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IN BAD COMPANY

From a Friend's Childhood Recollections

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I.

THE RUINS

My mother died when I was six. My father, overcome by grief, seemed to have completely forgotten my existence. He would sometimes caress my little sister, and took care of her in his own way, for she was the picture of our mother. But I grew up like some wild sapling in the fields; no one took any particular notice of me, nor were any restraints put on my freedom.

The little town in which we lived was called Knyazhe-Veno, or Princes Town. It had been the seat of a declining but proud Polish family, and had the typical features of most small towns in the south-western provinces, where amid the humdrum life of hard toil and the petty bustle of Jewish businesses, the last of the Polish nobles lived in the sad eclipse of their former grandeur.

When you approached the town from the east, the first building to strike the eye would be the prison, the town's most conspicuous piece of architecture. The town itself stretched lower down, along the banks of its drowsy, mouldy ponds. Leading to it was a gently sloping road with the usual town "gate". A sleepy invalided soldier, his sun-blotched figure itself a mark of undisturbed slumber, slowly raised the cross-bar—and you were inside the town before you were aware

of it. Grey fences and waste ground strewn with all kinds of rubbish now alternated with half-blind little hovels sunken deep into the earth. Further on was a wide square, from different points of which there gaped at you the dark gateways of the Jewish inns, and where government offices struck a dismal note with their stark whitewashed walls and severe barracks-like fronts. You got across a narrow river over a wooden bridge so decrepit with age that it creaked and swayed under the weight of your carriage. The bridge led to the Jewish quarter with its big and small shops, moneychangers behind open counters, and women peddling their hot buns in the street beneath sun shades and awnings. There was stench and dirt, and swarms of children rolling about in the dust. But, in the matter of a minute, you would be out in the open again. Birches softly whispered over the graveyard, the wind stirred the wheat fields, and drew a doleful, unending tune from the telegraph wires along the road.

The river spanned by the tumble-down bridge took its source from one pond and emptied into another. The town was therefore boarded north and south by broad stretches of water and marshland. From year to year the ponds grew more shallow and overgrown with duck weed; thick tall reeds, billowing like the sea, spread in the vast marshy spaces. There was an island in the middle of one of the ponds. On the island stood an old castle half-buried in ruins.

I recall with what awe I gazed upon that grand, decaying building. The most weird tales were told about it, and it was said about the island itself that it had been artificially piled up by the labours of Turkish prisoners of war. "The old castle stands on human bones," said the old people of the town, and with dread I used to picture to myself thousands of Turkish skeletons upholding with their bony arms the island, with its tall Lombardy poplars and the old castle. It made the castle, of course, appear more awesome still. Even on some bright summer days when, made brave by the sunlight and bird calls, we ventured quite close, we would be seized by sudden panic. So frightening would be the black empty windows staring at us, the deserted rooms so alive with mysterious rustling, and so eerie the echo of dropping stone chips and plaster, that we ran for dear life, with a strange thumping, stamping and cackle ringing in our ears.

But on stormy autumn nights, when the huge poplars tossed and moaned in the gusts swept in from beyond the ponds, the old castle inspired the whole town with terror. The terrified Jews cried—*Oi-vei-mir*, the pious old women crossed themselves, and even the smith, our neighbour, who denied demonkind as such, would not come out into his little backyard on such nights without making the sign of the cross and mumbling a prayer for the dead souls' repose.

Old, grey-bearded Janusz, who for want of lodgings had taken shelter in one of the castle's cellars, said that he clearly heard cries coming from under the ground on such nights. The Turks waxed unruly, rattling their bones and loudly rebuking the Polish lords for their cruelty. Arms clanged in the halls of the castle and around it on the island. With loud cries the Polish lords rallied their men. Janusz claimed that he could hear quite distinctly, despite the howling of the storm, the tramp of the horses, the clanking of swords, and shouts of command. He even assured us that one day he had heard the great-grandfather of the present count, who had been famous for his bloody deeds, ride into the middle of the island, and swear at the Turks, bidding them to hold their tongues and calling them "sons of bitches".

The descendants of that count had left their ancestral halls long ago. The

greater part of the gold pieces and the treasures which had once filled their strong-boxes found their way across the bridge into the Jewish hovels; and the last scions of that glorious family had erected for themselves a plain white stone house on top of a hill, at some distance from the town. There, in haughty and contemptuous seclusion, they dragged out a dull but yet imposing existence.

Sometimes the old count, as much a ruin himself as the castle on the island, would appear in the town on his English mare, accompanied by his daughter, gaunt and majestic, dressed in a black habit, who rode by his side, and followed at a respectful distance by a groom. The proud countess was doomed to spinsterhood. The noblemen who might have aspired to her hand, went out into the world in pursuit of foreign merchants' rich daughters, abandoning their ancestral homes or selling them for a song to the Jews, and there was no one left in the town who might have dared to raise his eyes to the fair lady. Whenever we children saw this party of three, we took to our heels, disappearing from the dusty streets like a flight of scared birds, scuttling into our yards and from there staring at the solemn-faced owners of the awesome castle.

On a hill west of the town, amid sunken tombs and crumbling crosses, stood a long-abandoned chapel. It had once been the cherished offspring of the staid town that lay in the valley below. In answer to the tolling of its bell, gathered the townsmen, clad in their clean, if not sumptuous, jerkins and carrying staves instead of the clanging sabres of the gentry, summoned, too, by the chapel bell from the outlying hamlets.

The chapel commanded a view of the island and its tall dark poplars. But the castle, hiding scornfully behind its mantle of shrubbery, was lost to sight, except for those moments when the south-west wind, breaking loose from the wall of reeds, would sweep upon the island. Then from behind the wind-tossed poplars one caught the gleam of windows, and the castle seemed to scowl at the chapel. Now both were dead. Gone were the castle's bright eyes and the play of the evening glow on them; the chapel's roof had fallen in in several places and the plaster had dropped off its walls, and instead of the clear treble of the bell, the ill-omened hooting of the owls filled it by night.

However, it was even after their death that the old-time dissension dividing the proud lordly castle and the burgher chapel continued; it was sustained by the creatures crawling in the vaults and cellars of the decayed buildings, like worms in the graves of the dead.

At one time the old castle offered asylum to all paupers, making no demands in return. All in our town who had no place to live, wrecks of humanity lacking for whatever reason the means to secure shelter for the night or in foul weather, would wend their way to the island and lie down their weary limbs among the ruins, paying for their lodging but with the risk run of burial beneath crumbling rubble. The comment—"He lives in the castle"—had come to indicate the direst poverty and a citizen's lowest station. Cordial welcome was equally extended by the ancient castle to clerks in straitened circumstances, lonely old women, and vagabonds. And all these creatures hacked and tugged at the decrepit building, chipping the floors and ceilings into fuel, made fires, cooked what food they could get, and in some unknown way clung to their human existence.

But there came a day when quarrels had broken out among these homeless refugees nestling in the old castle's ruins. It occurred when old Janusz, who had once been some menial official of the count's, somehow got himself a kind of

property deed, and took the reins of management into his hands. He launched a campaign of reform, and for several days such clamour and screaming issued from the island that one might have well thought the Turkish captives had broken loose from their subterranean dungeons to avenge their inquisitors. But it was only Janusz sorting out the population of the ruins, separating the sheep from the goats. Kept on in the castle, the sheep assisted Janusz in expelling the unfortunate goats who, loath to leave, put up a desperate but hopeless resistance. When order at long last was restored on the island, with the weighty, if not articulate, help of the local policeman, it became apparent that the coup was of a pronounced aristocratic nature. It was only "good Christians" or Catholics, moreover those who had been servants or were descendants of the servants in the count's household, that Janusz had retained. These were blue-nosed old men in shabby coats of the old Polish style, leaning on knobby sticks, and shrill-voiced, ugly old women, for all their penury, still clinging to their old-time bonnets and cloaks. And they formed a single, close-knit aristocratic grouping, claiming an exclusive right to respectable mendicancy. On week days, their lips framed in prayer, they would visit the homes of the more prosperous townspeople to spread gossip, complain bitterly of their fate and cadge what they might. On Sundays, they formed the most respectable section of the personages lining up in long rows in front of the Catholic churches to grandly receive alms offered in the name of "our Lord Jesus", and "our Lady, the Virgin Mary".

Attracted by the tumult and the shouting that came from the island during that revolution, I crossed over with a few of my playmates, and hid among the poplars. From behind their thick trunks, we observed Janusz, at the head of his army of blue-nosed old men and old hags, drive out the last of the castle's dwellers, who had been doomed to expulsion. Dusk was gathering, and rain was coming down from a cloud that hung low over the poplars. Several unfortunate wretches scuttled about the island—scared, pitiful, ashamed, hugging their tatters about them. Like moles driven from their burrows by spirited boys, they anxiously sought some opening leading into the castle so that they could slip into it unnoticed. But Janusz and his old witches chased them off, with shouts and curses, and brandishing sticks and pokers, while a policeman, armed with a heavy club, stood silently by, maintaining a neutrality in which his sympathy for the triumphant party was apparent. The poor wretches in the end retreated despairingly across the bridge, abandoning the island forever, and one by one were swallowed up by the rainy murk of the swiftly gathering evening.

After that memorable evening, the old castle which had formerly held for me the flavour of majesty, had lost, as did Janusz, too, all fascination. I had liked to visit the island, admiring, if only from a distance, the hoary walls and the moss-covered roof. And when, in the early morning, the castle's assorted dwellers would emerge from their shelter, yawning, coughing and crossing themselves in the sunlight, I had regarded them, too, with an esteem, as beings invested with the same mystery which enveloped the castle. For they slept there by night, and they heard whatever went on in those vast halls, into whose paneless windows the moonlight streamed or the storm winds burst in. I had liked to listen, too, to Janusz, when, making himself comfortable under the poplars, he held forth with the loquacity of his seventy years on the past glory of the old building. The past would then come alive in my childish imagination. Into my soul reached the breath of lost grandeur, and there stirred in me vague regrets for that which had

once made up the existence of the crumbling walls. Romantic shades of the past flitted through my mind in the way that faint shadows of clouds flit across the bright green growth of a field on a windy day.

But from that evening, I saw both Janusz and the castle in a new light. Meeting me not far from the island the next day, Janusz urged me to come to visit him. "The son of such worthy parents", he assured me with obvious satisfaction, can now show up at the castle without hesitation, for he would find there only the most respectable company. Indeed, he took me by the hand and led me almost to the castle door, but I jerked away my hand and ran off with tears in my eyes. The castle had become hateful to me. The windows in the upper storey were boarded; the women who clung to their bonnets and cloaks were in possession of the lower storey; and these old women creeping out of the castle looked so repulsive to me, flattered me with such sickening sweetness, and quarrelled among themselves so loudly, that I wondered at their being tolerated at all by the dead count who had restrained the Turks on stormy nights. But, above all, I could not forget the heartless cruelty with which these people had expelled their unfortunate mates. The thought of those outcasts, left without shelter, wrung my heart.

Be as it may, the example of the old castle brought home to me the truth of there being but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. As regards the castle, the sublime had become overgrown with ivy, creeper and moss, while the ridiculous seemed hideous and appalling to my childish mind, which as yet was incapable of grasping the irony behind these contrasts.

II.

QUEER CHARACTERS

Following the social changes on the island, a few exceedingly restless nights were spent in the town. Dogs barked, doors creaked, and the citizens kept running out of their houses and hammering on their fences with sticks—to indicate that they were on the alert. The town knew only too well that in the long cheerless nights wretched and starving human beings were wandering about its streets, drenched with rain and shivering with cold; and knowing the hard feelings these outcasts must harbour in their hearts, the town was on its guard and took care to answer such feelings with threats. And, as luck would have it, the rain and the cold continued night after night, the clouds driven low over the earth with each new day. A wind raged through the wetness, rocking the tree-tops, rattling the shutters, reminding me as I lay in bed of the dozens of my fellow beings denied warmth and shelter.

But then spring triumphed at length over these last efforts of the winter to hold its own, the sun dried the earth, and the outcasts were no longer seen. The dogs ceased to bark by night, the citizens stopped hammering their sticks on the fences, and town life lapsed back into its accustomed drowsy monotony. Queen of the sky, the hot sun shone on the dusty streets; the sons of Israel who sold in the shops

prudently put up awnings; brokers lolled lazily in the heat and kept a watchful eye for strangers to do a stroke of business; the scratching and creaking of pens could be heard from the open windows of government offices, the ladies went to market in the morning with baskets, and promenaded in the cool of the evening on their husbands' arms, with their gowns trailing behind them in the street dust. Without jarring on the scene, the old men and women of the castle primly paid their customary visits to the homes of their benefactors. The townspeople readily recognised their right to live and thought it quite the order of things to dispense alms on Saturdays, which the dwellers of the castle received as respectably as they were willingly distributed.

For the unfortunate exiles from the castle, however, life remained as unsettled as before. True, they no longer loitered in the streets by night. It was said that they had found shelter on the hill where the chapel stood, but how they could make do with such shelter, no one could tell. However, they had been seen—the oddest and most suspicious-looking figures climbing down of a morning into the towns from the hills and gullies surrounding the chapel and disappearing in the same direction when the evening drew on. They were like dark blots punctuating the drabness of the town, and disturbed its quiet, sleepy flow of life; the town's dwellers regarded them with apprehensive and hostile eyes. And, in their turn, they viewed the smugness around them with roving, searching glances that made many of the town dwellers go cold inside. In no way did they resemble the aristocratic beggars of the castle, and the town would not accept them, nor did they ask for acceptance. Their attitude to the town was definitely aggressive. They would abuse a townsman rather than wheedle him; take rather than beg. Either they were cruelly victimised, if they were weak, or caused the townsfolk to suffer, when possessing the necessary strength to do that. More so, as it often happens, there were those among this ragged, miserable band of outcasts who in wit and talents might have been a credit to the select society of the castle, but finding that society uncongenial, had preferred the more democratic company of the chapel. Some of these persons, it should be added, bared the stamp of stark tragedy.

To this day I remember the merry uproar in the street that greeted the bent, sad figure of the "Professor". He was a silent, demented creature, in an old faded frieze overcoat and a hat with a huge brim and a tarnished cockade. He earned his academic title, it seems, as a result of a vague rumour of his once having been a tutor somewhere. It was hard to imagine a more meek and harmless being. It was his wont to quietly and aimlessly roam the streets with a blank stare and drooping head. The town's idlers knew him to possess two peculiarities of which they took cruel advantage to amuse themselves. The first was that the "Professor" was perpetually mumbling under his breath. No one could make head or tail of what he was saying. Like the bubbling of a turbid streamlet, flowed his speech, and he would fix his blank stare upon the listener, as if in an attempt to bring the elusive meaning of his harangueing home to him. He could be wound up like a machine; all one of the brokers who got tired of dozing in the street had to do was to beckon to him to approach and pose a question. Wagging his head, his faded eyes peering pensively at the listener, the "Professor" would get started on a run of extremely melancholy mumbblings. The listener, if he pleased, could walk away, or doze off; on waking he would find the sad sombre figure still standing there and softly mumbling his unintelligible words. But this trait in itself was not of particular interest. It was another peculiarity of the "Professor" that made him easy sport for

the street loafers: the violent excitement into which the mere mention of sharp or cutting instruments would throw him. And therefore, at the height of the inscrutable flow of eloquence, the listener would suddenly get up from the ground and start yelling in a shrill voice: "Knives, scissors, needles and pins!" Upon this rude intrusion, the startled man would flap his arms, like a wounded bird its wings, cast a terrified look about him and claw his bosom feverishly. Alas, what depths of human suffering remain concealed to various hefty brokers because the sufferer is unable to drive it home to them with a good cuff and a blow! The poor "Professor" could only cast dismayed glances around him. Anguish rang in his voice when with his poor old eyes fixed on his tormentor, and clawing at his chest convulsively, he muttered: "My heart ... they tear my heart with a hook, my very heart!"

Most probably he longed to convey how deeply these yells cut into his heart; but it was just this reaction of his that afforded sport to the idle and bored townsmen. The poor "Professor" would hurry away, his head dropped even lower as though to avert a blow; he was followed with peals of satisfied guffaws, and through the air like a whip-lash rang the teasing cry: "Knives, scissors, pins and needles!"

Credit should be given to the outcasts for standing staunchly by one another. Should *Pan* Turkevich and a couple of his tramps, or, better still, the retired artillery officer Zausailov, descend upon the crowd when they taunted the "Professor", many of the jokers would get very rough handling. Of towering height, with a purple nose and fierce protruding eyes, Zausailov had long ago declared open war on all living creatures, allowing no truce or neutrality. Whenever he caught town loafers abusing the "Professor", there was no end to his fierce vociferation. He would run wild in the streets, like Tamerlane destroying all that came his way. He might thus be said to have engaged in pogroms against the Jews long before they were launched on a wide scale. He inflicted all sorts of tortures on the Jews he captured, and abused foully the Jewish ladies. Generally the escapades of this dashing soldier ended with his being dragged to the police station, after a desperate battle with the policemen, in which both parties showed much valour.

Another person, the spectacle of whose misfortunes and downfall afforded a great deal of amusement to the townspeople was Lavrovsky, a former civil servant, who had become a drunk of the lowest order. The days when Lavrovsky walked about in a uniform with brass buttons, wore the sprucest and brightest of neckties, and was addressed as "Pan clerk", were still remembered by the townsfolk. But this only added spice to the spectacle of his present sorry plight. The change which affected *Pan* Lavrovsky's life was brought about abruptly—by the arrival in Knyazhe-Veno of a brilliant officer of the dragoons whom it took only a fortnight's stay in the town to win the heart of the rich innkeeper's fair-haired daughter and elope with her. Lavrovsky still had his spruce neckties, but gone was the hope which brightened this petty official's life. And now he had given up service long ago, abandoning in some small town his parents whose hope and support he had once been, and shaking off all responsibility. In those rare moments when he was sober he would pass quickly through the streets, crestfallen, with averted gaze, crushed, as it were, by the disgrace of his own existence. Ragged, unkempt, with his long, tangled hair, he was a conspicuous figure attracting everybody's attention; but he walked on, as it seemed, seeing no

one, hearing nothing. Seldom only would he cast puzzled glances around him showing his bewilderment at what these strange and unfamiliar people might want of him. What had he done to them to make them taunt him so? At such moments of lucid thought, when his ear caught the name of the young lady with the fair-haired braid, a mad fury rose in his heart, his eyes blazed in his pale face with sinister flame, and he threw himself upon the crowd, which immediately took flight. Such outbursts, rare though they were, served only to further provoke the curious and bored idlers; they followed Lavrovsky whenever he passed through the streets, his eyes cast down, and, failing to rouse him out of his apathy, hurled mud and stones at him.

When he was drunk, Lavrovsky assiduously sought out dark corners behind fences, puddles that never dried, and other such haunts where he might count on remaining unobserved. There he would sit, his long legs stretched out, and his chin resting on his chest. Seclusion and the liquor roused in him a flow of confidences, the desire to talk of the grief that burdened his soul, and he set off on a rambling tale of his wasted young life. He seemed to be speaking to the grey palings of the decrepit fence, to the birch whispering understanding words above his head and to the hopping magpies drawn with fishwife curiosity to that dark, half-still figure.

Should any of us young boys succeed in tracking him down in such a condition, we would quietly surround him and with beating hearts listen to his tales of horror. Our hair stood on end, and we eyed with terror this grey-faced man, who ascribed to himself a multitude of crimes. According to Lavrovsky he had killed his own father, sent his mother to the grave, starved his sisters and brothers. We had no reason not to believe these staggering confessions. What troubled us, however, was that Lavrovsky seemed to have had several fathers, for he had stabbed the heart of one with a sword, slowly poisoned another, and drowned a third in deep waters. With awe and sympathy, we went on listening, until Lavrovsky's speech grew more and more slurred, he became utterly unintelligible, and blissful slumber finally put a stop to his remorseful outpourings. Older people laughed at us for believing his tales, and assured us that Lavrovsky's parents had died of hunger and disease in the course of time. But we, with our childish hearts, felt how sincere was his grief and remorse and, for all our credulity, we had a better understanding of his wasted life.

When his head sank on his breast and he fell asleep, wheezing, snoring, and then suddenly sobbing nervously, we gathered more closely around him, and peered into his face. Across it, even in sleep, seemed to flit dark shadows of his heinous deeds. The brows twitched, and the lips quivered almost like a child's when it is going to cry.

"I—I'll kill you!" he would suddenly cry out, feeling perhaps worried in his sleep by our presence. Whereupon we would scamper away in fear.

More than once, while sleeping thus, he had been drenched with rain, powdered with dust, or, in the autumn, half-buried beneath the snow. He might have doubtlessly perished if he had not been saved by just such other wretches as he was himself and, first and foremost, by the merry *Pan* Turkevich, who sought him out, himself reeling on his feet, shook him till he was awake, set him upon his legs, and marched him off to their quarters.

Unlike the "Professor" and Lavrovsky who suffered meekly *Pan* Turkevich belonged to that group of people who do not permit others "to spit into their

porridge", as he put it himself. And Turkevich was a merry fellow who had a comparatively easy time of it. To begin with he decided to call himself General, and insisted on the townspeople paying him the due respects; as nobody dared to question his right to the rank he soon thoroughly believed in it. He used to strut about the town majestically, scowling fearfully and quite prepared to punch somebody in the nose, which daring feat he seemed to consider one of the prerogatives of his rank. Should any doubts concerning his rank visit his untroubled head he speedily resolved them by stopping the first person he met in the street and inquiring in a bullying voice:

"Who do the people here say I am—eh?"

"General Turkevich!" was the meek answer, given by the apprehensive townsman. Whereupon Turkevich dismissed him, saying haughtily as he twirled his moustache: "There!"

He had a most impressive way of twirling his bristly moustache, and if it be added that he was never short of a clever retort or joke, it would be clear why he was always surrounded by crowds of idle listeners. Indeed, the doors of the town's best restaurant, in whose billiard room assembled visiting squires, were open to him. True, there were occasions when *Pan* Turkevich would be sent flying out of there with a good and fast kick. But since such occurrences merely pointed to the squires' lack of appreciation for humour, they did not affect Turkevich's spirits; a brimming self-confidence was natural to him, as was also intoxication.

This latter afforded him his second kick out of life. A single glassful of spirits would put him in a good temper for the rest of the day, the reason being that he had drunk such enormous quantities of brandy that his very blood fermented alcohol, and all he needed was a little addition of the drink to keep the process going with the froth and the bubble that made the world around him glow with the most pleasant colours.

But if for some reason the General had been obliged to forego his glass of brandy for two or more days, he suffered untold tortures. On such occasions the mighty warrior became sad and low-spirited, and as helpless as a babe, which gave his enemies a chance to revenge themselves on him for his past offences. He was beaten, spat upon, stamped into mud, and he bore it all meekly, sobbing with the tears streaming down his moustaches, and loudly beseeching his tormentors to kill him outright, because he was sure anyway to die under a hedge like a dog. Strange to say, at this juncture, even his fiercest persecutors felt compelled to stop and leave, because they could not bear to see his face, nor hear the voice of this unfortunate who had suddenly become aware of his own wretched state. But then another phase began: the General's whole aspect changed; he became frightful to look at, with burning eyes, sunken cheeks, and hair standing on end. He proceeded to march through the streets, striking himself on the breast and proclaiming in a booming voice:

"I'm going forth like the prophet Jeremiah to chastise the wicked!"

A spectacle worth seeing was now in the offing. It must be said to his credit that *Pan* Turkevich was, if anything, a past master of speaking up about things in our town. Little wonder, therefore, that now even the busiest and gravest of the citizens left off work and joined the crowd that followed around the new prophet, or at any rate watched his antics from a distance. He generally first betook himself to the home of the Secretary of the District Court of Justice, and with the help of a few willing actors whom he chose from the crowd, staged in front of the windows

a kind of mock show of the sitting of the Court, acting all the different parts himself, and mimicking the voice and manner of the parties to perfection. As he never failed to drop now and then an allusion to certain facts or occurrences which had already been an avid topic of town gossip, and as he was, besides, very knowledgeable in legal matters, it is not at all astonishing that in a very short time the Secretary's cook would come running out of the house, thrust something into Turkevich's hand, and vanish hurriedly to escape the polite attentions of the General's suite. Having got his reward, he showed the coin to the watchers and with scornful laughter betook himself to the nearest pub.

After his thirst had been somewhat assuaged, he led his followers to the houses of those involved in a suite, slightly altering his "repertoire" each time, according to circumstances. And as he pocketed a fee after each performance, he gradually softened, his eyes became oily, the ends of his moustache curled upwards, and the drama was changed into a comic piece. The last act was usually played out before the house of the chief of police Kotz. This worthy was the kindest-hearted of all the headmen of the town, but he unfortunately possessed two slight weaknesses—the habit of dyeing his hair black, and a preference for plump cooks. In all other matters he relied on the will of the Lord and the gratitude of the citizenry. As the crowd drew near his house which faced the street, Turkevich, after winking to his followers, threw his cap into the air, and proclaimed in a loud voice that the master of the house was not his superior but rather his father and benefactor.

Whereupon he would fix his eyes on the window in silent expectation. The results were as a rule twofold: sometimes Matryona, the fat rosy cook, would come running out of the front door with a gift from his "father and benefactor", but at other times the door remained closed, there was a glimpse of a sulky, old man with coal-black hair at the window, and Matryona, slipping out of the back door, made her way to the police station to call the policeman Mikita who had plenty of practice in tackling Turkevich. Mikita gravely laid aside the boot he was mending, and rose to go.

Meanwhile, Turkevich, seeing that all his blandishments got him nowhere, would gradually change to a tone of satire. He began to attack his benefactor's most sensitive points—first he said he regretted the sad fact that his benefactor should think it necessary to dye his hair with boot black, then seeing his words had no effect, he went on in a louder tone of voice to charge his benefactor with setting a poor example to the citizenry by his illicit cohabitation with Matryona. Once having touched on this delicate subject, Turkevich knew that for him to come to any terms with his benefactor was now past all hope, and for this reason perhaps he waxed more eloquent than ever. However, it was at this point that he was sure to be interrupted; Kotz's angry and jaundiced face would show at the window, and the policeman Mikita, who had come up softly from behind, pin Turkevich's arms in a grip of iron. No one of the listeners even tried to warn the speaker, for Mikita's stalking was a delight for them to watch. Interrupted in the middle of a word, Turkevich now somersaulted strangely in the air and after landing on Mikita's shoulders was carried bodily off by the policeman to the station in front of the excited crowd. The black gate gawked and the helplessly kicking "General" vanished into its darkness. With cheers for Mikita the ungrateful crowd finally dispersed.

Besides these more notable individuals, there huddled on the hill quite a few ragged outcasts whose appearance on the marketplace made the alarmed market

women cover up their wares with their arms as a hen covers its chicks at the sight of a hawk in the sky. Rumour had it that these unfortunates, deprived of all means of subsistence since their expulsion from the castle, had united into a close-knit group, which engaged among other things in petty thievery in the town and its environs. The rumour was grounded in the undeniable truth that no human being can subsist without food. And since most of these shady individuals had in one way or another fallen out with the ordinary ways of obtaining it, and had been cut off by the lucky ones at the castle from recourse to the boons of local charity, the inevitable conclusion to be drawn was that they either had to steal or die. They did not die, ergo ... the very fact of their existing became proof of their having strayed from the righteous path.

If this were true, then it could not be disputed that the organiser and leader of this community was *Pan* Tyburcy Drub, the most remarkable personality of all the queer characters driven out of the castle.

Pan Tyburcy's origins were shrouded in the most obscure mystery. Persons of imagination claimed that he was of aristocratic lineage, but had so dishonoured his name that he had been forced into hiding. It was said, too, that he had shared in the exploits of the legendary Karmeliuk. For one thing, his age belied that, and, for another, there was nothing of the aristocrat in *Pan* Tyburcy's appearance. He was a tall man, with a pronounced stoop that seemed to speak of the many misfortunes which had weighed heavily on Tyburcy's shoulders. He had prominent, coarse but expressive features, and short, stubbly, reddish hair. His low brow, protruding jaw, and mobile facial muscles reminded one somehow of a monkey. But the eyes which shone from under his bushy brows had a grim and stubborn look, and bespoke a sly humour, keen perception, energy and an astute mind. His face twisted and contorted into many grimaces, but his eyes never changed their expression. It was that, I believe, that lent such grisly fascination to this strange man's grimacing. I sensed beneath it the rippling of a deep unending melancholy.

Pan Tyburcy's hands were rough and calloused, and he set down his big feet with the heavy tread of a *muzhik*. On these grounds, most of the townspeople disbelieved the rumour of his aristocratic lineage. They could at most concede to his having served at the manor of some noted Polish squire. But there arose a difficulty—how then explain his extraordinary learning, which nobody could deny? There was not a pub in all the town in which *Pan* Tyburcy had not, with a view to edifying the Ukrainian peasants gathered for a drink on market days, regaled them with whole orations from Cicero, or chapters from Xenophon, delivered from the top of a wine barrel. The Ukrainian peasants gaped and poked one another's ribs, as *Pan* Tyburcy, his tattered figure enthroned above the crowd, flayed Catiline, or held forth on the glorious deeds of Caesar, or the treachery of Mithridates. Richly gifted with imagination, the Ukrainian folk read meaning of their own into those ardent, if incomprehensible addresses.... When, striking his fist upon his chest, and flashing his eyes, he addressed them as "*Patres conscripti*", they would, too, knit their brows, remarking to one another: "Just hear the son of the devil, the names he calls us!" And when, raising his eyes to the ceiling, he began reciting long Latin passages, his moustachioed listeners eyed him frightened but with sympathetic interest. It would seem to them at such times that Tyburcy's soul was adrift in some unknown land, where this un-Christian tongue was spoken, and which, judging by the speaker's despairing gestures, was in the grip of some grievous misfortunes. But the audience's sympathetic attention

reached its peak when, rolling his eyes upwards and moving only the whites, Pan Tyburcy would proceed to a long and exasperating scanning of Virgil or Homer. He did this in such hollow, such sepulchral tones, that the more drunken of his listeners, in the corners of the room, would hang their heads, until their long forelocks fell over their eyes, and mumble mawkishly:

"Ah, he wrings the heart, may the deuce take him!" And the tears fell from their eyes and trickled down their drooping moustaches.

No wonder, that when Tyburcy sprang suddenly down from his barrel laughing heartily, the peasants' sad faces brightened, and their hands dived into the pockets of their wide trousers in search of coppers. Overjoyed at Tyburcy's safe return from his* tragic wanderings, they would embrace him, treat him to vodka; and coppers would shower, clinking, into his cap.

The extraordinary learning he seemed to possess led to a new supposition concerning this strange man's origins, one that would more suit the obvious facts. It was thus agreed that as a boy *Pan* Tyburcy had been a serf in some count's manor; that he had been sent with the count's son to a Jesuit school, mainly to keep the young master's boots well polished; and that, while the young nobleman was being educated mainly by the Jesuit fathers' "discipline" of the rod, the boy serf had absorbed the wisdom intended for the young master.

Owing to the many mysteries that surrounded Tyburcy, excellent information on magic was ascribed to him among his other fields of knowledge. And when a wicked witch had sown tares in the ripening fields adjoining the last of the town's hovels, *Pan* Tyburcy had the power to pull them out with the least harm to himself or the reapers. And when a prophetic owl would alight at night on some roof calling down death with its loud hooting, *Pan* Tyburcy was again called to help and the bird of ill omen departed quickly, frightened away by a long chapter from Livy.

Nobody was able to tell where the children came from who lived with *Pan* Tyburcy. And yet there was the fact, indeed two facts, for there was a boy of six or seven, tall and sharp for his age, and a little girl of three. The boy had been with *Pan* Tyburcy from the first time he showed up in the town. As to the little girl, she seemed to have been brought by him from some unknown parts, after his absence of several months from the town.

The boy was called Valek. He was tall and slim, with black hair, and at times he wandered aimlessly and gloomily about the town, his hands in his pockets, casting looks which terrified the women selling buns. The little girl was seen only once or twice in Tyburcy's arms. Then she disappeared, and no one could guess where she might be.

There was talk of some sort of underground vaults on the hill where the chapel stood. This talk was readily believed, for in these parts which saw the Tatars pass with fire and sword, the Polish nobles rise in mutiny and the reckless Haydamaks. [*Ukrainian rebels who rose against national and religious oppression.— Tr.*] wreak their bloody vengeance, such underground vaults were not rare

Moreover, surely the band of outcasts seen in the town sheltered somewhere, and it was always in the direction of the chapel that they disappeared towards evening. There went the "Professor" hobbling sleepily along, and *Pan* Tyburcy with his fast, brisk stride; there, too, reeling, went *Pan* Turkevich, holding up the fierce-looking yet helpless Lavrovsky, and all the other shady characters who vanished into the twilight of the evening. And as they did so, there was no one

bold enough to follow them up the clayey slopes, for the hill, with its sunken graves, had a bad name. Blue lights were seen in the old graveyard on chilly autumn nights, and the owls in the belfry screeched loud and shrill, putting fear in the heart of even our brave smith.

III.

MY FATHER AND I

"A pity, young sir, a pity!" old Janusz from the castle would say, when he met me in the streets following Turkevich or listening to *Pan* Tyburcy's orations.

And the old man would shake his head dolefully.

"You have got into bad company.... What a pity that the son of such worthy parents should not hold dear the family honour."

And indeed, since the day our mother died, and my father's gloomy face grew more sombre, I was seldom in the house. On summer nights I would return home late making my way through the orchard. Stealthily as a wolf-cub, careful to avoid my father, and using a special contrivance I had made to pry open my window, half-hidden behind thick lilac bushes, I would slip quietly into my bedroom. If my sister was awake in her crib in the adjoining room, I would go there, and we would play sweetly and quietly, trying not to awake her cross old nurse.

In the early morning, when all the world was still asleep, I was already up. I would run through the tall, thick, dewy grass, climb over the orchard fence and go either to the pond where my buddies, scamps like myself, were waiting for me with their fishing rods; or to the mill, where I could see the yawning miller open the sluices, and the smooth water would quiver and then rush upon the wheels to merrily start out on a new day's work.

The big wheels, wakened by the loud jostling of the water, would quiver in their turn—yielding reluctantly at first, as though too lazy to get down to work. But, in a matter of seconds, they would be turning fast, spattering foam and bathing in the cool current. Then the heavy shafts would slowly and staidly come into motion. Inside the mill gears began to rumble, and the millstones to hum, and white clouds of flour dust would stream out of all the cracks of the old millhouse.

Then I roamed on. I liked to watch the awakening of nature, delighting when I startled a tardy lark or frightened a cowardly hare out of his furrow. Dewdrops fell from the clover and wild flower tops when I made my way across the fields to the wood on the town's outskirts. The trees greeted me with a sleepy whispering. At that hour the prisoners' pale, sullen faces were not yet visible behind the grated windows of the prison; but the new guards, their guns clattering as they circled the walls, had already come on duty to relieve the night watch.

Long as I would be on my tour of inspection, on returning through the streets, I would find the yawning townspeople only just opening their shutters. Presently the sun would come out from behind the hill; a clamorous bell beyond the ponds would summon the schoolboys to their lessons; and hunger would drive me home

to breakfast.

Every one called me a vagabond and a good-for-nothing. I was so often upbraided for the most varied evil inclinations that in time I myself came to believe I possessed them. My father believed that, too, and tried, at times, to give me guidance. However, nothing came of these attempts. At the sight of his stern and clouded face, with the mark of hopeless grief upon it, I would quail and withdraw into myself. I would stand there before him, shifting my weight from one foot to the other, fidgeting, my eyes roving from place to place. There were moments when something stirred in my breast; I longed for him to put his arms around me, to take me on his knees and be kind to me. I would then have pressed my head against his heart, and perhaps we might have wept together—child and stern man—for our common loss. But he regarded me with misted eyes that seemed to peer over my head into the distance, and I would recoil from that gaze, which I could not understand.

"Do you remember Mother?"

Did I remember Mother? Oh, yes, I remembered her. I remembered how, waking at night, I had felt in the dark for her soft hands, held them tight, and covered them with kisses. I remembered how in the last year of her life, sitting ill at the open window, she gazed sadly at the beauty of spring, bidding farewell to it.

Oh, yes, I remembered her! When she lay, so young and beautiful, covered with flowers, with the seal of death on her pale face. I drew away into a corner like a miserable pup, and stared at her with smarting eyes—confronted for the first time with the horrible riddle of life and death. She was carried off among a crowd of unfamiliar people. It was then that through the dusk of the first night of my orphanhood broke the moan of my suppressed sobbing.

Truly I remembered her.... Now, too, I would wake often in the dead of night, my childish heart brimming and overflowing with love—wake with a happy smile, imagining in the blissful ignorance of my childish dreams that her gentle presence was with me as before, that she would stroke and caress me. But the hands I stretched out met with only the empty darkness, and the bitterness of my orphanhood rent my heart. I would then press my hands against my small, anguished, fluttering heart and hot flowing tears scorched my cheeks.

Yes, I remembered her! But when this tall, gloomy man in whom I so longed to feel a kindred soul, but could not, asked me the question, I would retire still more into myself, and gently release my hand from his grip.

He would then turn away, distressed and hurt, feeling that he had not the slightest influence on me, and that a wall stood between us. When she was alive, he hardly noticed me, so overwhelming was his love for her. Now that she was dead, his grief shut him off from me.

And the gulf between us grew wider and deeper. He persuaded himself more and more that I was a bad, hard-hearted and selfish boy. The consciousness that he was failing in his fatherly duty to me, that he could find no real love for me in his heart, still further alienated him from me. I felt this well enough. I watched him sometimes from behind the bushes, as he strode up and down our orchard paths—faster and faster—uttering loud moans in his anguish. My heart would throb with sympathy and compassion. Once, when, clutching his head and dropping onto a bench, he broke into sobs, I could not stay in the bushes and ran up to him, impelled by some vague but powerful feeling. But, at the sight of me, my father, shaken out of his sad and bitter reverie, cast me a stern look and asked coldly:

"What do you want?"

I wanted nothing. I turned quickly away, ashamed of my impulse, afraid lest he guessed what I felt. Running to a far corner of the orchard, I dropped into the grass and wept in bitter anguish.

From the age of six I knew the horror of loneliness.

Sonya, my sister, was only four. I loved her dearly and she, too, felt the same love for me. But my being regarded an inveterate rogue put up a barrier between us. Every time I started to play with Sonya, noisily and boisterously as was my way, her old nurse, always sleepy, always dozing over the feathers she was forever plucking, would wake up at once, quickly pick up Sonya and carry her off into the house, glaring at me as she went. At such times, she reminded me of a mother hen in a flurry of fright, and I saw myself as the wicked hawk and Sonya the little chick. A bitter feeling of resentment possessed me, and, naturally enough, I gave up all attempt of engaging Sonya in my offensive games. Before long I began to feel cramped in the house, and in the orchard, where no one ever had a kind word for me. It was then that my roaming began. My whole being thrilled with a new expectancy, the opening up of life before me. I felt there was something in store for me in that great big unknown world outside our orchard fence. I felt, too, that there was something I would and could do, but had no idea what it was; meanwhile, an impulse, tantalising and challenging, rose from the bottom of my heart to meet the mysterious unknown. In anticipation of the puzzle resolving itself, I instinctively made my escape from my old nurse with her endless feathers, from the lazy familiar whisper of the apple-trees in our little orchard, and from the senseless clatter of knives mincing meat in the kitchen. In addition to all my other unflattering names I was now called a "street urchin" and a "tramp". But I did not care; I had become inured to reproaches, receiving them much as I might a sudden downpour of rain or a spell of sultry heat. I listened to them glumly and continued doing as I pleased. I wandered about the town, eyeing with childish curiosity its tumbledown houses, and observing the uncomplicated pattern of its life. Out on the highway, I would listen to the hum of the telegraph wires, trying to guess what news they carried from the big cities far away; or, perhaps, to the rustle of the wheat in the fields; or the whisper of the wind over the high mounds of the old Haydamak graves. Again and again I would stop short to look wide-eyed and morbidly frightened at the scenes laid open before me. Face after face, impression after impression, were planted in my mind. I saw and learned many things that children far older have little chance to learn. At the same time, as before, my childish heart went on throbbing in anticipation of something unknown and the throb was repeated defiant, tantalising and mysterious.

When the old hags had robbed the castle of the fascination it had for me, and I lost my reverence for it, when I had come to know every corner of the town, down to the very last of its dirty lanes, my gaze turned upon the chapel on the hill. At first, like some timid creature of the woods, I tried the approaches to the hill from every side, wanting to climb it, but was held off by its bad name. Inspecting the hillside I could see nothing but silent graves and crumbling crosses. There was not the slightest sign of human habitation or activity. The impression was of a place, tame, peaceful, empty, and abandoned. The solitary chapel stood frowning with its gaping windows, as though deep in sad meditation. And I now had the urge to examine it closely, to look inside, to convince myself that there was nothing there but dust. Afraid to undertake such a raid alone, and realising I might well need

help, I recruited from among the street boys I knew a little band of three daredevils, promising them the reward of buns and apples from our orchard.

IV.

I MAKE NEW FRIENDS

We set out one afternoon, and were soon climbing the steep clayey side of the hill, deeply furrowed by the spade of the gravedigger, and by spring torrents. Here and there, so „much of the soil was washed away, that white, crumbling bones protruded from open graves. In one place, we saw the corner of a wooden coffin; in another, a grinning human skull.

Helping each other across the pits, we climbed as fast as we could, and at length we reached the top of the hill. The sun was just beginning to sink westward. Its slanting rays softly gilded the green grass in the old cemetery, played on the crooked crosses, and on the few unbroken panes in the windows of the chapel. It was very quiet. A tranquillity and utter peace hung over the abandoned graveyard. We did not see any skulls there, nor bones, nor open coffins. The grass grew fresh and green in a smooth carpet slightly inclined towards the town below, and it gently veiled in its embrace the horror and ugliness of death.

We were alone, except for the busy sparrows and the swallows,» darting soundlessly in and out at the chapel windows. The old chapel stood plunged in sadness, amid the grass-grown graves, humble crosses, and the half-decayed stone tombs. These tombs, too, were covered with green grass dotted with buttercups, clover, and violets.

"There's nobody around," one of my companions said.

"The sun's coming down," another added, with a glance at the sky. The sun was not really setting, but it hung low over the distant hill.

We found the door of the chapel firmly boarded up and the windows were very high. However, with the help of my chums, I hoped to reach a window, and take a look inside.

"Don't," one of them cried, losing his courage, and gripped my arm.

But another, the eldest in our little party, with a scornful "you, cowardly ninny", pushed him away, and willingly bent his back for me to climb.

Fearing nothing, I climbed onto his back. Then he straightened up, and I planted my feet on his shoulders. From this height, I could easily reach the window frame. It proved strong enough to hold me; I swung up and seated myself on the window-sill.

"What's inside?" my chums demanded eagerly.

I did not answer. Leaning over the sill, I had looked in and was awed into silence by the solemn stillness of the abandoned chapel. The inside of this tall, tapering structure, was bare of all ornament. The evening sunlight, streaming freely through the paneless windows, traced patterns of bright gold upon the old peeling walls. I could now see the inside of the barred door: there were broken-

down galleries and mouldy columns that seemed to stagger under a weight they could no longer support. The corners were entwined in cobweb, and wrapped in that shadowy gloom that is wont to settle in the corners of all such old buildings. There seemed to be a much greater drop from the window to the floor than to the grass outside. It was as though I was looking down into a deep pit. Only after a while could I make out several objects of queer shape dimly outlined on the shadowy floor.

My chums grew tired of waiting for word from me, and one of them, climbing up just as I had done, drew up beside me, clinging to the jamb for support.

After peering long at a curious shapeless object on the floor, he remarked, "That's the altar."

"And that's a chandelier."

"There's the Gospel stand."

"What's that over there?" asked my friend curiously, pointing to a dark object lying near the altar.

"A priest's hat."

"No, it's a pail."

"What would a pail be doing there?"

"They might have kept the charcoal for the censer in it."

"No, I tell you, it's a hat. You can take a look, if you like. We can tie a belt to the window frame and you can slide down it."

"I won't! Go yourself, if you like."

"And I will, too. Do you think I'm scared?"

"Go ahead, then."

Acting on my word, I tied both of our belts tightly together, looped one end round the window frame and gave it to my friend to hold, and lowered myself down the other end into the chapel. I shuddered when my foot touched the floor, but a glance at the friendly face looking down at me restored my courage. The click of my heels echoed loudly through the empty chapel, resounding under the ceiling and in the dark corners. Some sparrows were startled out of their shelter in the galleries and darted out through a big hole in the roof. All at once, I saw looking down at me from the wall beside the window on which I had perched, a stern, bearded face, crowned with a wreath of thorns. The face belonged to a huge crucifix, reaching almost to the ceiling.

Fear gripped me. My chum's eyes, from above, shone with breathless curiosity and sympathy.

"Will you go over and see?" he asked in a half-whisper.

"Yes," I replied in the same hushed tone. But just then something unexpected happened.

We heard the clatter of falling plaster, up on one of the galleries, and a stir which sent a cloud of dust into the air. Then we saw a big grey hulk thrash out from a dark corner. It was a huge owl we had disturbed by our voices. As it hovered towards a hole in the roof, it blocked the patch of blue sky, and for a moment it seemed to grow darker in the chapel. The next instant it was gone, disappearing through that hole.

Frantic fear gripped me.

"Pull up!" I cried to my chum, seizing hold of the belt.

"In a minute, don't be afraid," he returned comfortingly, preparing to pull me up into the light of day.

But all at once his face contorted with terror, and, with a frightened cry, he dropped out of sight, jumping off the window. Instinctively, I looked behind me. What I saw was strange, indeed, but it surprised rather than frightened me.

The shadowy object of our debate, which had actually turned out to be neither hat nor pail, but an earthen pot, now flashed through the air and, before my gaze, disappeared under the altar. I did, however, glimpse the hand that held it—a small hand that looked like a child's.

My sensations of the moment are hard to describe. I suffered nothing painful, and the feeling I experienced could hardly be called fear. It was as though I was not in this world. And from somewhere, positively from another world, my ear caught for a while the rapid, frightened patter of two pairs of running feet. Shortly the silence was restored, I remained alone, entombed, as it were, in consequence of some strange and inexplicable happenings.

I had lost all sense of time, and could not say how long it was before I heard voices whispering under the altar.

"Why doesn't he climb out again?"

"He's scared, can't you see?"

The first voice seemed to belong to a very small child, the second to a boy about my age. I thought, too, that I had caught the gleam of a pair of black eyes looking at me through a crack in the altar.

"What'll he do now?" asked the first voice, whispering again.

"We'll soon find out," replied the older voice.

There were sounds of movement. The altar seemed to quake, and, presently, from under it, a figure popped out.

This was a boy of about nine, taller than me, but thin as a reed. He wore a grimy shirt, and he stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his short, tight trousers. His hair, dark and curly, hung tangled over his black, pensive eyes.

Appear as he did in so startling and strange a way, and approach me with the careless, cocky air the boys around our marketplace assumed when they were spoiling for fight, for all that, I was immensely relieved at the sight of him. And I felt even greater relief, when behind him from under the altar, or rather from the trap-door in the floor, which was screened by the altar, there showed a smudgy little face, framed in fair hair, with blue eyes that sparkled at me with childish curiosity.

I moved forward a little, away from the wall, and, true to the chevalier rules of our marketplace, too, thrust my hands into my pockets. This was a stance to show that I had no fear of my antagonist, indeed, that I held him more or less in contempt.

We faced one another, and our eyes met for an instant. Looking me up and down, the boy demanded:

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing," I replied. "What's it to you?"

His shoulder shot up, as though he were going to draw his hand out of his pocket and sock me one.

I held my ground.

"I'll show you!" he threatened.

I stuck out my chest.

"Just you try!"

It was a crucial moment: on it depended the further turn of relations between

us. I stood waiting, but the boy, still watching me closely, made no further move.

"I can show you, too," I said, but rather more peaceably.

All the while, the little girl behind him had been trying to climb out from the trap-door; she lifted herself up by grasping its edges with her little hands, fell back again and again, then finally succeeded, and came toddling unsteadily towards the boy. Reaching him, she huddled up close to him with a firm clasp, and cast me a glance of mingled wonder and fear.

That settled it; the boy could not fight with the child hanging on to him like that, and I was not ignoble enough to take advantage of the situation.

"What's your name?" he asked me, stroking the little girl's fair hair.

"Vasya, what's yours?"

"Valek. I know who you are. You live in the house up above the pond, and you've the biggest apples in your orchard."

"Yes, we have—the finest apples! Would you like some?"

I took two apples out of my pocket—they had been part of the reward promised the chums that had so shamefully deserted me—and offered one to Valek, and the other to the little girl. But she only clung closer to Valek, hiding her face against him.

"She's afraid," he said, taking the apple and handing it to her himself.

Then, turning back to me, he asked, "What made you come here? I've never gone and climbed into your orchard, have I?"

"Why don't you! I'd be glad if you came," I replied cordially.

The answer seemed to puzzle Valek. He thought a little, and said ruefully:

"I'm no company for you."

"Why not?" I demanded, genuinely distressed by his rueful tone.

"Your father's the judge."

"Well, what of it?" I asked in genuine surprise. "You'll be playing with me, not my father."

Valek shook his head.

"Tyburcy wouldn't let me," he said. And as though the name had signalled something to him, went on hurriedly, "Look here, you seem to be a good sort, only just the same you'd better go. There's sure to be trouble, if Tyburcy finds you here."

I agreed that I had better be going. The last rays of sunlight were fading away from the chapel window, and it was a good distance back to town.

"How can I get out of here?"

"I'll show you the road. We'll go out together."

"She, too?" I poked my finger at our tiny lady.

"Marusya? Yes, she'll come, too."

"What? Through the window?"

Valek paused to think.

"No, here's what we'll do. I'll help you up on the window, and Marusya and I will go out by another way."

With my new friend's help, I got up on the window-sill, untied my belt, and looped it over the window frame. I lowered myself down with both ends in my hands, and was soon dangling in the air. Then I let go of one end, dropped to the ground, and jerked the belt free. Valek and Marusya were already outside at the wall, waiting for me.

The sun had just set behind the hill. And the town lay mantled in violet

shadow. Only the tops of the poplars on the island still gleamed red gold, tinged by the last rays of sunlight. I now had a feeling that a whole day, if not more, had gone by since I had come up the hill to the old graveyard, and that whatever happened belonged to yesterday.

"How good it feels!" I cried, breathing deep of the fresh evening coolness, and exhilarated by it.

"It's dull here," Valek remarked wistfully.

"Is this where you live?" I asked when we were climbing down the hillside.

"Yes."

"But where is your house, then?"

I could not imagine children like myself not living in "houses".

Valek smiled in his sad way, but did not answer. We did not go down by the pitted slope I had climbed, but by a better way that Valek knew. It took us through the reeds of a dried-up marsh, across a little stream by a bridge of thin planks, and down to the flat land at the foot of the hill.

Here we paused to say good-bye. After shaking hands with my new chum, I turned to the little girl. She gave me her tiny hand, and looking up at me with her blue eyes, asked:

"Will you come again?"

"I will," I replied. "I certainly will."

"Well, I suppose you could," said Valek thoughtfully. "Only pick a time when our people are down in town."

"Your people? Who's that?"

"Why, the whole lot—Tyburcy, Lavrovsky, Turkevich. And the 'Professor'... but I don't believe he matters much."

"Very well, I'll come when I see them in town. Good-bye, then."

I had gone a few steps, when Valek called after me: "Wait a minute! You won't go telling anybody that you were here, will you?"

"I won't tell a soul," I replied assuredly.

"That's fine! And if those fools of friends of yours begin asking questions, tell them you saw the devil."

"I'll do that."

"So long, then."

"So long."

A deep dusk had settled upon Knyazhe-Veno, when I approached our orchard fence. A faint narrow sickle of the new moon hung over the castle, and the stars had come ablaze. I was just going to climb the fence, when someone gripped my hand.

It was the boy who had run off. "Vasya, chum," he spoke in a hushed, ruffled voice. "How did you get out?... Poor fellow!..."

"I got out, as you see. But all of you ran away and left me."

He seemed ashamed. However, curiosity got the better of shame, and he asked:

"What was it, in there?"

"What was it? Devils, of course," I replied most positively. "And you're a bunch of cowards."

And, shaking off my embarrassed chum, I scrambled up the fence.

In another fifteen minutes I was sound asleep, dreaming of real devils that came merrily hopping out of the trap-door. Valek chased after them with a willow broom, and Marusya, her blue eyes sparkling gleefully, laughed and clasped her

hands.

V.

OUR FRIENDSHIP GROWS

From that time on, I was wholly absorbed by my new friends. Morning, noon, and night I could think of nothing else except my next visit to the hill. I had but one purpose now in loitering about the streets: to make sure that all those whom Janusz had described as "bad company" were down in town. And if I found Lavrovsky sprawled in a muddy puddle, Turkevich and Tyburcy orating in their usual haunts, and other shady characters of their crowd poking about the marketplace, I would hurry off at once across the marsh and up the hill to the chapel, my pockets full of apples, which I was allowed to pick to my heart's content in our orchard, and with sweets I saved for my new friends.

Valek, level-headed, and with grown-up ways that I rather respected, would accept these offerings as a matter of course, putting away the greater part of his share for his sister. But Marusya threw up her tiny hands, her eyes dancing with delight, her pale cheeks glowing with colour, and laughed happily. Her laughter echoed in our hearts, rewarding us for the sweets we denied ourselves to give her.

She was a pale, slight child, much like a flower grown without sunlight. Though four years old, she could hardly walk, but waddled along unsteadily on her short, rickety legs, swaying like a grassblade. Her arms were thin, almost transparent, and her head lolled on her skinny neck, like a bluebell on its stalk. Her eyes, at times, gazed at you with an unchildlike sadness, and her smile so reminded me of my mother in her waning days—in the chair by the window, with the breeze fluttering her fair hair—that I would grow sad myself and tears pricked my eyes.

I could not help but compare her with my sister. They were about the same age—but Sonya was as chubby as a cherub and bouncy as a ball. She could run so fast, in the heat of play, laughed so ringingly; and she wore the prettiest little frocks, with a bright red ribbon plaited into her dark braids by our maid.

As to my new little friend, she hardly ever ran, and very seldom laughed; and when she did laugh, it was like the tiniest of silver bells, not to be heard more than a few steps away. She wore a soiled, shabby dress, and there never was a ribbon in her braids. Her hair, though, was far thicker and more beautiful than Sonya's. Valek, to my surprise, was extremely adept at braiding it, which he did every morning for her.

I was a brisk and zestful youngster. "That boy's got quicksilver in his limbs," my elders would say of me. I believed them, though I had no idea by whom and how this operation had been performed. At the outstart, I was my usual sprightly self in the company of my new friends. I don't believe the old chapel had ever echoed to such shouts as mine, when I tried to put some spirit into Valek and Marusya, and draw them into play. But I had little success. Valek would look

gravely from me to the little girl, and once, when I tried to make her run, he said:

"Don't! She's going to cry."

True enough, after I had got her to run, and when she heard me running after her, Marusya suddenly stopped and turned to face me, raising her arms above her head as though in defence. And, throwing at me the helpless glance of a trapped bird, she began to sob, leaving me utterly bewildered.

"You see," Valek said. "She doesn't like to play."

He sat her down on the grass, picked some flowers, and threw them into her lap. She stopped crying, and sat quietly fingering the flowers, whispering to the golden buttercups and lifting the bluebells to her lips. Subdued, I lay down in the grass closeby, with Valek.

"Why is she like that?" I asked presently, pointing with my eyes at Marusya.

"Sad, you mean?" Valek said and replied, in an utterly convinced tone. "Well, you see, it's the fault of the grey stones."

"Ye-es," the little girl feebly echoed his words, "it's the fault of the grey stones."

"What grey stones?" I demanded perplexedly.

"The grey stones have sucked the life out of her," Valek explained, as he lay on his back looking up at the sky. "That's what Tyburcy says.... Tyburcy knows it all."

"Ye-es," once again the little girl echoed softly. "Tyburcy always knows."

I could make nothing of this puzzling explanation Valek gave, but the argument supporting it—that Tyburcy "always knew"—duly impressed me. Raising myself on my elbow, I eyed Marusya. She sat just as Valek had sat her down, and was still playing with the flowers. Her thin hands moved listlessly. The eyes against the pale face looked even bluer under their drooping lashes. The sight of that tiny, sorrowful little figure, somehow brought home to me the bitter truth of Tyburcy's words, though their entire meaning still escaped me. Yes, surely something was sucking the life out of that queer little girl, who cried when other little girls would laugh. And, yet, how could stones have such power?

This puzzle filled me with more dread than the phantoms of the castle. The Turkish prisoners, languishing under the island, and the terrifying old count, however fearful, after all, savoured of fairy tale, but here I had come up against something not only strange and weird, but real. There was something—shapeless, merciless, cruel and hard as stone—bearing down on the little girl, sucking the colour from her cheeks, the sparkle from her eyes, the energy from her body. "It must happen in the night," I thought, and a painful feeling of pity wrung my heart.

This feeling prompted me to restrain my own high spirits; I tried to fall in, like Valek did, with our little lady's sedate ways. We would settle her in the grass somewhere, and go picking flowers for her, collecting pretty pebbles, or catching butterflies. Sometimes we made brick traps for sparrows. And, sometimes, we would stretch out on the grass beside her, looking up at the clouds floating high over the shaggy chapel roof, and tell her stories, or just talk.

And, as one day followed another, these talks cemented our friendship, which grew steadily, despite the sharp difference of our natures. I was impulsive and brimming with spirits; Valek was sober and restrained. There was an authority about him and an air of independence when he spoke of his elders, which I admired. Moreover, he made me think of many things which had never before occupied my mind. Hearing him speak of Tyburcy as he would of a comrade of his own age, I asked:

"Tyburcy is your father, isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he replied thoughtfully, as though the question had never occurred to him.

"Is he fond of you?"

"Oh, yes," he replied with greater assurance. "He's always worrying about me, and—you know—he kisses me sometimes, and cries...."

"He cares for me, too," Marusya put in with childish pride, "and he cries, too."

"My father doesn't care for me," I said ruefully. "He never kisses me. He's just no good."

"You're wrong there," Valek objected. "You don't understand. Tyburcy knows better. He says the judge is the very best man in the town, and that the town deserved long ago to go to its doom. But there was your father, and then the priest, whom they got locked up in the monastery a short time ago, and there was, too, the rabbi. Owing to these three men..."

"What is there owing to them?"

"Owing to them the town has not gone to its doom yet. That's what Tyburcy says; it's because they stand up for the poor....And your father, do you know what he did? He decided a case against a count."

"Yes, that's true. The count was frightfully angry. I heard him."

"There! And to put a count in the wrong is no joke!"

"Why?"

"Why?" Valek paused to think a little. "Well, because a count is a person of importance. A count does whatever he pleases, and rides in a carriage, well, and a count has money. With another judge, he'd give him money, and the case would be decided in his favour, and against the moneyless man."

"I dare say you're right for I heard the count shout in our house—I can buy you and sell you all!"

"And what did the judge say?"

"My father said to him: 'Get out of my house!'"

"There you are! That's what Tyburcy says—that the judge would not hesitate to throw a rich man out. And when old Ivanikha came to him, on her crutch, he called for a chair for her. That's what he's like. Even Turkevich makes no rows outside his windows."

It was true; during his expeditions of exposure in the town's streets, Turkevich would pass by our windows in silence, or on occasion even doff his cap.

I thought over deeply all that was said. Valek had shown me my father from an angle from which I had never viewed him before. Valek's words had touched a chord of filial pride deep in my heart. It pleased me to hear my father praised, the more so that the praise came from Tyburcy, who "always knew". My heart filled with aching love mingled with the bitter certainty that my father had never loved me, would never love me, as Tyburcy loved his children.

AMONG THE "GREY STONES"

Another few days went by, followed by a time when the "bad company" from the hill ceased coming to town. Feeling bored, I wandered through the streets, hoping to catch sight of them, so that I could hurry up the hill. The "Professor" alone passed through the town once or twice, wobbling alone dreamily, but neither Turkevich nor Tyburcy put in an appearance. I grew terribly lonesome, and could not bear to be deprived of the company of Valek and Marusya. At last, one day, as I walked crestfallen down a dusty street, Valek overtook me and laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Why don't you come around any more?" he asked.

"I was afraid to come, because I didn't see your people in town."

"Oh, I see! Silly of me not to have let you know— they're away, and you may come. I thought it was something else."

"What did you think?"

"I thought you had got bored with us."

"Not at all—I'll go with you right away," I said hastily. "I've even got some apples with me."

My mention of the apples somehow made Valek start, and turn towards me quickly. He seemed on the point of saying something, but then thought better of it, only giving me a rather quizzical glance.

Seeing that I looked expectantly at him, he said evasively, "Oh, nothing! You go ahead to the hill; I've got to drop into a place—for a bit of business. I'll catch up with you soon enough."

I walked slowly, looking back every now and again to see if Valek was anywhere behind. But there was no sign of him, even when I had got all the way up the hill and almost reached the chapel. Here I paused, rather perplexed, for there seemed to be nothing before me but the graveyard, still and deserted, without the slightest evidence of human habitation. There were only the carefree chirping of the sparrows, and the rustle of the dark, dense foliage, where the thick growths of bird-cherry, lilac, and honeysuckle nestled close to the south wall of the chapel.

I looked around, and was somewhat at a loss where to turn. Obviously, I had best wait for Valek. And while I waited, I wandered about among the graves, eyeing them idly, and trying to decipher the half-obliterated inscriptions on the moss-grown tombstones. Thus roaming from grave to grave, I came upon a large, half-ruined tomb. On the ground, near it, lay its roof, torn off, most probably, by a violent wind. Its door was boarded up. Prompted by curiosity, I propped up an old cross against the wall of the tomb, climbed up with its help, and looked inside. The tomb was empty. But there was a window with glassed panes cut into the middle of its floor; through the panes gaped at me a black emptiness.

While I was atop the tomb, wondering at the purpose of this strange window, Valek came running uphill tired and breathless. He held in his hand a loaf of Jewish bread, and something bulged under his shirt. Perspiration was streaming down his face.

"Ho!" he cried when he saw me. "So that's where you are! Tyburcy would be good and mad, if he caught you there! Well, but there's no helping it now. I know you're a good fellow. You won't tell anyone where we live. Come, let's go in."

"Where? Is it far?" I asked.

"You'll see in a minute. Keep right after me."

Parting the bushes where the honeysuckle and lilac grew, he slipped in among the greenery under the chapel wall, and disappeared. Following close behind, I found myself in a small open space of trampled ground, wholly concealed by the surrounding shrubbery. And, in between two bird-cherry trunks, I saw a large opening in the ground with earth steps leading down. Valek started down the steps, and beckoned to me to follow. In a few seconds, we were underground, in pitch darkness. Valek took my hand and led me down some damp, narrow passage, and then suddenly, after a sharp turn to the right, we emerged in a roomy vault.

I stopped short in the entrance, stunned by the strange sight that met my gaze. Two shafts of light poured down into the vault, slicing up the underground darkness. The light came in through two windows in the ceiling; one of these I had already seen from above, in the floor of the tomb, the other, I assumed, was of the same type. The sunlight could not reach these windows directly, but was reflected down to them from the walls of the decayed tomb. Diffused in the damp air of the vault, it struck the stone slabs of the floor, and glancing off from them cast dull gleams into every corner. The walls, too, were stone. Massive columns, rising ponderously from the floor, dispensed stone arches to every side; and these merged overhead in a vaulted ceiling. On the floor, in the light that fell from the windows, crouched two figures. One was the old "Professor", who sat with bowed head, mumbling to himself, and poking with a needle at his old rags. He did not so much as lift his head when we came in. Were it not for the feeble movements of the hand that held the needle, his drab figure might have passed for a fantastic stone carving.

Under the other window sat Marusya, twiddling with the flowers in her lap, as was her wont. Though her fair head and her whole tiny figure were bathed in light, she did not seem to stand out at all distinctly against the grey stone, but was more like a hazy little dot that would fade and vanish any minute. When a cloud drifted by across the sun, far above the ground, the walls of the vault were swallowed up by the darkness, as though opening up and retreating, but only to heave back, when the cloud passed, with all their cold, hard stone, and bear down in their heavy embrace upon the little girl's tiny figure. Somehow I recalled Valek's talk of the "grey stones" that sucked the joy out of Marusya, and a superstitious dread crept into my heart; I seemed to feel an invisible glare of stone, greedy and intent, as though the vault were jealously guarding its victim.

Marusya brightened at the sight of her brother, calling softly, "Valek!"

And when she saw me, too, her eyes began to sparkle.

I gave her my apples, and Valek broke his white loaf in two, giving half to Marusya, and the other half to the "Professor". The unfortunate scholar accepted this offering listlessly, but at once, without dropping his needle, started to eat. I fidgeted and shifted my weight from one foot to another, feeling constrained, as it were, beneath the oppressive glare of the grey stones.

"Come away. Come away from here," I said, tugging at Valek's sleeve. "Take her away, too."

And Valek called to his sister, "Marusya! Come, we're going up!"

Together we left the vault, and emerged into the daylight above. I still felt constrained, and uncomfortable. Valek seemed more gloomy than usual, and less inclined to talk.

"Was it buying that loaf that kept you so long in town?" I asked.

"Buying it?" Valek smiled wryly. "Where would I get the money?"

"What did you do, then? Beg it?"

"Beg it? As if anyone would give it to me! No, man, I pinched it from Sura's tray, at the marketplace, without her noticing it."

He said this in the most matter-of-fact tone, lying on his back, his arms folded under his head. I raised myself on my elbow, and looked straight at him.

"You mean you stole it?"

"Yes, of course."

I dropped back into the grass. There was a moment or two of silence between us.

"It's wrong to steal," I said gloomily.

"All our people had gone off. And Marusya cried, she was so hungry."

"I was hungry," Marusya repeated with plaintive frankness.

I did not yet know what hunger was, but Marusya's last words tugged at my heart, and I looked again at these new friends of mine, as though I were seeing them for the first time. Valek still lay on the grass, pensively watching a kite soaring high overhead. He seemed less of an authority to me now, and as my gaze passed to Marusya, sitting there and clasping the bread in both her hands, my heart ached at the sight.

"But why," I asked with an effort, "why, hadn't you told me about it?"

"I was going to, but then changed my mind, because you have no money of your own."

"What of it? I'd have brought some bread from home."

"You'd have sneaked it out?"

"I—I suppose so."

"You'd be stealing then?"

"It would be from my own father."

"That's even worse!" Valek declared with great conviction. "I never steal from my father."

"Well, I might have asked for it—and I'd get it."

"You'd get it once, maybe. But nobody's got enough to feed all the beggars."

"You're not beggars, are you?" I asked in dismay.

"Yes, we are," Valek replied curtly.

I fell silent. A few minutes later, I got up to say good-bye.

"Going already?" Valek asked.

"Yes, I have to go."

I had to go because I could not play with my friends that day as light-heartedly as I did before. A shadow has been cast on my innocent childish attachment for them.... It wasn't that my affection for Valek and Marusya had diminished, but that it was now tinged with a pity so keen that it wrung my heart. I went to bed early that night, not knowing how to cope with that new feeling of pain that gnawed at my being, and cried bitterly into my pillow, until I found relief in sleep from the burden of my woes.

PAN TYBURCY APPEARS ON THE SCENE

"Hullo! And I began to think that you won't come again," Valek exclaimed, when I came up the hill next day.

I knew why Valek had had that thought.

"No, I... I won't ever stop coming," I replied resolutely to end this matter once and for all.

Valek was obviously pleased, and we both felt happier.

"What about your folk?" I asked. "Not back yet?"

"Not yet.... Devil knows what's become of them."

We now merrily got down to making an ingenious trap for sparrows, for which I had brought along some string. We gave the end of the string to Marusya. And every time an imprudent sparrow, attracted by the bait, hopped in, she pulled the string, and down went the lid—the bird was captured, only to be set free directly afterwards.

However, close to noon the sky became overcast, dark clouds gathered, and to the merry peal of thunder the rain came pouring down. I shrank at the thought of going underground at first, but then, remembering that Valek and Marusya lived there all the time, I overcame my aversion, and went down with them. It was dark and very quiet in the vault; but we could hear the thunder rolling up above, like a huge cart rumbling over huge cobblestones. Quite soon I got used to being underground, and we cheerfully spent some time listening to the earth's reception of the teeming rain. The sound of splashing water and frequent pealing of thunder were exhilarating, infusing us with new vitality.

"Let's play blind-man's buff," I suggested.

And so I was blindfolded. Marusya toddled about the stone floor on her wobbly little legs, filling the air with the feeble tinkle of her pathetic laughter. Suddenly I bumped into somebody's wet figure, and felt myself promptly being seized by one leg, lifted from the floor by a powerful arm, and swung into the air with head down. The bandage slipped from my eyes.

It was Tyburcy, who had seized me. Drenched and cross, looking even more formidable because I saw him upside down, he held me by the leg and rolled his eyes wildly.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded sternly, his eye on Valek. "I see you're having a good time. And pleasant company, too."

"Let me go!" I pleaded, surprised that I could speak at all in the strange position in which I was held. But *Pan* Tyburcy only tightened his grip on my leg.

"*Responde!* Answer!" he demanded even more truculently of Valek, who found nothing better to do in his predicament than thrust two fingers in his mouth, as though in proof that there was nothing he could say in reply.

I could see, however, the friendly sympathy with which he watched me as I swung wretchedly in space like a human pendulum.

Pan Tyburcy lifted me high, so that he could look into my face.

"Ha! His Honour, the Judge, if my eyes don't deceive me. And to what may we owe the honour of this visit?"

"Let me go!" I repeated stubbornly. "Let me go this minute!" And involuntarily, as I said it, I tried to stamp my foot which only made me swing all the more violently in mid-air.

Tyburcy laughed. "Aha! His Honour is pleased to be cross.... But you don't know me yet. Ego—Tyburcy sum. For two pins I'll hang you over the fire, and roast you like a little pig!"

I began to think that I might indeed suffer just such a fate, all the more so that Valek's own look of despair seemed to confirm it. At this point, however, Marusya came to the rescue.

"Don't you be scared, Vasya," she said reassuringly, and walked right up to Tyburcy. "He never roasts little boys over the fire. It's not true!"

And now with a quick movement Tyburcy turned me over in the air, and stood me up on my feet. I was so dizzy that I pretty nearly fell, but he steadied me, and then, sitting down on a block of wood, set me between his knees.

"How did you get in here?" he proceeded to question me. "How long has this been going on?" Getting no answer from me, he turned to Valek: "You tell me, then."

"Pretty long," Valek replied.

"How long?"

"Six days."

Pan Tyburcy seemed rather pleased by this answer.

"Six whole days!" he exclaimed, turning me around so that he could look into my face. "Six days is quite a long time. And in all that time you haven't told anybody where you go visiting?"

"No, I haven't."

"Honestly?"

"Honestly," I repeated.

"Good for you. We can hope then that you won't talk in future either? As a matter of fact, I've always thought you a good sort, seeing you about town. A real 'street urchin', judge or no judge. And will you be judging us some day, eh?"

His tone was good-natured enough, but by now I felt so deeply nettled that I replied rather peevishly:

"I'm no judge, I'm just Vasya."

"No matter, your being Vasya is not going to stop you from being a judge—and if you're not one now, you may be one later. That's the way it has been and will be! Look at us: I'm Tyburcy, and there's my boy Valek. I'm a beggar, and so is he. I steal, to be truly frank with you, and so will he. Your father is judge to me, and some day you'll be judge to him."

"That's not true," I objected sullenly. "I won't ever be his judge!"

"He won't!" Marusya put in, sweeping aside with firm conviction the horrid suspicion against me.

She nestled trustfully against the monster's knee, and his gnarled hand gently stroked her fair hair.

"Don't be too sure," said this strange man slowly to me in the tone he would use with a grown-up person. "Don't be too sure, *amice!* It is something that goes back to long ago: to each his own—*suum cuique!* Each goes his own road. And yet—who knows?—it may be a good thing that your road has crossed ours. In any event, it's good for you, *amice*, because it's better to have a morsel of human heart in your breast than a cold stone, do you see what I mean?"

I did not see at all. But I peered at the face of this queer man. And *Pan* Tyburcy met my eyes with a fixed stare of his own that seemed to search my soul.

"You don't understand, of course. You're only a youngster. I'll try to put it

briefly to you—and some day you might recall the words of Tyburcy, the philosopher. See, if a time ever comes when Valek here stands before you to be judged, remember that, when the two of you were young fools and played together, that even then you started out on your way with proper clothing to wear and plenty of food to eat, and Valek went his way in rags and with an empty belly. Well, and for the present," his tone grew harsh, "remember this: if you let out a word of what you've seen here to that judge of yours, or to as much as a bird, I won't be Tyburcy Drub if I don't hang you by your feet in this fireplace here and make a smoked ham of you. You've understood that, I hope."

"I won't tell a soul. I...May I go on coming here?"

"I don't mind if you come ... *sub conditionem*—I better drop the Latin which you're too ignorant to understand— on the one condition that you remember about the smoked ham."

He now let me go, and stretched out, with a tired look, on a long bench that stood at the wall.

"Bring that in," he said to Valek, pointing to a large basket that he set down in the doorway as he came in. "And start a fire. We cook dinner today."

This was no longer the man who rolled his eyes so fearfully at me only a short while ago. Nor was it the jester who harangued before the public to cadge a few coppers. He had the air of a master of the house, the head of a family, back from his job, running his household.

He seemed extremely fatigued. His clothes were wet with the rain, his face, too, the damp hair sticky on the forehead; and his whole figure spoke of exhaustion. I caught an expression I had never before seen on the face of that merry-andrew of the streets and public houses. It was like a glimpse caught behind the scenes of a spent actor, resting after the strenuous part he had played on the stage of life, and it sent a shudder through me. It was another one of these insights which the old chapel gave me so unstintingly.

Now Valek and I got briskly down to work. Valek lit a strip of kindling, and by its light we went into the dark passage, where in a corner there was a heap of rotting wood, mostly old boards and broken crosses. We brought in a few pieces, poked them into the fireplace and set the fire going. When it came to the cooking, I had to leave it to Valek, which he managed skilfully. In half an hour, he had a stew simmering in a pot over the fire, and while we waited for it, Valek set down on a loosely knocked together three-legged table a sizzling panful of fried meat. Tyburcy got up.

"Ready?" he asked. "Very good! Come and join us, boy. You've earned your meal.... *Doming preceptor!*" he called to the "Professor". "Drop your needle and come to dinner."

"Right away," the "Professor" said quietly, his lucid answer quite a surprise to me.

However, the spark of lucidity kindled by Tyburcy's voice, did not come alight again. The old "Professor" stuck his needle into his rags, and sat down listlessly, with lack-lustre eyes, on one of the blocks of wood that served as chairs.

Marusya sat in Tyburcy's lap. She and Valek ate with a greed that clearly showed how rare a luxury meat was to them. Marusya even licked the dripping off her fingers. Tyburcy ate unhurriedly. Having apparently an irresistible urge to talk, he addressed himself from time to time to the "Professor". The luckless scholar showed remarkable attention. Tilting his head to one side, he listened with the air

of one who understood every word. Now and again he nodded or made some mumbling sound, indicating agreement.

"There, *domine*, how little we require to satisfy our needs," mused Tyburcy. "It's so, isn't it? Now that our bellies are full we need but thank the Lord—and the Kiev an priest."

"Umh'm, umh'm," the "Professor" agreed.

"There you *go, domine*, umh'ming, when you have no idea what the Klevan priest has got to do with it all—don't I know you? And yet if it weren't for the Klevan priest, we'd have no fried meat or anything else...."

"Did the Klevan priest give you all this?" I asked, recalling the round, good-natured face of the priest who at times visited my father.

"That young chap has got an inquisitive mind, *domine*," Tyburcy said, still addressing the "Professor". "His Reverence had indeed given us all this, though never did we ask for it, and though it may well be not only that his left hand knew not what the right was doing, but that neither hand knew anything at all....Go on eating, *domine!*"

From that strange and rather involved utterance I gathered only that the food had not been acquired in exactly the ordinary way. And I could not refrain from putting one more question:

"Did you then take it ... yourself?"

"See, the young chap's not lacking in intelligence," Tyburcy continued in the same vein. "A pity he hasn't seen the priest. That one's got a belly like a barrel, so that anyone can see overeating is bad for him. We, on the other hand, are badly underfed, so who can grudge us a little extra food, which is not extra at all?... Am I right, *domine?*"

"Umh'm, umh'm," the "Professor" mumbled again, quite absently.

"There! You've made your point very nicely this time—and just as I was beginning to think that this young man might have sharper wit than certain scholars I know.... But to go back to the priest. He's learned a lesson, I believe. And for a lesson one pays; so we might say we bought the meat from him. And if he keeps his doors padlocked faster, that'll make us quits. However," he turned abruptly to me, "you're still a silly boy, and there are many things you don't understand. Though this child does. Tell me, Marusya, did I do well to bring you the meat?"

"Very well," replied the little girl, with a sparkle of her turquoise eyes. "Marusya was hungry!"

Evening was drawing on when I made my way home that day, quite confounded, and deep in thought. Tyburcy's odd talk had not for a moment shaken my conviction that it was wrong to steal. If anything, the repugnance I had felt before had grown. Beggars and thieves! They were outcasts, held in general contempt. I knew that. And I, too, felt contempt welling up from somewhere deep down in my being. But instinctively I fought it down to protect my new affection from this bitter infusion. The outcome of these struggles in me was that my pity for Valek and Marusya increased and deepened; nor did my affection for them waver. I went on believing that it was wrong to steal, but when there flashed back into my mind the picture of Marusya's beaming face as she licked clean her greasy fingers, I could not but share in her and Valek's joy.

Coming down a dark path in our orchard, I bumped into my father. He was pacing gloomily up and down, as was his wont, with the usual dazed look in his

eyes. When he saw me, he laid a hand on my shoulder.

"Where have you been?"

"Just ... walking."

He gave me a searching glance, and was about to say something, when the dazed look returned to his eyes and, with a shrug, he strode on down the path. What that shrug conveyed I had guessed quite well:

"What does it matter? *She* is no more!..."

I had lied to him, perhaps, for the first time in my life.

I had always been afraid of my father. And now I feared him all the more, being as I was in the grip of a whole world of troublesome questions and emotions. Could he possibly understand me? Could I confess anything to him, without betraying my friends? I trembled at the thought that he might one day get wind of the "bad company" I had picked up, but it was not in my power to turn away from that company, to betray Valek and Marusya. Besides, it had now become with me a matter of principle, for had I betrayed my friends by breaking my word to them, I could never have looked them in the eyes again for shame.

VIII.

AUTUMN

Autumn was approaching. It was harvest time in the fields, and the leaves on the trees began to get yellow. And our Marusya started ailing.

She did not complain of anything, but kept getting thinner, her cheeks paler; her eyes darkened so that they seemed bigger than ever, and only by an effort could she raise her heavy lids.

I could visit the hill now at any time, the presence of other members of the "bad company" no longer a hindrance. I had come to know them and felt quite at home in their midst.

"You're a fine chap, sure to be a general one day, too," Turkevich assured me.

The younger of the shady characters made bows and arrows for me of elm shoots and a tall artillery officer with a big red nose tossed me up into the air, teaching me gymnastics. Only the "Professor" remained absorbed, as always, in some deep thoughts of his own, while Lavrovsky, who shunned company when he was sober, huddled in corners.

All these people had their quarters separately from Tyburcy, who with his children occupied the vault I described. The rest of the "bad company" lived in the same type of underground chamber, only bigger, which was connected with the first by two narrow corridors. There was less light in these quarters, and it was damper and gloomier. Along the walls stood benches and stumps which served for chairs. Rags of every description were heaped on the benches in place of bedding. In the middle of the chamber, where the light fell, stood a bench at which now *Pan* Tyburcy, now some of the other shady characters, did a bit of carpenting. The "bad company" included a cobbler and a basket-maker. But, apart from Tyburcy, the

rest were either amateurs at their trades or weaklings, and there were those, I noticed, whose hands were too shaky for them to cope with any decent job. The floor of this vault was strewn with shavings and bits of cut wood; dirt and disorder stared out from everywhere. Now and again Tyburcy would get worked up into a fury about this, and compel one or another of the inmates to sweep and tidy up a little these gloomy quarters. I seldom dropped in there, for I could not abide the pungent musty odour. Moreover, in his sober moments, Lavrovsky would stay here. He would sit on a bench, his face buried in his hands, with his long hair tossed about him; or pace from corner to corner. He cut such a figure of eerie gloom that my nerves gave way at the sight of him. But the other inmates seemed to be quite accustomed to his strange ways. "General" Turkevich now and then made him copy the petitions and pleas he concocted in behalf of the townspeople or the fun-poking squibs he tacked on to lamp-posts. Resignedly Lavrovsky would sit down at a small table in Tyburcy's room and go on copying for hours in his beautiful clear hand. Once or twice I saw him being dragged down into the vault when he was dead drunk, his head hanging down and swaying, his feet dragging along the stone steps, while tears streamed down his suffering face. Marusya and I, clinging to one another, looked on from a far corner where we crouched. But Valek darted nimbly in and out between the bearers, making himself useful by supporting either the head, or an arm or a foot of the unfortunate man.

Whatever had amused or interested me about these people as I watched their clowning in the town streets, appeared to me here, "behind the scenes", in a harsh nakedness that weighed heavily upon my childish heart.

Tyburcy enjoyed indisputable authority among these people. It was he who had discovered the vaults. He was in command, and all his orders were carried out. Most likely this accounts for there not having been a single instance, as far as I can remember, of any of these wretched persons daring to propose to me a bad or doubtful action. Looking back now with the wisdom of years, I know that sin, depravity and petty vice were not absent from their midst. Yet today, when from the veiled and misty past, memories are brought back to me of these people and scenes, I can see in them only features of deep tragedy, appalling need and grief.

Our childhood and youth! They are the greatest sources of idealism!

Autumn was fast coming into its own. Skies grew cloudier, the country around sank into foggy gloom, and the rain came pouring down in noisy torrents, echoing drearily and sadly through the vaults.

It was pretty hard for me to get away from home in such weather. The best I could do was slip out unnoticed. But when I got home soaking wet, I would hang up my things before the fire and climb meekly into bed, maintaining a philosophic silence in the face of the reproaches heaped upon me by nurse and housemaids.

With every visit I paid my friends, I found Marusya getting worse. She no longer went outdoors; and the grey stone—the dark, silent monster—pursued its fearful work uninterrupted, sucking the life from her puny frame. Most of the time she lay in bed; and Valek and I exerted all our efforts to divert and amuse her in the hope of hearing the silvery tinkle of her faint laughter.

Now that I was at home in the "bad company", Marusya's wistful smile had become as dear to me as my own sister's gay one; moreover there was nobody here to upbraid me for my wickedness, no perpetually fault-finding nurse. Here I was *needed*—my arrival brought a flush of animation to Marusya's cheeks, Valek hugged me like a brother, and Tyburcy at times watched us with a strange look in

his eyes, and a gleam that might have been of tears.

For a while the sky cleared. The last of the rain clouds vanished, and upon the drying earth beamed sunny days again, defying the approach of winter. We carried Marusya out into the sunlight every day, and each time she seemed to revive. Her eyes would open wide as she looked around her, and her cheeks would glow with colour. The breeze with its freshness seemed to infuse the life robbed from her by the grey stones of the vault. But that did not last long.

In the meantime clouds were beginning to gather over my head at home.

Making my way out down our orchard paths, as usual, one morning, I caught sight of my father in the company of Janusz from the castle. The old man was bowing obsequiously and telling something to my father, who stood there glumly, a furrow of impatience and anger cutting deep across his forehead. Presently he flung out his arm, as though to brush Janusz from his way, and said:

"Go! You're nothing but a disgusting gossip-monger!"

But the old man, blinking, his cap in his hand, only scurried up the path, again blocking the way. My father's eyes flashed with anger. Janusz spoke so quietly that I could not make out a word; but my father's curt replies reached me sharp and clear like the lash of a whip.

"I don't believe a word of it.... What have you got against these people? Where are your proofs?... I take no verbal reports, and if you make a written report, you're obliged to bring proof.... Keep your tongue! That's my affair....! won't hear another word."

Finally, my father brushed Janusz aside so brusquely that he dared not annoy him further. Then my father turned down one of the side paths, and I dashed on to the gate.

I had a great dislike for the old owl from the castle, and now after what I witnessed my heart was heavy with foreboding. The conversation I had overheard, I knew, concerned my friends, and perhaps myself as well.

When I told him about it, Tyburcy made a terrible face.

"Eh, youngster, that's unpleasant news. A curse on that old hyena!"

"My father sent him away," I said comfortingly.

"Your father, sonny, is the flower of judges, beginning from Solomon down. Do you know what a *curriculum vitae* means? No! You do not, of course. Look here, the *curriculum vitae* is the life-history of one who has never had anything to do with a court of justice; and if the snoopy old owl has raked up a thing or two from the past, and goes and tells your father my history—I swear by the Holy Virgin, • sonny—I should not like to fall into the judge's hands."

"But surely he is not a hard man?" I asked remembering what Valek had said.

"Oh, no, no, sonny, God forbid that you should think ill of your father. Your father has a heart. And he knows many things.... I wouldn't be surprised if he already knew all Janusz can tell him, but he does nothing because he sees no need in baiting an old toothless beast in his last lair.... Only how can I put it to you, sonny, so you'll understand? See, your father serves a master whose name is Law. He has eyes, he has a heart, only as long as the Law lies asleep on its shelves. But when that master comes down from the shelves and says to your father— 'Well, Judge, isn't it time we went after Tyburcy Drub or whatever that man's name is?'—from that moment on, the judge must lock away his heart. And then the judge's grip is firm, so firm that the earth would sooner rotate backwards than Tyburcy wriggle out of that grip.... Do you understand me, sonny? And for this I respect

your father all the more because he is a faithful servant of the Law, and such persons are rare. Were all its servants like your father, the Law could sleep peacefully on its shelves and never be disturbed at all.... My trouble is that some time in the past—quite long ago—I had something of a disagreement with the law. It was a sudden quarrel, if you get my meaning. But, sonny, it was a bad quarrel."

Having said this, Tyburcy rose, and lifting Marusya up in his arms, retired with her to a far corner, kissing her tenderly and pressing his ugly head to her tiny bosom. I did not stir, and stood for quite a while in the same position, stunned by the strange things this strange man had said to me. For all his fanciful and obscure turns of speech, I had grasped perfectly the essence of what he had said about my father. And in my thoughts my father's figure acquired still greater stature, bathed in an aureole of austere yet appealing strength, of actual grandeur. At the same time, the old feeling of bitter resentment grew as well....

So that was what he was like, my father, I mused, only he did not love me.

IX.

THE DOLL

The sunny days came to an end, and again Marusya grew worse. She met all our efforts to amuse her with an indifferent glassy stare of her big, sombre eyes. And for many days now we had not heard her laugh. I began bringing her my toys, but they held her attention for only the briefest time. It was then that I plucked up courage and appealed to my sister Sonya.

Sonya had a big doll with bright pink cheeks and gorgeous flaxen hair, the gift of our dead mother. I set great hopes on this doll, and, calling Sonya into one of the side paths of our orchard, asked her to give it to me for a short time. At first she only hugged it the tighter; but I begged so earnestly, described to her so vividly the poor sick child, who never had any toys of her own, that in the end she gave the doll to me, promising to play with her other toys for two or three days and say nothing about it to anyone.

The effect produced by this grand porcelain lady exceeded all my expectations. Marusya, drooping like a flower in the autumn, seemed to have suddenly come back to life. She hugged me so! And she laughed most merrily as she conversed with her new acquaintance.... The doll had practically achieved a miracle. Confined to her bed for so many days, Marusya got up again, and walked about, leading her flaxen-haired daughter by the hand. At times she even ran about the vault, shuffling along on her weak little feet.

But for me the doll was the cause of many an anxious moment. First, when I was on my way to the hill with the doll under my jacket, I passed old Janusz in the street, who stared long after me and shook his head. Then, a day or two later, our old nurse noticed that the doll was missing, and began searching for it in every corner of the house. Sonya tried to divert her, but her innocent assurances that she did not need the doll, that it had gone out walking and would soon be back, only

puzzled the servants and aroused the suspicion that the toy had not been simply mislaid. My father knew nothing of this as yet. But Janusz paid another visit, and though my father sent him away with even greater anger than before, I was stopped by him that day on my way to the gate, and ordered to stay at home. Next day, too, I was not allowed out; and it was not until four days later that I was able to get away, climbing the fence and running off before my father was awake.

On the hill the news was bad again. Marusya was in bed and worse than ever. Her face was strangely flushed, her fair hair spread loose over her pillow; she knew no one at all. Beside her lay the doll with its rosy cheeks and silly bright eyes.

I spoke to Valek of my misgivings, and we decided it would be best to take the doll back—the more so that Marusya seemed beyond missing it. But we were mistaken. Half-conscious as she was, she opened her eyes, when I took the doll out of her arms, and stared vacantly in front of her, as though not seeing me or understanding what was going on. And then, unexpectedly, she began to cry very softly, yet so plaintively, and an expression of such poignant grief crossed her thin face through the veil of delirium that in fright I quickly replaced the doll at her side. She smiled and happily pressed the doll to her breast. It came to me then that I was on the point of robbing my little friend of the first and last joy of her brief life.

Valek cast me a timorous glance.

"What will you do?" he asked sadly.

Tyburcy, sitting crestfallen on the bench by the wall, too, turned to me questioningly.

With as good an air of nonchalance as I could muster, I replied, "Never mind! Nurse has probably forgotten about it."

But our old nurse had not forgotten. Coming home that day, I met Janusz in the gateway. I found Sonya with her eyes red from crying; our nurse threw me an angry, withering glance, and mumbled something under her breath with her sunken lips.

My father asked me where I had been. I made my usual answer. He listened gravely, but said nothing, except to order me once again not to leave the house without his permission. The order was final and firmly put; I dared not disobey it, nor did I have the courage to ask for the required permission.

Four weary days elapsed. I wandered drearily about the orchard, looking longingly in the direction of the hill, and waiting for the storm gathering over me to break. I did not know what to expect, but my heart was heavy. I had never in my life been punished; not only had my father never struck me, but I had never so much as heard a sharp word from him. But now I was assailed by dark misgivings.

At last I was summoned to my father, in his study. I entered and paused timidly at the door. Through the window the sorrowful autumn sun was peeping in. My father did not turn to look at me, but went on sitting in his armchair before my mother's portrait. I could hear the pounding of my heart.

He finally turned. I looked up at him, and quickly dropped my eyes. I was terrified at the look in his face. Perhaps half a minute passed during which I could feel his probing and crushing stare.

"Did you take your sister's doll?"

I started at these words, they dropped upon me with such sharp impact.

"Yes," I replied almost inaudibly.

"Were you aware that it was a gift from your mother, something you ought to treasure as a sacred memory?... And you stole it?"

"No," I said, raising my head.

"No, you say?" he cried starting to his feet with a jerk of the armchair. "You stole it, and took it away somewhere!... Where did you take it? Speak up!"

He strode up to me and laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. With an effort I lifted my head and looked up at him. His face was white. The furrow of pain that had appeared in between his brows after my mother's death was as deep as ever, but his eyes now blazed with anger. I shrank from those eyes in which I could see almost frenzy or was it hatred?

"Well then! Speak up!" He tightened the grip of his hand on my shoulder.

"I ... I will not," I answered in a low voice.

"Oh yes, you will!" he said sharply, with a threatening note in his voice.

"I won't," I answered in an even lower tone.

"You will, you will!"

He spoke in a choked, gasping voice, as though he had to force the words out with painful effort. I could feel his hand trembling and thought I heard in his chest the pounding of his rising rage. I hung my head lower and lower, tears welled in my eyes and trickled down onto the floor, but still, barely audibly, I repeated:

"I won't tell ... I'll never tell you—not for anything!"

I showed myself at that moment to be my father's son. Not by the most terrible torments could he have got any other answer out of me. His threats only brought up in me the half-dormant sense of the injury of a rejected child— and of fervid love for my friends at the old chapel who welcomed me so warmly.

My father drew a laboured breath. I shrank, bitter tears scorching my cheeks, and waited.

The feeling I had at that moment could hardly be defined. I knew my father to be hot-tempered, and could see that he was boiling over with rage—any minute now, perhaps, I would find myself helplessly struggling in his iron grip. What would he do to me in his frenzy? Toss me into a corner? Break my bones? But as I see it now, it was not that I feared.... Even in that dreadful moment, I loved my father; my instinct, however, told me that he might by some blind act of violence shatter my love for him completely, so that for ever afterwards, whether I lived under his roof or in later life, I shall nurse that same burning hatred for him as now flashed out at me from his sombre eyes.

I now ceased to be afraid. A feeling of defiance and reckless challenge welled up in my breast. I seemed to be waiting, even hoping, for the worst to happen. If it had to come to this, all the better, be as it may....

Again my father drew a laboured breath. I no longer looked at him, only heard that breath—a heavy, long gasp. I cannot tell to this day if my father had conquered his fury or if the explosion was averted by the sudden and unexpected interruption that occurred just at that crucial moment. A gruff voice was suddenly heard at the open window.

"Ha! My poor young friend!"

"Tyburcy!" flashed through my mind. But his arrival meant nothing to me. Tensely I waited for the blow I was expecting to fall any moment. It never occurred to me, even when I felt my father's hand on my shoulder quiver at the interruption, that Tyburcy's appearance or any other extraneous circumstance might stand between my father and myself, might avert the inevitable outburst

which I now awaited with a surge of reckless, answering anger.

Coming quickly into the house, Tyburcy paused in the doorway of the study. His sharp lynx eyes took in the situation at a glance. I remember the scene to this day in its every detail. A cold, exultant sneer flashed for a moment in the greenish eyes and across the wide ugly face of Tyburcy, the street orator, and just as quickly faded away. He shook his head. When he spoke it was in a sad rather than his usual ironical tone.

"Ha! I find my young friend in quite a predicament."

My father met him with a gloomy stare of surprise, but Tyburcy did not falter beneath it. He was grave now, no longer the clown, and his eyes gazed with an unwonted sadness in them.

"Your Honour!" he said quietly. "You are a just man. Let the child go. He's been in 'bad company', true, but—God is my witness—he's done nothing wrong. And if he's taken a liking to my ragamuffins, why, I swear it, you can have me hanged, before I'll let him suffer for it. Here's your doll, boy!..."

He untied the bundle he was carrying, and there the doll was.

My father relaxed his grip on my shoulder. His face showed great amazement.

"What does it all mean?" he demanded. "Let the boy go," Tyburcy repeated, and he gently stroked my head with his broad hand. "You'll get nothing out of him by threats, whereas I'll gladly tell you what you want to know. Could we step into some other room, Your Honour?"

My father, still staring at Tyburcy amazedly, agreed. As both of them walked out, I remained there, standing alone, overwhelmed by the feelings that surged in me. I was oblivious to the world. And if I do remember to this day the scene in its every particular—down to the frisking of the sparrows outside the window, and the even splash of oar strokes coming from the river—I owe it to the mechanical registering of the mind. At the moment I was aware of nothing, except the existence of a little boy whose heart was shaken and beclouded by two conflicting emotions—wrath and love—as would be a receptacle containing two different liquids. There was such a little boy, and I was that little boy, and apparently I was sorry for myself. Yes—and there were two voices, sounding through the shut door in muffled but animated conversation.

I was still standing where they had left me, when the two men returned. I felt a hand on my head and started. It was my father's hand, gently stroking my hair.

Tyburcy lifted me and sat me down on his lap in my father's presence.

"Come and see us," he said. "I dare say your father will let you come and say farewell to my little girl. She ... she's dead."

Tyburcy's voice quivered, and his eyes blinked strangely. But he got up quickly, set me down on the floor, drew himself up, and strode out of the room.

I looked up questioningly at my father. A different man stood before me, and I now sensed in him the tenderness I had so vainly sought before. He looked at me in his usual thoughtful way, only now there was a hint of amazement and something like a question in his eyes. The storm that had just passed over us had swept away, as it were, the heavy fog that sheathed my father's heart, obscuring the love and kindness underneath. And my father was at last able to discern in me the familiar traits of a son of his own.

Taking his hand trustfully, I said:

"I didn't steal it.... Sonya gave it to me herself for a few days."

"Yes," he replied pensively. "I know. I was wrong, my boy, and I hope you will

try to forget it, won't you?"

I clasped his hand fervently, and kissed it. I now felt that he would never turn upon me that dreadful look of a few minutes past, and a love, long restrained, came surging into my heart.

I was not afraid of him any more.

"May I go to the hill?" I asked suddenly, remembering Tyburcy's invitation.

"Ye-yes, go, my boy, and say good-bye," he said fondly, but with still that hint of puzzlement in his voice. "Though—wait a minute, please, just a minute more, my boy."

He went out into his bedroom, and returned a minute later with some bills, which he thrust into my hand.

"Give them to ... Tyburcy.... Tell him that I kindly beg him—will you remember? — kindly beg him to take the money... as coming from you.... Do you understand? Tell him also," my father seemed to hesitate, "tell him that if he knows one here of the name of Fedorovich, he might warn this Fedorovich that it would be best for him to leave this town. And now go, my boy, go quickly."

It was on the hillside that I caught up with Tyburcy. Clumsily, all out of breath, I delivered my father's message.

"Father ... kindly begs you..." and I pressed the money into his hand.

I did not look into his face. He took the money, and gloomily received the message concerning Fedorovich.

Marusya lay on a bench in a dark corner of the vault. Dead! A child cannot grasp the full meaning of that word. And it was not until I saw her lifeless form that I choked with heartbroken tears. My tiny friend lay grave and sad, her face pathetically drawn, her closed eyes slightly sunken, and the blue shadows under them even more pronounced than before. Her lips were parted in an expression of childish sadness—as though in answer to our tears.

The "Professor" stood behind her, shaking his head listlessly. In a corner the artillery officer was at work with his axe, knocking together, with the help of a few more of the shady characters, a coffin of old boards torn from the chapel roof. Sober and fully mindful of his task, Lavrovsky was decking Marusya in autumn flowers. In another corner Valek was asleep. He quivered in his sleep, and from time to time broke into a convulsive sobbing.

CONCLUSION

Soon after the events I have described the "bad company" dispersed. The "Professor" alone remained, loitering in the town streets to his very last days, and there was Turkevich, too, to whom my father would occasionally give some writing to do. And I shed a good deal of blood in skirmishes with the Jewish boys who tormented the "Professor" by reminding him of the sharp and cutting instruments.

The artillery officer and the rest of the shady characters went away to try their luck elsewhere, Tyburcy and Valek vanished suddenly, and nobody knew where they went to, just as nobody had known where they had come from to our town.

The old chapel fell into greater decay. First, the roof collapsed, and crushed the

ceiling of the underground vaults. Then the ground around the chapel sank in, making it look grimmer still. The owls hooted ever louder in the ruins, and on dark autumn nights, there appeared over the graves startling flashes of a sinister blue light.

But one little grave was lovingly surrounded by a fence, and was bright with fresh green turf and flowers when the spring was back.

Sonya and I used to pay frequent visits to this grave, and sometimes our father would accompany us. We liked to sit there in the shade of a gently whispering birch and look at the town beaming mistily below. Here we read and meditated, shared our first elated and sincere youthful thoughts and dreams.

And when the call came to us to leave this peaceful place, where we were born, we came up there on the last day and full of life and hope made vows over the tiny grave.

1885.

IN BAD COMPANY

This short novel was written by Korolenko at the time of his exile in Yakutia (1881-1884). It first appeared in 1885. According to Korolenko himself, many aspects of the story are drawn from real life, and "the scene of the action is a faithful description" of the town (Rovno) where the writer spent part of his childhood. The character of the Judge embodies some of the features of his own father.