers and the sun splintered in a million panes had spun itself out of the air.

"Not that way, either," said Woland, and his voice thickened and flowed over the cliffs. "Romantic Master! He, whom the hero you have invented and just freed has longed to see, has read your novel." Woland turned to Margarita. "Margarita Nikolayevna! I am sure that you have tried to think of the best possible future for the Master. But, really, what I am offering you, and what was asked by Yeshua for you, is still better! Leave them to each other," said Woland, bending from his saddle to

the saddle of the Master and pointing at the departing Procurator. "Let's not disturb them. Perhaps they will come to some agreement, after all." Woland waved his arm at Yershalayim, and it disappeared.

"And that too," Woland pointed back. "What will you do in the basement?" The sun fragmented in the panes of glass went out. "What for?" continued Woland softly and persuasively. "Oh, thrice romantic Master, don't you want to stroll with your beloved by day under the cherries bursting into bloom, and in the evenings listen to Schubert's music? Won't it be pleasant for you to write with a quill by candlelight? Don't you want to sit, like Faust, over a retort, hoping to create a new homunculus? There, there is your way! Your house and old servant are already waiting for you. The candles burn and will soon go out, for you will now meet the dawn. This is the road, Master, this way! Farewell, it's time for me to go!"

"Farewell!" the Master and Margarita cried in unison. Then the black Woland, unmindful of any roads, plunged into the abyss and his suite crashed after him. There were no cliffs, no mountaintop, no moonlight path, no Yershalayim any longer. The black horses had vanished too. The Master and Margarita saw the promised dawn. It rose at once, immediately following the midnight moon. The Master walked with his beloved in the bright light of the first morning rays across a stony, moss-grown little bridge. They crossed it. The brook remained behind the faithful lovers, and now they walked along a sandy road.

"Listen to the soundlessness," Margarita said to the Master, and the sand rustled under her bare feet. "Listen and enjoy the stillness. Look, there, ahead, is the eternal home you were given as reward. I can already see the Venetian window and the vine climbing to the very roof. Here is your home, here is your home for eternity. You will fall asleep in your eternal, greasy nightcap, you will fall asleep with a smile on your lips. Sleep will strengthen you, and you will speak words of wisdom. And you will

never again be able to send me away. I shall guard your sleep."

So Margarita spoke, walking with the Master to their eternal home, and it seemed to the Master that Margarita's words flowed like the flowing, whispering stream they had left behind. . . .

EPILOGUE

But still, what happened in Moscow after that Saturday evening when Woland left the capital at sunset and vanished with his suite from the Vorobiev Hills?

It goes without saying that for a long time the capital hummed with wildly incredible rumors which rapidly spread to the most remote and out-of-the-way spots in the provinces. It would be too tedious to repeat all of these rumors.

The author of these truthful lines has himself heard in a train, during a journey to Feodosiya, a story of how two thousand persons had come out of a theater stark naked in the most literal sense of the word and gone home in taxis as they were.

Whispers about "unholy powers" were heard in queues before dairy stores, in streetcars, shops, homes, kitchens, trains, both suburban and long distance, in stations and junctions, summer resorts and beaches.

Naturally, the more educated and intelligent people had nothing to do with the tales of the evil one's visit to the capital; indeed, they laughed at them and tried to reason with the purveyors of such tales. Nevertheless, as the saying goes, a fact remains a fact, and will not be dismissed without some explanation. Someone had clearly paid the capital a visit. Not only the cinders which remained of Griboyedov's, but many other things attested to that all too eloquently.

People of culture and education sided with the viewpoint of the investigating commission: all that had happened was the work of a gang of master hypnotists and

ventriloquists. Immediate and energetic steps toward their capture were, of course, taken both in Moscow and outside it. But alack and alas, they bore no fruit. The one who had called himself Woland and his retinue vanished and never returned to Moscow. Nor did he appear or manifest his presence in any way elsewhere. Quite naturally, there arose a theory that he escaped abroad. However, he did not make himself known there either.

But his visit claimed many more victims, even after his departure from the capital. And those victims, sad as it is to report, were black tom cats.

About a hundred of these peaceful, devoted and useful beasts were shot or otherwise annihilated in various parts of the country. A dozen or so tom cats, sometimes badly maimed, were brought to militia precincts in various cities. For example, in Armavir one of these utterly innocent animals was brought by a citizen to the militia with his front paws tied.

The citizen had nabbed the tom at a moment when the beast was proceeding with a stealthy air (and what can you do if this is the manner natural to toms? It's not that they are criminal, but that they are afraid of stronger creatures—dogs or men—who might inflict some harm or wrong upon them. And this is easily done, but, I assure you, there is little honor to be claimed from such an act, yes, very little!), and so, the tom was, for some reason of his own, proceeding with a stealthy air into a clump of weeds.

Pouncing upon the tom and pulling off his tie to bind the animal, the citizen muttered venomously and threateningly:

"Ah-ah! So now you've come to Armavir, mister hypnotist? Well, you don't scare us! And don't pretend you're dumb! We know what sort of a bird you are!"

The citizen led the tom to the militia, dragging the poor beast by his front paws, bound with the green tie, and forcing him with gentle kicks to walk on his hind legs.

"You," scolded the citizen, accompanied by a gang of

whistling urchins, "quit, quit fooling! It won't get you anywhere! Be kind enough to walk like everybody else!"

The black tom merely rolled his eyes like a martyr. The poor beast is indebted for his rescue first to the militia, and second, to his mistress, a respectable aged widow. As soon as the tom was delivered to the precinct, the officers found that the citizen reeked most revoltingly of alcohol, which cast immediate doubt on his testimony. Meantime, the old woman, who had learned from neighbors that her tom had been arrested, rushed to the militia and just made it in the nick of time. She gave the tom the most flattering testimonial, explained that she had known him for five years, since his kittenhood, vouched for him as for her own self, and proved that he had never done any evil and had never been in Moscow. He had been born in Armavir, and it was there that he grew up and learned his honest trade of catching mice.

The tom was unbound and returned to his mistress—true, after having had a taste of trouble and learning from experience the meaning of error and slander.

In addition to the toms, there were also several humans who had suffered minor difficulties. Among those arrested for short periods were: the citizens Wolman and Wolper in Leningrad; three Wolodins—in Saratov, Kiev, and Kharkov; a Wolokh in Kazan; and in Penza—heaven alone knows why—the Candidate of Chemical Sciences, Vetchinkevich. True, he was a giant of a man, and a very dark brunet.

The militia had also rounded up in various places nine Korovins, four Korovkins, and two Karavayevs.

One citizen was taken off the Sevastopol train at the Belgorod station bound hand and foot. This citizen had tried to entertain his fellow-passengers with card tricks.

In Yaroslavl a citizen appeared in a restaurant at lunch time with a primus stove he had just picked up at the repair shop. At the first sight of him, the two attendants left their posts in the coatroom and fled, followed by all the diners and the staff. During the panic, the entire contents of the cash register had somehow disappeared.

There were many other incidents, but who can remember them all?

Again and again, due justice must be rendered the investigating commission. It had done everything possible not only to catch the criminals but also to explain everything they had done. And, indeed, everything was explained, and the explanations must be recognized as both sensible and irrefutable.

Spokesmen for the investigating commission and expert psychiatrists established that the members of the criminal gang or, perhaps, one of them (the suspicion fell chiefly on Koroviev), were hypnotists of extraordinary powers, capable of showing themselves, not where they actually were, but in illusory places elsewhere. Besides, they easily suggested to those they met that certain objects or persons were in places where they were not in reality; they were also able to remove from the field of vision things or people who were in fact within that field of vision.

In the light of these explanations absolutely everything becomes clear, even the seemingly inexplicable invulnerability of the tom under fire in apartment Number 50 which so upset the officers who sought to arrest him.

There had never been any tom on the chandelier, and no one had returned the fire. The men were shooting at an empty spot, while Koroviev, who made them believe that the tom was taunting them from the chandelier, might easily have been behind the firing men, clowning and gloating over his enormous, but criminally utilized powers of suggestion. And it was he, of course, who had poured out benzine and set fire to the apartment.

As for Styopa Likhodeyev, he had naturally never gone to Yalta (even Koroviev would have been powerless to pull such a stunt), and had never sent any telegrams from there. After he had fainted in the apartment of the former jeweler's wife, frightened by Koroviev's trick which made him see a tomcat with a pickled mushroom on a fork, he lay there until Koroviev, mocking him further, pulled a felt hat over his head and sent him to the Mos-

cow airfield. Meantime, he had hypnotized the officers of the criminal investigation department who had gone to meet Styopa, suggesting to them that he would disembark from a plane arriving from Sevastopol.

It is true that the Yalta criminal investigation office insisted that it had held the barefoot Styopa and sent telegrams about him to Moscow. However, no copies of these telegrams were found in any of the files, which led to the melancholy, but entirely irrefutable conclusion that the band of hypnotists could exercise its powers across vast distances, affecting not only individuals, but entire groups.

Under these circumstances, the criminals were able to drive people of the most stable psychic make-up out of their minds. As for such trifles as putting a pack of cards in the pocket of someone in the orchestra, or disappearing women's dresses, or a miaowing beret—why, tricks of that caliber are within the range of any professional hypnotist of average powers on any stage. And that goes for the simple stunt of tearing off the head of the master of ceremonies as well. The talking tom was also child's play. To show the public such a tom it was enough to command the first elements of the ventriloquist's art, and few would doubt that Koroviev's accomplishments went far beyond such elementary skills.

No, the point is not at all in any packs of cards or in forged letters in Nikanor Ivanovich's briefcase. Those were trifles! But it was he, Koroviev, who had sent Berlioz to his death under the streetcar. It was he who had driven the poor poet Ivan Homeless out of his mind, forcing him to see visions and tormenting dreams of ancient Yershalayim and the sun-parched waterless Bald Mountain with three men hanged on posts. It was he and his gang who had caused the disappearance from Moscow of Margarita Nikolayevna and her maid Natasha. Incidentally, the investigating commission studied this affair with special attention. It had to determine whether these women had been kidnaped by the gang of murderers and incendiaries, or had escaped with the criminal band of

their own free will. Basing itself on the absurd and confused testimony of Nikolay Ivanovich, and taking into account the strange and insane note left by Margarita Nikolayevna to her husband, in which she wrote that she was leaving to become a witch, as well as the fact that Natasha disappeared leaving all her clothes behind, the investigators came to the conclusion that both the mistress and her maid had been hypnotized, like so many others, and kidnaped in that state. It was supposed—and probably quite correctly—that the criminals had been attracted by the beauty of the two women.

What remained entirely unclear to the investigators was the motive that prompted the gang to kidnap the mentally ill man who called himself Master from the psychiatric hospital. This motive was never established. Nor was the real name of the kidnaped patient. And he vanished forever under the empty designation of Number 118 of the First Ward.

And so, almost everything was explained, and the investigation came to an end, as everything in life comes to an end.

Several years have gone by, and people have begun to forget Woland and Koroviev and the rest. Many changes have taken place in the lives of those who had suffered at the hands of Woland and his associates, and, minor and insignificant though they may be, they nevertheless should be recorded.

For example, George Bengalsky recovered and left the hospital after three months, but he was compelled to resign from his job at the Variety Theater, and that at the best time, when the public besieged the theater for tickets. The memory of black magic and its exposé was still too fresh. Bengalsky resigned from the theater, for he realized that it was too painful to face two thousand persons nightly and be subjected to inevitable recognition and a barrage of mocking questions as to whether he was happier with or without his head.

Besides, the master of ceremonies had lost a good deal of his cheerful disposition, so necessary to a man of his

profession. He was left with a troublesome and distressing habit of falling into a state of anxiety in the spring, when the moon was full, suddenly clutching at his neck, looking around fearfully, and crying. These fits were transitory. Nevertheless, they made it impossible for him to continue in his former occupation, and the master of ceremonies retired and went to live on his savings, which, according to his modest calculations, should last him for fifteen years.

He left and never again met Varenuvka, who has since won universal popularity and affection by his warm responsiveness and courtesy, rare even among theatrical house managers. The ticket scalpers, for example, never refer to him otherwise than as "our father-benefactor." Whenever anyone telephones the theater, a gentle but sad voice invariably answers with a soft, "Hello, what can I do for you?" And if the caller asks to speak to Varenuvka, the same voice answers hastily, "I am at your service!" But how many headaches poor Ivan Savelievich has suffered through this courtesy!

Styopa Likhodeyev never has occasion to speak over the telephone at the Variety Theater any more. Immediately after his release from the hospital, where he had spent eight days, he was transferred to Rostov and appointed manager of a large gastronomic establishment. Rumor has it that he has given up drinking port wine and drinks nothing but currant brandy, which has greatly improved his health. It is said that he has become taciturn and shuns women.

The removal of Stepan Bogdanovich from the Variety Theater did not bring Rimsky the joy of which he had dreamed so ardently for several years. After his stay at the psychiatric hospital and a rest cure in Kislovodsk, the financial manager, now a doddering old man with a shaking head, applied for retirement from the theater. It is interesting that the application was brought to the theater by Rimsky's wife. Grigory Danilovich could not bring himself even in daylight to visit the building where

he had seen the moon-flooded, cracked windowpane and the long arm groping for the lower bolt.

After retiring from the Variety Theater, the financial manager went to work at the children's puppet theater in Zamoskvorechye. He has never again encountered the most esteemed Arkady Apollonovich Sempleyarov in connection with acoustical problems. The latter was quickly transferred to Bryansk and appointed director of a mushroom-growing center. Nowadays, Moscow residents eat pickled saffron milk caps and marinated white mushrooms with endless relish and praise, and never stop rejoicing in the lucky transfer. Since it is all a matter of the past now, we feel free to say that Arkady Apollonovich never did make any headway with acoustics, and, for all his efforts to improve the sound, it remained as bad as it was.

Aloisy Mogarych is still alive and holds the post abandoned by Rimsky—that of financial manager of the Variety Theater.

Recovering his senses, some twenty-four hours after his visit to Woland, in a railway train somewhere near Vyatka, Aloisy discovered that, on leaving Moscow for some unknown reason in a state of mental derangement, he had forgotten to put on his trousers but had inexplicably stolen the builder's house register, which he had no earthly use for. He paid the conductor a huge sum of money for a greasy old pair of trousers and turned back home from Vyatka. But alas, he no longer found the builder's little house in its place. The ramshackle old building had literally been licked off the ground by fire. But Aloisy was a man of great enterprise. Two weeks later he was living in an excellent room in Bryusovskiy Lane, and several months later he was already installed in Rimsky's office. And just as Rimsky once used to tear his hair over Styopa, so Varenuvka is now plagued by Aloisy. All that Ivan Savelievich dreams of today is to see this Aloisy kicked the hell out of the theater and out of his sight. As Varenuvka sometimes whispers in intimate company, he has never met a greater scoundrel than this

Aloisy from whom, he says, he expects nothing but the worst.

However, the house manager may be prejudiced. Aloisy has never been noticed indulging in any shady act, or, indeed, in any other acts, with the sole exception, of course, of appointing a new bartender in place of old Sokov. As for Andrey Fokich, he died of cancer of the liver in Ward 1 of the Moscow State University Hospital some ten months after Woland's appearance in Moscow. . . .

Yes, years have gone by, and the events truthfully described in this book have receded and dimmed in memory. But not for everyone, not for everyone.

Every year, during the spring holidays, when the moon is full, a man of about thirty appears under the lindens at the Patriarchs' Ponds. A modestly dressed man, green-eyed, with reddish hair. He is a member of the faculty of the Institute of History and Philosophy, Professor Ivan Nikolayevich Ponyrev.

Coming under the lindens, he always sits down on the same bench, the bench where he had sat that evening when the long forgotten Berlioz saw the shattered moon for the last time in his life. Now, intact and round, white early in the evening, and later golden, with a dark little dragon-horse on its face, it sails over the former poet, Ivan Nikolayevich Homeless, and at the same time hangs suspended in the same spot in the heights.

Ivan Nikolayevich knows everything and understands everything. He knows that in his younger days he had been a victim of criminal hypnotists, had undergone treatment and had been cured. But he also knows there are some things he is powerless to cope with. He is powerless against this spring full moon. As soon as it approaches, as soon as the luminary which had once hung higher than two five-pointed candelabra begins to wax and turn golden, Ivan Nikolayevich becomes restless and nervous, loses his appetite and sleep, and waits for the moon to ripen. And when the moon is full, nothing can

keep Ivan Nikolayevich indoors. In the evening he goes out and walks to the Patriarchs' Ponds.

Sitting on the bench, Ivan Nikolayevich openly talks to himself, smokes, and squints now at the moon, now at the turnstile he knows so well.

He sits so for an hour or two. Then he takes off and, always following the same route, walks with empty and unseeing eyes through Spiridonovka to the Arbat lanes.

He passes the kerosene store, turns at the corner with the bent old gaslight, and steals up to a railing beyond which he sees a luxuriant, but still bare garden and the Gothic house within it, bright with moonlight on the side where a bay with triple windows projects from the wall, and dark on the opposite side.

The professor does not know what draws him to this fence or who lives in the house, but he knows that he cannot master himself on the night of the full moon. He also knows that he will inevitably see the same thing in the garden beyond the fence.

He will see an elderly, respectable-looking man with a goatee, pince-nez and slightly porcine features sitting on a bench. Ivan Nikolayevich always finds this resident of the house in the garden in the same pensive pose, gazing at the moon. Ivan Nikolayevich knows that, after admiring the moon for some time, the sitting man will invariably turn his eyes to the bay windows and stare at them, as though expecting them to fly open momentarily, revealing something extraordinary on the window sill.

Ivan Nikolayevich knows everything that will follow by heart. He must conceal himself carefully behind the railing, for the sitting man will now start restlessly turning his head, following something in the air with wandering eyes, smiling ecstatically. Then he will suddenly clap his hands in some sweet anguish and mumble loudly in plain words:

"Venus! Venus! . . . Oh, the fool that I am! . . ."

"Gods, gods," Ivan Nikolayevich will whisper, hiding behind the fence, his eyes fixed on the mysterious stran-

ger. "Another victim of the moon. . . Yes, another victim, like me. . ."

And the sitting man will go on speaking:

"Ah, what a fool I am! Why, why didn't I fly away with her? What was I afraid of, the old ass? Got myself a slip of paper! . . . Eh, now you can suffer, old cretin! . . ."

This will continue until a window clicks open in the dark part of the house, something whitish appears in it, and an unpleasant female voice calls out:

"Nikolay Ivanovich, where are you? What silly fancy is this? You want to catch malaria? Come in to tea!"

Here, of course, the sitting man will come to with a start and answer in false tones:

"I wanted a breath of air, a breath of air, my soul! The air is so fresh! . . ."

Then he will rise from the bench, secretly shake his fist at the closing window, and amble home.

"He is lying, lying! Oh, gods, how he is lying!" Ivan Nikolayevich mutters, walking away from the fence. "It's not the air that draws him to the garden, there is something that he sees this spring night on the moon and in the garden, in the sky over it! How much I'd give to fathom his secret, to know what Venus he has lost and now vainly tries to capture, waving his hands in the air! . . ."

The professor returns home altogether ill. His wife pretends she does not notice his condition and hurries him off to bed. But she herself does not lie down. She sits by the lamp with a book and looks bitterly at the sleeping man. She knows that at dawn Ivan Nikolayevich will awaken with an anguished scream, and cry and toss in bed. This is why a syringe lies ready in alcohol before her under the lamp, with an ampule of dark, tea-brown liquid.

The poor woman, tied to a gravely sick man, is free now and can safely go to sleep. After the injection, Ivan Nikolayevich will sleep till morning with a blissful face

and see exalted and happy dreams she knows nothing about.

And what wakens the scholar and makes him cry out piteously on the night of the full moon is always the same thing. He sees an unnatural noseless executioner who leaps up, hoots, and drives his spear into the heart of the maddened Gestas, bound to the post. But what is most terrifying is not the executioner, but the unnatural light in the dream, coming from a cloud that is boiling and tumbling on the earth, as always at moments of world catastrophe.

After the injection, everything changes before the sleeper. A wide path of moonlight stretches from the bed to the window, a man in a white cloak with blood-red lining ascends the road and walks toward the moon. Next to him is a young man in a torn chiton, with a badly bruised face. They talk heatedly about something, debating, trying to reach agreement.

"Gods, gods!" says the man in the cloak, turning his haughty face to his companion. "What a vulgar execution! But tell me, please tell me," and his face is no longer haughty, but pleading, "it never happened! I beg you, tell me, it never happened?"

"Of course, it never happened," his companion answers in a hoarse voice. "You imagined it."

"And you will swear to me it didn't happen?" the man in the cloak begs in ingratiating tones.

"I swear!" answers his companion, and for some reason his eyes are smiling.

"That is all I need!" the man in the cloak cries out in a broken voice and rises higher and higher toward the moon, drawing his companion with him. Behind them, calmly and majestically, walks a giant sharp-eared dog.

Then the beam of moonlight froths up, and a torrent of light gushes out of it and overflows in all directions. The moon is mistress of all, the moon plays, dances, gambols. Then a woman of incomparable beauty emerges

from the stream and walks toward Ivan, leading by the hand a bearded man who looks around him with frightened eyes. Ivan recognizes him at once. He is Number 118, his nocturnal visitor. Ivan Nikolayevich stretches his arms to him in his sleep and cries out breathlessly:

"So that was how it ended?"

"That was how it ended, my disciple," answers Number 118, and the woman approaches Ivan and says:

"Yes, of course, that is how it was. Everything ended, and everything ends. . . . And I shall kiss you on the forehead, and all will be with you as it should be. . . ."

She bends over Ivan and kisses his forehead, and Ivan stretches toward her and looks into her eyes, but she recedes, recedes, withdraws with her companion to the moon. . . .

And then the moon bursts into frenzy, it tumbles streams of light upon Ivan, it splashes light in all directions, a moon-flood fills the room, the light sways, rises, washes over the bed. And it is then that Ivan Nikolayevich sleeps with a blissful face.

In the morning he awakens silent, but entirely calm and well. His lacerated memory subsides, and no one will trouble the professor until the next full moon—neither the noseless killer of Gestas, nor the cruel fifth Procurator of Judea, the rider Pontius Pilate.

