

**The Road to Life
(An Epic of Education)
Volume 2**

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The Road to Life (Volume 2)

1 A JUG OF MILK

We transferred to the new colony on a fine, warm day. The leaves on the trees not yet begun to turn, the grass was still green, as if at the height of its second youth, freshened by the first days of autumn. The new colony itself was at that time like a beauty of thirty years--lovely for itself as well as for others, happy and calm in its assured charm. The Kolomak encircled it on almost all sides, leaving a narrow passage for communication with Goncharovka. The whispering canopy of the luxuriant treetops of our park spread generously over the Kolomak. There was many a shady mysterious nook here, in which one could bathe, cultivate the society of pixies, go fishing, or, at the lowest, exchange confidences with a congenial spirit. Our principal buildings were ranged along the top of the steep bank, and the ingenious and shameless younger boys could jump right out of the windows into the river, leaving their scanty garments on the window sills.

The slope on which the old orchard grew was terraced, and the lowest terrace of all was taken over by Sherre from the very start. It was always airy and sunny here, and the Kolomak, if not particularly adapted to mermaids, fishing, or poetry, flowed broad and calm. Instead of poetry, cabbage and black currants flourished here. The members of the colony went to this plot with strictly practical intentions, armed with spade or hoe, and sometimes a few of the boys accompanied Falcon or Bandit, harnessed to a plough and picking his way with difficulty. Here also was situated our jetty--three planks jutting out over the waves of the Kolomak to a distance of three metres from the bank.

Still further, the Kolomak, curving eastward, generously left at our feet several hectares of lush meadowland, dotted with bushes and copses. We could descend to this meadow straight from our new orchard, and in hours of leisure there was a keen temptation to go and sit on this green slope in the shade of the poplars at the edge of the orchard, for yet another look at meadow, woods, and sky, at the silhouette of

Goncharovka etched on the horizon. Kalina Ivanovich was very fond of this place, and sometimes, at noon, on a Sunday, would get me to go there with him.

I liked talking to Kalina Ivanovich about the peasants and the repairs, about life's inequities, and our own future. Before us lay the meadow, and this circumstance sometimes distracted him from his highly philosophical meanderings.

"You see, old man, life is like a woman--you can't expect justice from either. Anyone with a fine moustache will get any amount of pies and cheesecakes and fritters, and then another comes along, whose beard simply won't grow, let alone a moustache, and the wench won't even give him as much as a draught of water. Now, when I was a hussar.... Oh, you son-of-a-bitch, where's your head? Have you eaten it for supper, or did you leave it at home? Look where you've taken the horse, you parasite! Curse you! There's cabbage planted there!"

Kalina Ivanovich finished up these utterances on his feet, quite a distance from me, brandishing his pipe.

Three hundred metres away, a chestnut-coloured rump could be seen among the grass, but there was no "son-of-a-bitch" in sight. Kalina Ivanovich knew whom he was addressing, though. The meadow was Bratchenko's domain, he was constantly there, unseen, and Kalina Ivanovich's speech was in reality a sort of incantation. After two or three more brief incantations, Bratchenko himself materialized, in keeping with the magical atmosphere, not next to the horse, but just behind us, emerging from the orchard.

"What are you raving about, Kalina Ivanovich? Where's the cabbage, and where's the horse?"

A highly specialized argument ensued, from which, however, it would have been apparent even to the uninitiated that Kalina Ivanovich was quite out-of-date in his views, that he could hardly follow the topography of the colony any more, and had actually forgotten where the field had been cleared to plant cabbages.

The boys allowed Kalina Ivanovich to age in peace. Agricultural affairs had long ago passed exclusively into the hands of Sherre, and Kalina Ivanovich only now and then, by way of meticulous criticism, endeavoured to thrust his old nose into certain chinks in the agricultural armour. Sherre had a way, cool, courteous and jocular, of pinching this nose, and Kalina Ivanovich always beat his retreat.

In our general economy, however, Kalina Ivanovich approached more and more nearly the position of a king, who reigned, but did not rule.

We all recognized his economic majesty and bowed respectfully to his axioms, but we did as we ourselves thought fit. Kalina Ivanovich was not even offended, for he was not a touchy individual, and besides, what he really cared about was philosophizing.

According to long-established tradition, it was Kalina Ivanovich who drove into town, and his journeys were now accompanied by a certain amount of ceremony. He had ever been an advocate of old-fashioned luxury, and the boys were familiar with his utterance:

"Gentlemen keep a grand carriage and a hungry nag, but the good master has a plain cart and a well-fed horse."

The boys would spread fresh hay covered with a clean strip of hand-woven linen on the bottom of the old, hearse-like cart. Then they would harness the best of the horses, and drive up in style to Kalina Ivanovich's porch. All our economic officials and authorities would be doing their jobs --in the pocket of Denis Kudlaty, our assistant manager of supplies, lay a list of all that had to be done in town; Alyoshka Volkov, storekeeper, pushed the necessary boxes, tubs, balls of string, and other necessities for packing, under the hay. Kalina Ivanovich would keep the cart waiting three or four minutes at his porch, and then emerge in a clean, well-pressed raincoat, put a match to his previously prepared pipe, cast a rapid glance at the horse and cart, sometimes muttering through his teeth huffily.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to go into town in such a disreputable cap! What a stupid lot!"

While Denis changes caps with one of his comrades, Kalina Ivanovich clambers up into his seat, and gives his order:

"Let's be off, then!"

In the town Kalina Ivanovich spends most of his time in the office of some food supply bigwig, holding his head upright, and endeavouring to keep up the honour of that strong and wealthy power, the Gorky Colony. To this end, his talk is chiefly of matters of high political importance.

"The muzhiks have all they want," he would declare. "I can tell you that for a fact."

In the meanwhile Denis Kudlaty, in his borrowed cap, would swim and dive in the economic ocean on the floor below, writing out orders, quarrelling with managers and clerks, loading the cart with sacks and bags, taking care to leave Kalina Ivanovich's place inviolate in the process, feeding the horse, and would burst into the office at three o'clock, covered with flour and sawdust.

"Time to go, Kalina Ivanovich!"

A diplomatic smile would light up Kalina Ivanovich's countenance, he would press the director's hand, and ask Denis in a businesslike manner:

"Have you loaded everything properly?"

On arriving at the colony again, the exhausted Kalina Ivanovich would rest, while Denis, hastily swallowing his lukewarm dinner, would journey to-and-fro along the economic channels of the colony, fussing about like an old woman.

Kudlaty was physically unable to bear the sight of waste--he really suffered if straw was scattered from a cart, if anyone lost a padlock, if a cowshed door hung by one hinge. Though sparing of his smiles, he never seemed cross, and the insistence with which he hunted down anyone wasting economic values was never mere nagging, such was the persuasive solidity and restrained will in his voice. He knew how to deal with careless little chaps who believed, in their innocence, that climbing a tree was the most reasonable expenditure of human energy. Denis could

make them come down by a mere movement of his brows.

"Do you think with your head--or what? It'll be time for you to be married, soon, and there you are, perched up in a willow, spoiling your trousers. Come along with me, I'll give you another pair of trousers."

"What trousers?" the little chap would ask, breaking out into a cold sweat.

"Kind of overalls for climbing trees. Who ever saw a person climbing trees in new trousers? Have you ever seen such a person?"

Denis was deeply imbued with the economic spirit and therefore incapable of reacting to human feeling. He could not understand the simple manifestation of human psychology--the little chap had climbed a tree from the very ecstasy inspired by the new trousers he had been given. The trousers and the tree were causally associated, whereas to Denis they were completely incompatible.

Kudlaty's austere policy was, however, a necessity, for our poverty demanded the fiercest economy. Kudlaty was therefore invariably nominated assistant supply manager by the Commanders' Council, and the latter resolutely brushed aside the unmanly complaints of the younger boys as to "unfair" reprisals in regard to trousers. Karabanov, Belukhin, Vershnev, Burun, and other veterans highly appreciated Kudlaty's energy, and submitted without a murmur to the order issued by Kudlaty at a general meeting in the spring:

"Boots to be returned to the storeroom tomorrow, we can go barefoot in the summer."

Denis worked hard in October 1923. The ten detachments of the colony could hardly be got into those buildings which had been put into full repair. In the old mansion, which we called the White House, were the dormitories and classrooms, and in the big hall, which did duty as a verandah, was the carpenters' shop. The dining room was relegated to the basement of the second house, in which were the apartments of the staff. It could not seat more than thirty persons at a time, and so we had to dine in three shifts. The cobblers', wheelwrights' and tailors' shops were huddled into corners quite unlike the halls of industry. No one in the colony had enough space--neither pupils nor staff. And a perpetual reminder of potential prosperity was the two-storey empire-style building in the new orchard, tantalizing us with the spaciousness of its lofty chambers, its ornate plastered ceilings, and the wide, open verandah overlooking the orchard. We had only to put in floors, windows, doors, staircases and stoves, to have splendid dormitories for a hundred and twenty persons, thus freeing other premises for all sorts of pedagogical requirements. But we lacked the six thousand rubles this would have required, and our whole income went on the struggle against the clinging remains of our former poverty, the return to which would have been intolerable for us all. On this front our attack had put an end to the padded jackets, the tattered caps, the camp beds, the wadded quilts handed down from the era of the last Romanov, and the rags for winding around feet. We already had a hairdresser visiting us twice a month, and though he charged ten kopeks for cropping with clippers, and twenty kopeks for a regular haircut, we were able to indulge in the luxury of various styles of haircut. Our furniture, it is true, was still unpainted, we still used wooden soup spoons, and our underclothes were patched, but this was because we converted the greater part of our income into inventory, tools, and other forms of fixed capital.

We did not possess the necessary six thousand rubles, and had no prospect of obtaining it. This sum was continually being brought up--at

general meetings, at the Commanders' Council, in Komsomol speeches, or simply in the talk of our seniors and the twittering of the little ones--and in every case it was conceived of as utterly unattainable in its vastness.

At that time the Gorky Colony was under the authority of the People's Commissariat for Education, from which it received small subsidies according to estimates given. The size of these subsidies may be judged from the fact that twenty-eight rubles per head was annually allotted for clothing. Kalina Ivanovich was indignant.

"Who's the clever chap that assigns such a sum? If only I could have a look at his face, just to know what it's like! I've lived threescore years, you know, and I've never seen anyone like that in the flesh--the parasites!"

I also had never seen such people, though I was often at the People's Commissariat for Education. These figures were not drawn up by a live organizer, but obtained as the result of dividing the sum assigned for waifs and strays in the whole country by their number.

And so, for lack of funds, the Red House, as we familiarly called the empire-style building on the Trepke estate, was swept and garnished as for a ball, but the ball itself was postponed indefinitely. Not even the first dancers--the carpenters--had been invited.

Despite this melancholy state of affairs, however, the colonists were far from low-spirited. Karabanov attributed this last circumstance to our belief in diabolical forces:

"The devil will help us, you'll see! We're always lucky--we're love children....you'll see, if not the devil himself, some other evil spirits will come to our aid--a witch, or something.... I simply can't believe that this house will always be an eyesore to us!"

And so a telegram informing us that on the 6th of October we were to be visited by Bokova, an inspector from the Ukrainian Children's Aid, and that we must send a conveyance for her to meet the Kharkov train was considered extremely important news in leading colony circles, and ideas of immediate application to the repairing of the Red House were expressed by many.

"The old woman could get six thousand rubles for us...."

"How d' you know she's old?"

"It's always old women in the Children's Aid."

Kalina Ivanovich was doubtful.

"You won't get anything from the Children's Aid. I know that very well. She'll ask you if you can't take three boys more. And then, you know, women--equal rights for women in theory, but in reality once a woman, always a woman...."

On the fifth, in the domain of Anton Bratchenko, the two-horse phaeton was washed, and the manes of Red and Mary plaited. Guests from the capital were a rarity in the colony, and Anton was inclined to regard them with profound respect. On the morning of the 6th of October I went to the station, with Bratchenko himself in the driver's seat.

Seated in the carriage, in the station yard, Anton and I examined with an attentive eye all the old women coming out of the station, to see if there was one among them who looked as if she came from the Department of Public Education. Suddenly we heard an inquiry from a person who did not seem to be in our line at all.

"Where is this carriage from?"

"We're here on our own business! There are cabs over there," said Anton a trifle gruffly, through his teeth.

"Aren't you from the Gorky Colony?"

Lifting his feet, Anton described a complete circle around his own axis. I, too, was interested.

Before us stood a most astonishing figure—a light-grey coat of checked material, and beneath it a pair of silk-clad legs. The face was smooth and rosy, with the most wondrous dimples in the cheeks; the eyes sparkled, the brows were finely marked. From beneath a lacy scarf peeped out dazzling blonde ringlets. At her back was a porter holding the lightest of luggage—a bandbox and a travelling bag of fine leather.

"Are you Comrade Bokova?"

"You see! I guessed at once you were from the Gorky Colony!"

Anton pulled himself together, shook his head gravely, and carefully gathered up the reins. Bokova skipped lightly into the carriage, from which the smell of trains and station was driven by quite another smell—fragrant and fresh. I reared into the corner of the seat, greatly embarrassed by this unusual presence.

The whole way Comrade Bokova chattered on the most varied subjects. She had heard a great deal about the Gorky Colony and was simply longing to see what it was like.

"You know, Comrade Makarenko, we have such difficulties—such difficulties!--with these boys. I'm terribly sorry for them, and I should so love to help them somehow. Is this one of your boys? Awfully sweet boy! Aren't you bored here? You know it's awfully boring in these children's homes! We hear such a lot of talk about you. But they say you don't like us."

"Don't like whom?"

"Us--the Social Education Ladies."

"I don't understand."

"They say that's what you call us--ladies Social Education."

"That's news!" I said. "I never called anyone that in my life.., but... it's not bad, really!"

I laughed heartily. Bokova was delighted with the apt designation.

"You know, there's something in it--there are lots of ladies in Social Education. I'm one of them myself. You won't hear anything--er--learned from me. Are you glad?"

Anton kept glancing back from the box, gravely staring from his great eyes at the unusual passenger.

"He keeps looking at me!" laughed Bokova. "Why does he look at me like that?"

Anton reddened and, urging the horses forward, muttered something.

When we arrived we were met by the members of the colony and Kalina Ivanovich--all deeply interested. Semyon Karabanov scratched his head, a gesture which betrayed his embarrassment. Zadorov screwed up one eye and smiled.

I introduced Bokova to the boys, who politely took her to show her the colony. Kalina Ivanovich tugged at my sleeve, asking:

"How are we to feed her?"

"I don't know how they're fed," I replied, mimicking his tone.

"I suppose what she needs is plenty of milk. What d' you think, eh?"

"No, Kalina Ivanovich," I said. "She'll need something a little more solid than that."

"What am I to give her? Perhaps we should slaughter a pig? Eduard Nikolayevich'll never let us."

Kalina Ivanovich went off to see to the feeding of our distinguished visitor, and I hastened after Bokova. She was already on friendly terms with the boys and I heard her say:

"Call me Maria Kondratyevna."

"Maria Kondratyevna! That's fine! Well then, look here, Maria Kondratyevna--this is our hothouse. We made it ourselves. I put in a lot of digging there. Look, my hands are still blistered."

Karabanov displayed a hand like a spade to Maria Kondratyevna.

"Don't you believe him, Maria Kondratyevna! He got those blisters rowing."

Maria Kondratyevna kept turning her fair beautiful head, now freed from the scarf, in the most lively manner, but it was obvious that she felt very little interest in the hothouse and our other achievements.

She was shown the Red House, too.

"Why don't you finish it?" asked Bokova.

"Six thousand rubles," said Zadorov.

"And you haven't any money? Poor things!"

"Have you got lit?" Semyon growled out. "Why, then--d' you know what--let's sit down here on the grass!"

Maria Kondratyevna let herself down gracefully on to the grass right in front of the Red House. The boys described to her in vivid colours our crowded way of life, and the luxurious forms our future would take, if the Red House could be restored.

"You see, we have eighty members now, and then we'd have a hundred and twenty. You see?" Kalina Ivanovich approached from the orchard, Olya Voronova following him with an enormous jug, two earthenware mugs, and half a loaf of rye bread. Maria Kondratyevna gasped:

"How lovely!" she exclaimed. "How nice everything is here! Who's that darling old man? He's a beekeeper, isn't he?"

"No, I'm not a beekeeper," said Kalina Ivanovich, beaming. "And I've never been one, but I tell you this milk is sweeter than honey. It's not the work of some wench, but that of the Gorky Colony. You've never tasted such milk in your life--so cold, so sweet." Maria Kondratyevna clapped her hands and bent over the mug, into which Kalina Ivanovich poured milk as if performing a sacred rite. Zadorov hastened to make the most of this interesting incident.

"You have six thousand rubles lying idle, and we can't repair our house. That's not fair, you know."

Maria Kondratyevna gasped from the cold milk, whispering ecstatically:

"What milk! Never in my life.... It's sheer bliss!"

"And what about the six thousand rubles?" said Zadorov, smiling impudently into her face.

"What a materialist that boy is!" said Maria Kondratyevna, blinking. "You want six thousand rubles--and what do I get for it?"

Zadorov looked round helplessly, and threw out his hands, ready to offer all his wealth in exchange for six thousand rubles. Karabanov wasted no time on thought.

"We can give you as much of that sort of bliss as you like."

"Bliss--what bliss?" asked Maria Kondratyevna, all aglow with colour.

"Cold milk."

Maria Kondratyevna fell on her face on the grass and laughed till she cried.

"Oh, no--you don't get round me with your milk!" she cried. "I'll get you six thousand rubles, hut you'll have to take forty children from me--sweet lads, only just now they're a bit, you know, grimy."

The colonists fell serious, Olya Voronova, swinging the jug like a pendulum, looked into Maria Kondratyevna's eyes.

"Why not?" she said. "We'll take forty children."

"Take me where I can have a wash, I need a nap. I'll get you six thousand rubles."

"You haven't seen our fields yet."

"We'll go to the fields tomorrow. All right?"

Maria Kondratyevna stayed three days with us. By the evening of the very first day she knew the names of many of the members of the colony, chattering with them on a bench in the old orchard late into the night. They rowed her in a boat, they swung her on the giant's stride and on the swings, but she had no time to inspect the fields, and could scarcely find time to sign an agreement with me. Under this agreement the Ukrainian Children's Aid undertook to send us six thousand rubles for the repairing the of the Red House, and we undertook, on the

conclusion of these repairs, to receive forty homeless children from the Ukrainian Children's Aid.

Maria Kondratyevna was enthusiastic about the colony.

"It's a paradise!" she exclaimed. "You have the most splendid--what shall I call them?"

"Angels?"

"N--not angels! People!"

I did not see Maria Kondratyevna off. Bratchenko did not take the driver's seat, and the horses' manes were not plaited. Karabanov, to whose hands Bratchenko entrusted the turnout, sat on the box. His black eyes sparkled, and he seemed to be brimming over with diabolical smiles, which he scattered all over the yard.

"Has the agreement been signed, Anton Semyonovich?" he asked me in undertones.

"Yes," I replied.

"All right, then. I'll show that beauty a ride!" Zadorov pressed Maria Kondratyevna's hand.

"Mind you come in the summer," he said. "You promised, you know."

"I will, I will! I'll take a dacha here."

"Why a dacha? You can come to us."

Maria Kondratyevna bowed all round, bestowing a kind, smiling glance upon all of us.

On his return from the station, Karabanov, unharnessing the horses, seemed worried, and Zadorov listened to him in a worried way, too. I went up to them.

"I told you a witch would help us," said Zadorov, "and that's how it did turn out."

"Maria Kondratyevna isn't a witch!"

"You think all witches are on broomsticks, and have hooked noses! Oh, no! Real witches are beautiful."

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2

OTCHENASH

Bokova did not let us down--we received a money order for six thousand rubles in a week's time, and Kalina Ivanovich went groaning all over the place in a paroxysm of building fever. The fourth detachment under Taranets, which had received orders for making good window frames and doors out of unseasoned wood, was groaning, too. Kalina Ivanovich abused some person unknown:

"May they make him a coffin of unseasoned wood when he dies, the parasite!"

The last act of our four-year struggle with the Trepke ruins had begun. We were all, from Kalina Ivanovich to Shurka Zhevely, seized with the desire to finish the house as quickly as possible. We had to attain, without delay, the goal of which we had so long and consistently dreamed. The lime pits, the tangled weeds, the crooked paths in the park, the rubble and builders' trash all over the yard, were getting on our nerves. And there were only eighty of us. The Sunday Commanders' Councils patiently wrung out of Sherre two or three mixed detachments for the putting in order of our territory. They often got quite cross with Sherre.

"Upon my word, it's going too far! We have no say in anything--it's all cut and dried."

Sherre calmly produced his crumpled notebook, asserting quietly that, on the contrary, everything was behindhand, that there were oceans of work to be done, and that if he gave up two detachments for work in the yard, it was simply because he, too, fully appreciated the necessity of such work, otherwise he would never have given the detachments, but would have set them to sorting seeds, or repairing forcing frames.

The commanders muttered discontentedly, with difficulty finding room in their minds for two conflicting emotions--anger with Sherre for his inflexibility, and admiration for the firm stand he took.

At this time Sherre was just finishing the organization of the six-crop rotation system. All of a sudden everyone seemed to notice how our agricultural undertakings had developed. Some of our colonists were devoted to agriculture, as to their own future, and conspicuous among these was Olya Voronova. But the enthusiasm for the land of Karabanov, Volokhov, Burun and Osadchy, was of an almost purely aesthetic nature. Having, without the slightest thought of personal advantage, fallen in love with farm work, they had gone in for it without a backward glance, connecting it neither with their own future, nor with any of their other tastes. They simply lived and enjoyed life, enjoying each day of intensive work, and looking forward to the morrow as to a holiday. They were confident that all these days were leading them to new and brilliant successes, but what these would be they did not trouble to think. They were all preparing for the *Rabfak*, but here, also, without any definite aspirations--they did not even know which *Rabfak* they wanted to enter.

Others there were in the colony who, while fond of farming, took up a more practical stand. Like Oprishko and Fedorenko, these had no desire to study in our school, and, altogether, laid no special claims upon life, considering with goodhumoured modesty that to cultivate the land, to get themselves a good hut, a horse, and a wife, to work in the summer from sunup to sundown, to gather up everything in the autumn, and put it safely away, to settle down quietly in the winter to the enjoyment of fritters and borshch, cheesecakes and lard, to attend, about twice a month, weddings, saints' days, betrothals or birthday gatherings, was a splendid future for a man.

The case of Olya Voronova was quite different. She cast the thoughtful, anxious glance of a Komsomol on our own and our neighbours' fields; for her, the fields suggested problems, as well as fritters.

Our sixty desyatins of land, on which Sherre worked so hard, did not deter him and his pupils from dreaming of big-scale farming, with a tractor, and furrows a kilometre long. Sherre knew how to interest the members of the colony in this subject, and he had a group of permanent listeners. As well as our own people, Pavel Pavlovich, and Spiridon, the secretary of the Goncharovka Komsomol organization, were constant members of this group.

Pavel Pavlovich Nikolayenko, although already twenty-six years old, was not married and according to village standards an old bachelor. His father, old Nikolayenko, had become a substantial kulak under our very eyes, furtively exploiting boy tramps as farm hands, and at the same time posing as an out-and-out poor peasant.

It may have been on this account that Pavel Pavlovich disliked the paternal hearth, and spent most of his time at the colony, where Sherre employed him for the execution of the more responsible work with the cultivators, and where he had almost the status of an instructor in the eyes of our boys. Pavel Pavlovich was well-read, and could listen intelligently and attentively when Sherre spoke.

Both Pavel Pavlovich and Spiridon were apt to turn the conversation towards peasant themes--they could only think of big-scale farming in terms of peasant holdings. Olya Voronova would gaze steadily at them, her brown eyes becoming warm with sympathy when Pavel Pavlovich said quietly:

"I look at it this way--all around people are working, working, hut not the right way. And if they are to work the right way, they must be taught. And who's to teach them? The muzhik? To hell with him--it's hard enough to teach *him!* Eduard Nikolayevich here, he has reckoned

everything up, and told us what to do. That's right! That's the way to work! But those devils will never work like that! They want to work their own way."

"But the colonists work," cautiously interpolated Spiridon, a man with a wide, clever mouth.

"The colonists," smiled Pavel Pavlovich wistfully. "That's something quite different, you know."

Olya smiled, too, joined her hands with interlaced fingers, as if to crack a nut, and darted a mischievous glance at the top of the poplars. Olya's golden plaits tumbled over her shoulders, followed by the grave grey eyes of Pavel Pavlovich.

"The colony folk don't intend to go in for farming, and yet they work, and the peasants spend their whole life on the land, they have children, and all that...."

"Well, and what about it?" said Spiridon, not getting her point.

"Don't you see?" said Olya in a voice of surprise. "The peasants ought to work still better in a commune."

"What makes you think so?" asked Pavel Pavlovich gently.

Olya looked severely into the eyes of Pavel Pavlovich, and he forgot her plaits for a moment, aware of nothing but this severe, almost unfeminine gaze.

"They ought to!" said Olya. "You know what 'ought to' means, don't you? It's as plain as two and two is four."

Karabanov and Burun listened to this conversation. It had merely theoretical interest for them, like all talk about the "muzhiks," from whom they had dissociated themselves forever. But the tenseness of the moment entertained Karabanov and he could not refrain from taking part in the verbal gymnastics.

"Olya's right," he said. "'Ought to' means they must be taken in hand and compelled...." "And how are you going to compel them?" asked Pavel Pavlovich.

"Somehow or other," said Semyon, warming up to the subject. "How does one compel people? By force! Just you hand all your muzhiks to me, and in a week they'll be working like lambs, and in two weeks they'll be thanking me."

Pavel Pavlovich screwed up his eyes.

"And what's your force? A sock in the jaw?"

Semyon flopped down on to the bench laughing, and Burun explained, restrained contempt in his voice:

"Sock in the jaw--nuts! The real force is a revolver."

Olya turned her face slowly towards him, instructing him patiently:

"It's you who don't understand. If people ought to do a thing, they'll do it without a revolver. They'll do it of their own free will. You only have to tell them properly, explain."

Semyon lifted his head from the bench, his eyeballs distended with astonishment.

"Olya, Olya!" he cried. "You're in a regular muddle! 'Explain!' D'you hear that, Burun? Ha! What's the good of explaining, if a chap *wants* to be a kulak?"

"Who wants to be a kulak?" asked Olya indignantly, opening her eyes wide.

"Who? They all do! Every last one of them. Spiridon, Pavel Pavlovich, all of them!"

Pavel Pavlovich smiled. Spiridon was overwhelmed by the unexpected attack and could only say: "Just fancy!"

"Fancy!" repeated Karabanov. "He's only a Komsomol because he hasn't any land. Just you give him all in one go twenty desyatins, a cow, a sheep; and a good horse,--and there you are! Next thing, he'll be driving *you*, Olya!"

Burun laughed and backed him up, with an air of authority:

"He will, and Pavlo will, too!"

"To hell with you, you bastards!" cried Spiridon, suddenly stung--he reddened and clenched his fists.

Semyon walked around the garden bench, lifting each leg high before he put it down, as an expression of his extreme delight. It was hard to make out if he was in earnest, or just teasing the rustics.

In front of the bench on the grass sat Silanti Semyonovich Otchenash. He had a barrel-shaped head, a red face, a clipped, colourless moustache, and a perfectly bald skull. One seldom comes across people like that now, but lots of them used to rove up and down Russia--

philosophers conversant both with the rights of humanity and the taste of vodka.

"It's true, what Semyon says," he said. "The muzhik--he doesn't understand fellowship, as they say. If he has a horse, he wants to have a foal as well--so that there'll be two horses, and that's all he cares. You see how it is!"

Otchenash gesticulated with a gnarled thumb extended from his clenched fist, and narrowed his white-lashed eyes wisely.

"So it means that horses rule men, does lit?" Spiridon asked angrily.

"That's just it--it's the horses who rule, that's what it is. Horses, and cows, you know! And if he has nothing, he's good for nothing but guarding the melon beds. You see how it is!"

Everyone in our commune liked Silanti. Olya Voronova was fond of him, too. And now she bent over him affectionately, while he turned his broadly smiling face towards her, as to a sun.

"What is it, my beauty?"

"You're old-fashioned, Silanti, old-fashioned. And all around is the new."

No one had any idea where Silanti Semyonovich Olchenash came from. He had simply emerged from the cosmos, trammelled neither by conventions nor property. He wore a coarse linen blouse, and ancient ragged trousers pulled on over his bare legs. He did not so much as carry a staff. This free individual had a special charm for the colonists, and they dragged him into my office with the utmost enthusiasm.

Anton Semyonovich--look who's come to us!"

Silanti looked at me with interest, and smiled back at the little boys like an old friend.

"And is this your what's-his-name-your chief?"

I, also, took an immediate fancy to him.

"Have you come to us on business?" I asked.

Silanti rearranged his features, to make them look at once businesslike and inspiring of confidence.

"It's like this, you see," he said. "I'm a worker myself, and you have work and that's all there is to it."

"What can you do?"

"Well, as they say, where there's no money, a man learns to do anything."

He suddenly burst out into frank, merry laughter. The boys laughed with him, and I laughed, too. And it was clear to all that the only thing to do was to laugh.

"And can you do all sorts of work?"

"Well, almost anything....it's like this, you see--" declared Silanti, by now slightly confused.

"But what exactly?"

"I can plough, and I can harrow," began Silanti, checking off his accomplishments on bent fingers, "and then, I can look after horses, and all sorts of livestock, and do-er-what d'you call it--odd jobs of all sort--carpentry and work in the smithy, and stovemaking. And I'm a housepainter, you know, and I can mend boots. If there's a hut to be built, I can do that, too, and I can slaughter a boar. The only thing I can't do is stand godfather--it's never come my way."

He suddenly burst out laughing, so amused that he had to wipe tears from his eyes.

"Never came your way? You don't mean it!"

"Nobody ever asked me, you see--that's what it is!"

The boys laughed wholeheartedly, and Toska Solovyov fairly squealed, reaching on tiptoe towards Silanti.

"Why didn't anyone ever ask you? Why didn't they ask you?"

Silanti became serious, and, like a good teacher, began to explain to Toska: "It's like this, you see, brother," he said. "Whenever there's a christening on foot I think to myself--they'll ask me! And then somebody richer is found, and there you are!"

"Have you got any papers?" I asked him.

"I did have a paper, quite a short time ago I had a--what's-its-name-document," he said. "But it's like this, you see--I have no pocket, and so, you see, it got lost. But what d'you want documents for, when I'm here myself,--as large as life, you know, standing in front of you?"

"Where did you work before?"

"Where? In all sorts of places! For all sorts of people. Good ones, beasts, all sorts, you know! I tell you straight--I have nothing to conceal--I've worked for all sorts of people."

"Tell me the truth--have you ever gone in for stealing?"

"I'll tell you straight--I've never gone in for stealing. I haven't, and that's the truth! That's how it is, you see!"

Silanti glanced at me in embarrassment. He seemed to think that I might have preferred a different reply.

Silanti stayed to work with us. We tried setting him to work with the livestock for Sherre, but nothing came of our attempt at "organizing" him. Silanti admitted of no limitations whatever in the sphere of human activities--why was he to be allowed to do this, and forbidden to do that? Accordingly, when working for us, he did anything he deemed necessary, just when he deemed it necessary. He regarded all authorities with a smile, and paid no more heed to orders than he would have to speech in a foreign language. In the course of the day he managed to work in the stables, the fields, the hog-house, the farmyard, the smithy, to take part in sessions both of the Pedagogical and the Commanders' Councils. He had an extraordinary gift for discovering, through a sort of sixth sense, the most dangerous spot in the colony, and would be on that spot in a twinkling of an eye, in the role of a responsible person. While rendering nothing to authority, he was always ready to answer for his work, or to submit to abuse and revilings for mistakes and failures. In such cases he would scratch the back of his head and throw out his arms.

"We've made a mess of things," he would admit. "It's like this, you see!"

Silanti Semvonovich Otchenash threw himself into our Komsomol life from his very first day with us, and never failed to hold forth at Komsomol general meetings and at meetings of the bureau. Once he came to me full of righteous indignation.

"Look here," he exclaimed, gesticulating with his thumb, "I went to them--"

"To whom?"

"Oh, to those Komsomols, you know. they wouldn't let me in--it's one of those, you know, closed meetings. I spoke to them nicely--'You cubs,' I said, 'if you shut me out, you'll be green to the day of your death. Born a fool--die a fool, and that's all!'"

"And then what?"

"It's like this, you see--either they don't understand, or they're drunk--but no, they're not drunk. I put it to them. Who are you keeping things from? If it's from Luka, or from Sofron, or Moussi, it's right. But how can you keep me out? Perhaps you don't, as they say, recognize me, or

perhaps you've gone out of your minds.' It's like this, you see--they wouldn't even listen, just laughed, like, what d'you call it, little boys. You talk seriously to them, and they only make fun, and that's all there is to it."

Together with our Komsomol organization Silanti took part in scholastic affairs also.

The first result of the regular Komsomol regime was to set our school on its feet. Till then it had dragged out a somewhat wretched existence, incapable of overcoming the detestation of study felt by many of our members.

This was, it must be admitted, quite comprehensible. The first days of the Gorky Colony had been a time of recuperation from the bitter experiences of their homeless days. In those days modest dreams of becoming shoemakers and carpenters formed a refuge in which overstrained nerves could regain their tone.

The dazzling progress of our collective, and its triumphant fanfare on the shores of the Kolomak did much to bolster up the members of the colony in their own eyes. With very little difficulty we were able to advance in the place of modest shoemaking ideals the fair and moving symbol:

RABFAK

At that time the word *Rabfak* had quite a different significance from that which it now bears. It has become simply the title of a modest scholastic institution. Then it was a banner standing for the deliverance of working-class youth from darkness and ignorance, vivid assertion of the new right of man to knowledge. And all of us at that time regarded the *Rabfak* with what can only be described as tender emotions.

In practice this is how things worked out: by the autumn of 1923, aspirations towards the *Rabfak* had got a hold on almost all our charges. These aspirations had crept into the colony unnoticed, as far back as 1921, when our women teachers had persuaded the ill-starred Raissa to go to the *Rabfak*. Many *Rabfak* students from among the youth of the engine works used to come and see us. The colonists would listen enviously to their stories of the heroic days of the first *Rabfaks*, and this envy helped them to receive our own propaganda work for the *Rabfak* with greater warmth. We urged our charges towards school and learning with the utmost insistence, speaking of the *Rabfak* as of the most glorious path a human being could take. But entry into the *Rabfak* was associated in the eyes of the colonists with an examination of insuperable difficulty, only to be passed, according to eyewitnesses, by prodigies. We had great difficulty in convincing our pupils that it was possible to prepare for this terrible ordeal in our school, too. Many of them could have gone into a *Rabfak* by now, but were prevented from doing so by vague fears, and they decided to remain Let another year at the colony, so as to make quite sure of their preparedness. Such was the ease of Burun, Karabanov, Vershnev, Zadorov. We were particularly impressed by the scholastic ardour of Burun. He hardly ever required encouragement. With silent determination he wrestled with the difficulties of arithmetic and grammar, and even with his own limitations. The merest trifles--a law of grammar, or an arithmetical problem of a certain type--required his utmost exertion, accompanied by much puffing, panting and sweating, but never by irritation or any doubt of the outcome. He was possessed of the fortunate illusion that knowledge was a supremely difficult and brain-taxing thing only to be acquired by extraordinary efforts. He failed, in some miraculous manner, to remark that others took all these difficulties in their stride, that Zadorov never expended a single moment on study beyond the

ordinary school hours, that Karabanov gave himself up to dreams having no connection with his studies even during lessons, inwardly brooding over some trifle of colony life, instead of the problem or the exercise. And at last the time came when Burun was ahead of his comrades, when their brilliant flashes of knowledge appeared but a small thing in comparison with his own solid erudition. Marusya Levchenko was the exact opposite of Burun. She brought with her to the colony an intolerably quarrelsome disposition, noisy hysteria, suspiciousness, and tearfulness. We went through a lot on her account. She was capable, with a kind of drunken abandon and the sweeping impetuosity of a neurotic, to smash into smithereens in the place of a single minute the most precious things--friendship, success, a fine day, a bright, calm evening, the most cherished and the most radiant hopes. There were many cases in which it seemed that there was nothing for it but to take pails of cold water and mercilessly pour them over this intolerable creature, with her eternal, idiotic outbreaks of fire.

The steady resistance of the colony, expressed in terms far from tender, and frequently almost cruel, taught Marusya to control herself, but then she began with the same morbid obstinacy to mock at and torture herself. She had a splendid memory and was clever and extremely goodlooking; there was a deep flush on her dusky cheeks, her great black eyes seemed to emit flames and lightning from beneath the disarming surprise of a calm, pure intelligent forehead. But Marusya was convinced that she was hideous, that she was "a fright," that she understood nothing, and never would understand anything. She attacked the simplest of tasks with preconceived resentment.

"Nothing will come of it, anyhow!" she would exclaim. "You keep on at me--study, study! Teach your Buruns! I'll go out as a servant! What's the good of torturing me, if I'm not good for anything?"

Natalya Markovna Osipova, a sentimental being with angelic eyes and an almost exasperatingly angelic temperament, would melt into tears after working with Marusya.

"I'm fond of her," she would say, "and I do want to teach her, but she sends me to the devil and says it's disgraceful how I pester her. What am I to do?"

I transferred Marusya to the group of Ekaterina Grigoryevna, though I myself feared the consequences of this step, for Ekaterina Grigoryevna placed simple and straightforward demands on people.

Three days after the beginning of term, Ekaterina Grigoryevna brought Marusya to me, closed the door, seated her pupil, who was trembling with rage, on a chair, and said:

"Anton Semyonovich! Here's Marusya--*you* decide what's to be done with her! The miller happens to need a servant. Marusya thinks she'll never be fit for anything but service. Let her go to the miller! But there's another alternative: I guarantee to prepare her for the *Rabfak* by the autumn, she's very capable."

"The *Rabfak*, of course," I said.

Marusya sat on the chair, watching Ekaterina Grigoryevna's calm face from eyes full of hatred.

"But," continued Ekaterina Grigoryevna, "I can't have her insulting me during lessons. I'm a toiler myself, and I'm not to be insulted. If she ever again uses the word 'devil,' or calls me an 'idiot,' I won't work with her."

I understood Ekaterina Grigoryevna's move; but all moves had been tried with Marusya, and my pedagogical imagination no longer burned with the least enthusiasm. I cast a weary glance at Marusya and said, without the slightest affectation:

"Nothing will come of it! She'll go on with her devils and fools and idiots. Marusya has no respect for others, and such an attitude isn't going to pass all at once...."

"I do respect others!" Marusya interrupted me.

"No, you have no respect for anyone," I said. "But what's to be done about it? She's our charge. This is the way I look at it, Ekaterina Grigoryevna: you're a grown-up, wise, experienced person, and Marusya's a bad tempered little girl. Let's not allow ourselves to be upset by her. We'll let her have her own way--let her call you idiot, let her even call you a beast--that's happened too, hasn't it?--and you just take no notice. It'll pass. Do you agree?"

Ekaterina Grigoryevna, smiling, looked at Marusya, and said simply:

"All right. That's the way. I agree."

Marusya's black orbs, shining with tears of mortification, were fixed steadily on me; suddenly she covered her face with her kerchief, and ran weeping from the room.

A week later I asked Ekaterina Grigoryevna: "How's Marusya doing?"

"She's all right. She holds her tongue, but she's very cross with you."

And the next day, late at night, Silianti came to me with Marusya, saying:

"I could hardly drag her to you, as they say. You see, Marusya's very hurt with you, Anton Semyonovich. You just have a talk with her."

He moved modestly to one side. Marusya let her head droop.

"I haven't got anything to say to you," she said. "If they think I'm mad, let them!"

"What are you hurt with me about?" I asked.

"I won't be thought mad!"

"But I don't think you mad."

"Why did you say that to Ekaterina Grigoryevna?"

"Oh, well, I was wrong, there. I thought you'd use all sorts of bad language to her."

Marusya smiled.

"But I don't swear at her."

"You don't? It means I was wrong. Somehow I thought you would."

Marusya's exquisite face lit up with a cautious, mistrustful joy:

"You're always like that--jumping on a person!"

Silanti stepped forward, gesticulating with his cap.

"Don't go on at a fellow! There's a whole lot of you, as they say, and only one of him. What if he did make a little mistake, you shouldn't be offended with him."

Marusya glanced gaily and quickly into Silanti's face.

"You're a blockhead, Silanti!" she said in a ringing voice. "Even if you *are* an old man!"

And she ran out of the office. Silanti waved his cap.

"That's the way it is," he said.

Suddenly he smote his knee with his cap and burst out laughing.

"So that's the way it is, damn the little brat!"

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

3 DOMINANTS

Hardly had the carpenters finished the windows in the Red House, when winter was upon us. That year, winter was kind: downy and mellow with no unhealthy thaws or severe frosts. For three days Kudlaty was busy with the distribution of winter clothing to the colonists. The grooms and pig tenders he gave *valenki*, [High felt boots.-Tr.] the rest got boots, remarkable neither for newness nor style, but possessing many other virtues--solid material, elegant patches, enviable roominess, enabling two sets of legging-strips to find a place in each of them. At that time we hardly knew what a coat was, wearing instead a kind of jacket quilted with wadding, and with padded sleeves--the legacy of the world war. On some heads there appeared caps reminiscent of the tsarist military commissariat. But the majority of the boys had to wear their cotton caps in the winter, too. We were unable at that time to warm the bodies of our charges in a more efficient manner. Winter and summer their trousers and shirts were of a light cotton material. There was therefore in the movements of the boys in the winter a certain superfluous lightness, enabling them to dash from one place to another like shooting stars, even during the severest frost.

Winter evenings in the colony were full of charm. Work was over by five, and there were three hours till supper. Here and there oil lamps were lighted, but it was not this which made for true animation and cosiness. The staves would be set going in dormitory and classroom. There were always two clusters around each stove--one of logs, the other of colonists, and both clusters seemed to be there not so much with a view to heating as for friendly evening chat. The logs began first, as the nimble hands of one of the lads laid them in the stove. They told a long story full of amusing adventures and laughter, shots, pursuit, boyish cheerfulness and triumphant jubilations. The boys could hardly make out their chatter, for the narrators interrupted one another, and all seemed to be in a hurry to get somewhere or other, but the meaning of the story was clear enough, and sank deep into the heart--life is a gay and absorbing adventure. And when the crackling of the wood died down, and the narrators had settled down to ardent repose, merely whispering something with their weary tongues, the boys and girls would begin their stories.

In one of these groups was Vetkovsky. He was famed in the colony as a story-teller, and was always sure of a large audience.

"There are many wonderful things in the world," he would say. "We stick here and never see anything, but there are chaps in the world who

never miss a thing. I met one of them lately. We'd been to the Caspian Sea and had roved about the Caucasus. There's a ravine there, and a cliff, and it's called 'God take me across!' Because there's no other way there's only this one way, you see, past this cliff. Some people get by, and some don't--stones keep rolling down all the time. It's all right so long as one doesn't fall on your noodle, but if it does, you fall right into the abyss and nobody ever finds you."

Zadorov stood by listening attentively and looking with equal attentiveness into Vetkovsky's blue eyes.

"Why don't you go there and try, Kostya?" he would say. "Perhaps God would take you across."

The lads would turn their heads, illuminated by the red glow of the stove, towards Zadorov. Kostya sighed his displeasure. "You don't understand, Shurka," he said. "It would be interesting to see everything. This chap, now, was there."

With his usual irresistible, ironic smile, Zadorov would say:

"I'd ask that chap something else.... Time to close the flue, kids."

"What would you ask him?" inquired Vetkovsky pensively.

Zadorov watched the eager lad who was rattling the shutter over the flue.

"I'd ask him the multiplication table. He's a rotter, after all, travelling all over the world, sponging on people, and growing up an ignoramus--probably he can't even read. 'Take me across,' indeed! Dunces like that deserve to have their heads bashed in. That cliff was put there purposely for them!"

The boys would laugh, and someone volunteered the advice:

"Better stay with us, Kostya! You're no dunce!"

At another stove was Silanti, seated on the floor, his knees wide apart, his bald head gleaming, as he spun a long yarn.

"...We thought everything was tall right, as they say. He was crying and kissing us, the mean guy, but the moment he got to his office, he played a dirty trick. He unleashed his hounds on the town, that's what he did. And the next morning what did we see--mounted police, and everyone was saying we were to be flogged. But my brother and I, we didn't like, as they say, having our trousers taken off, and all that. I was sorry for my girl, you see how it was! But I thought to myself: 'They won't touch the girl...'"

Behind Silanti were planted Kalina Ivanovich's *valenki*, and above them rose the smoke of Kalina Ivanovich's pipe. The smoke from his pipe

descended to the stove, making a sharp angle, bifurcating in two streams around the ears of a bullet-headed little chap, and rushing eagerly into the hot draft of the stove. Winking at me, Kalina Ivanovich interrupted Silanti:

"Hee-hee! Come on, Silanti, just you tell us--did those parasites stroke you on the place your legs grow from, or did they not?"

Silanti jerked his head, and almost falling on the floor, burst out laughing.

"They did, Kalina Ivanovich, you're right there! And all for a wench, damn her!" And the murmuring streams of narrative bowed on around the other stoves, and in the classrooms and in the apartments. Vershnev and Karabanov were sure to be in Lydochka's room, where Lydochka would treat them to tea and jam. The tea did not prevent Vershnev from getting angry with Karabanov.

"All right!" he stammered. "You do nothing but scoff day in, day out. When are you going to start thinking?"

"Why, what is there to think about? Have you a wife, or bullocks, or are your storerooms full of goods? What have you to think about? Just live, that's all!"

"One ought to think about life, you funny chap!"

"You're a fool, Kolka, that's what you are--a fool!" cried Karabanov. "According to you, thinking means settling into an armchair, and staring in front of oneself. But anyone who has a brain will think, anyhow. It's only people like you who need to stoke themselves before they can begin to think."

"Why d'you tease Kolya?" Lydochka would say. "Let him think if he wants to--he might get at something that way."

"Who? Kolka? Not he! D'you know what Kolka is? He's a little Jesus! He's 'seeking the truth.' Have you ever seen such an idiot? He wants the truth! He'd like to grease boots with the truth."

Semyon and Kolya would leave Lydochka the best of friends, Semyon singing at the top of his voice, and Kolya, an affectionate arm around Semyon's waist, still trying to convince him.

"S-s-since there has been a r-r-revolution," he would stammer, "everything ought to be done right."

In my modest abode, also, were visitors. I now had my mother with me, an aged woman, whose life was quietly flowing into the final reaches of eventide, veiled by calm, transparent clouds. The colonists called her "Granny." And now Shurka Zhevely, Mitka Zhevely's younger brother, was visiting her. Shurka had the sharpest of noses. He had been a long time in the colony but didn't seem to grow, though certain parts of him became sharper and sharper, till he was all over points--his nose was sharp, his ears were sharp, his chin was sharp, and his glance was sharp, too.

Shurka always had some odd enterprises or other on foot. Behind a remote bush in the garden he had a bearded-up space in which dwelt a couple of rabbits, and in the stoker's basement he kept a baby raven. At the general meeting the Komsomols would sometimes accuse Shurka of running his "farm," which they said was of a purely private nature, for the purposes of speculation. But Shurka would defend himself vigorously, and not too politely.

"Come on, then, just you prove that I've sold anything! Did you ever see me selling anything?"

"Where d'you get the money from, then?"

"What money?"

"Where did you get the money to buy sweets with yesterday?"

"Call that money? Granny gave me ten kopeks."

Nobody had anything to say against Granny at the general meeting. There were always a few little boys hanging around Granny. Sometimes they would run little errands for her in Goncharovka, but they always tried to keep out of my sight when doing so. And when it was absolutely certain that I was busy and not soon to be expected home, they would flock to Granny's table in groups of two or three, drinking tea, or finishing up some stewed fruit which Granny had made for me, but which I had not had time to eat. Granny, with the failing memory of the aged, did not even know all her friends by name, but Shurka stood out in the crowd, because Shurka was a veteran colonist, and because he was the liveliest and the most talkative of them all.

Shurka had come to Granny today for a most particular and important reason.

"Good day!"

"Good day, Shura! Where have you been all this time? Have you been ill?"

Shurka seated himself on a stool, smiting the knee of his new print trousers with the peak of a once white cap. His head bristled with stubbly flaxen hair, badly in need of clipping. His nose in the air, Shurka regarded the low ceiling.

"I haven't been ill. But my rabbit has.

Granny sat on the bed rummaging in the wooden box which contained most of her possessions--the scraps of stuff, reels of cotton and balls of wool composing a grandmother's treasures.

"Your rabbit's been ill--poor thing! You must feel it!"

"It can't be helped," said Shurka seriously, hardly able to suppress the anxiety in his screwed-up right eye.

"And if you were to try and cure it?" said Granny, looking at Shurka.

"I have nothing to cure it with," whispered Shurka.

"Do you need any medicine?"

"If I could only get some millet--half a glass of millet, that's all!"

"Would you like some tea, Shurka?" asked Granny. "Look, there's a kettle on the stove, and the glasses are over there. Pour some out for me, too."

Shurka laid his cap carefully on the stool and busied himself awkwardly at the high stove, while Granny, not without difficulty, stood on tiptoe and reached down from the shelf the pink bag in which she kept her millet.

Kozyr's domain--the wheelwrights' shed--was the meeting place of the gayest and noisiest company of all. Kozyr slept, as well as worked, there. In the corner of the shed was a low, homemade stove, and on the stove, a kettle. In another corner was a folding bed, covered with a patchwork quilt. Kozyr himself sat on the bed, his visitors on blocks of wood, on technical equipment, on heaps of wheel rims. All did their utmost to wring from Kozyr the abundant store of beliefs which he had accumulated in the course of his life.

Kozyr would smile wistfully:

"It's wrong, my children, it's wrong--God forgive us! the Lord will be angered!"

But before the Lord had time to vent his anger, Kalina Ivanovich got angry. From the dark aperture of the doorway, he emerged into the light, and exclaimed, waving his pipe:

"What are you making fun of an old man for? What business of yours is Jesus Christ, I'd like to know! I'll give you something that'll make you pray not only to Jesus Christ, but to Saint Nicholas, too!"

"May the Lord bless you, Kalina Ivanovich, for standing up for an old man!"

"If there's any more of such goings on, just you come and tell me! You can't manage these tramps without me--I wouldn't count too much on

your Jesus Christs!"

The lads pretended to be afraid of Kalina Ivanovich, hastening out of the wheelwrights shed to disperse themselves about the many other corners of the colony.

We no longer had the big barrack-like dormitories, our charges sleeping in small rooms, holding from six to eight persons. Under this system they were able to consolidate their groupings, and the characteristic features of each group stood out more vividly, making it more interesting to work with them. An eleventh detachment was formed--a detachment of younger ones, organized as a result of the steady insistence of Georgievsky. As before he was always looking after them--tending them, washing them, playing with them and scolding them, indulging them like a mother, filling the toughened souls of the other boys with wonder by his energy and patience. And this marvellous work of Georgievsky's did something to mitigate the unpleasantness which might have arisen from the general conviction that he was the son of an Irkutsk governor.

New teachers were added to the colony. I was still patiently seeking real people, and managed to fish some sort of material out of the not very brilliant pedagogical reserves. It was in the truck garden of the teachers' trade union, where he was working in the capacity of a watchman, that I discovered Pavel Ivanovich Zhurbin. Well-educated, kindly, disciplined, he was a stoic and a true gentleman. He had one feature in particular which I greatly appreciated--a connoisseur's delight in human nature. With the passion of a collector, he would descant upon individual traits of human psychology, the subtle convolutions of personality, the beauties of man's heroism, and the sombre depths of man's baseness. He had thought much of all this, while patiently scrutinizing the human crowd for signs of anything in the shape of new collective laws. I could see that his dilettante enthusiasm would never get him anywhere, but I liked the sincere, pure nature of the man.

Another discovery was Zinovi Ivanovich Butsai. About twenty-seven years old, he had only just graduated from art school and was recommended to us as an artist. We needed an artist, both for the school and for our theatre, and for all sorts of Komsomol activities.

Zinovi Ivanovich impressed us by the extremes to which all his characteristics were carried. He was extremely lean, extremely dark, and spoke in a bass voice so deep that it was hard to keep up a conversation with him, for he seemed to emit ultraviolet sounds. Zinovi Ivanovich was further distinguished by extreme calmness and imperturbability. He came to us in the end of November, and we were all agog to see what artistic innovations were to enrich our life. But Zinovi Ivanovich, before he ever took up his pencil, astonished us by another side of his artistic nature.

A few days after his arrival, the boys informed me that every morning he emerged naked from his room, with his coat slung over his shoulders, and went to bathe in the Kolomak. By the end of November the Kolomak had already begun to freeze, and soon became the colony skating rink. Zinovi Ivanovich, with the help of Otchenash, made a hole in the ice, and continued every day his terrible bathing. Soon after, he took to his bed with an attack of pleurisy which lasted a fortnight. The moment he recovered he was again clambering into the hole. In December he had bronchitis, with complications. Butsai missed lessons and upset our schedule. At last I lost patience, and requested him to stop this nonsense. Zinovi Ivanovich replied huskily:

"I have a right to bathe whenever I see fit! This is not prohibited in the labour code. I have a right, also, to be ill, and therefore no one can make any official accusations against me."

"But Zinovi Ivanovich, old man," I protested, "I'm not doing it officially. Why should you torture yourself? I'm just sorry for you as a human being."

"In that case, I'll explain--my health is poor, my constitution is a scamped job. It's simply disgusting, you see, to have to live with such a constitution. I've made a firm resolution--either I'll harden it, so that I may be able to live with it in peace, or--to hell with it. Let it rip! I had four attacks of pleurisy last year, and this year, it's already December; and I've only had one. I don't think I shall have more than two. I purposely came to you, because there's a river so close at hand here."

I summoned Silanti and shouted at him:

"What's this nonsense? Here's a man going out of his mind, and you make holes in the ice for him."

Silanti extended his arms apologetically.

"Don't be cross, Anton Semyonovich! I couldn't help it, don't you see! I've had to do with a chap like this before. He wanted to depart this life, you see. He had made up his mind to drown himself. The moment you turn your back on him, there he is in the river, the beast. I simply exhausted myself, as they say, dragging him out again and again. And what d'you think--the lousy guy went and hanged himself. And that was a thing that had not come into my head. You see how it is! So I'm not going to get in this one's way, and that's all about it!"

Zinovi Ivanovich went bathing in the ice hole right up to May. The boys at first laughed at the presumption of this weakling, then they gradually began to feel respect for him, patiently tending him when he was laid up with pleurisy, bronchitis and common colds.

But there were weeks at a stretch during which the process of hardening Zinovi Ivanovich's organism was not accompanied by a rise in his temperature, and then it was that his truly artistic nature showed itself. An art circle rapidly came into being under his auspices, its members obtaining a small room in the attic, which they fitted out as a studio.

On sociable winter evenings enthusiastic work went on in Butsai's studio, and the walls of the attic shook with the laughter of the artists and admiring onlookers.

Several persons would be working at a huge cartoon in the light of a great oil lamp. Scratching his coal-black head with the handle of a paint brush, Zinovi Ivanovich would boom out like a choir leader recovering from a drinking bout:

"Add some sepia to Fedorenko! He's a muzhik, and you've made him into a merchant's wife--you lay on crimson lake, whether it's necessary or not!"

Vanka Lapot, carrotty, freckled, with a lowbridged nose, mimicking Zinovi Ivanovich, would answer in the same hoarse bass voice: "I've used up all the sepia on Leshy." It used to get quite noisy of an evening in my office, too. A couple of girl students had recently arrived from Kharkov, bearing a paper stating:

"The Kharkov Pedagogical Institute sends comrades K. Varskaya and R. Landsberg for practical acquaintance with the pedagogical system of work in the Maxim Gorky Colony." I received these representatives of the young pedagogical generation with extreme curiosity. Both K. Varskaya and R. Landsberg were enviably youthful, not more than twenty years apiece. K. Varskaya was a pretty, plump blonde, small and active; she had a tender subtle blush which could only have been done justice to in water colour. Continually knotting her fine, almost invisible brows, and dismissing with an effort of her will the smile that kept rising to her lips, she subjected me to a regular interrogation.

"Do you have a pedagogical room?"

"We have no pedagogical room."

"How do you study personality, then?"

"The personality of the child?" I asked as gravely as I could.

"Yes, of course. The personality of your pupil."

"Why should it be studied?"

"Why? How can you work otherwise? How can you work on material you know nothing about?"

K. Varskaya piped out her words with energy and sincere emotion, continually turning towards her friend. R. Landsberg, dark-skinned, with glorious black plaits, lowered her eyes, restraining her natural indignation with patient indulgence.

"What dominants predominate among your charges?" asked K. Varskaya, sternly resolute.

"If the personality is not studied in the colony," interpolated R. Landsberg quietly, "it's no use talking about dominants."

"Not at all," I said seriously. "I can tell you something about dominants. The same dominants predominate here as they do with yourselves."

"How d'you know what we're like?" asked K. Varskaya in unfriendly tones.

"Aren't you sitting in front of me and talking?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Well--I can see right through you. You sit there just as if you were made of glass, and I see everything going on inside you."

K Varskaya blushed, but just then Karabanov, Vershnev, Zadorov and a few other boys burst into the room.

"May we come in, or are you talking secrets?"

"Of course you can!" I said. "Let me introduce you--our guests, students from Kharkov."

"Guests! That's fine! What are your names?"

"Ksenia Romanovna Varskaya."

"Rakhil Semyonovna Landsberg."

Semyon Karabanov smote his cheek with the palm of his hand, exclaiming in mock alarm:

"Oh, my! Must it be so long? You're just Oksana, aren't you?"

"Very well!" agreed K. Varskaya.

"And you're--Rakhil. Will that do?"

"Just as you like," whispered R. Landsberg.

"All right! Now we can give you some supper. Are you students?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so right away--you must be as hungry as--well, what--Vershnev and Zadorov would say--as dogs. But let's say--as kittens, shall we?"

"As a matter of fact, we are hungry," laughed Oksana. "Is there anywhere we can wash?"

"Come on! We'll hand you over to the girls. You can do what you like there."

Thus passed our first acquaintance. Every evening they came to me, but only for a brief moment. The talk about the study of personality was never revived--Oksana and Rakhil had no time. The kids drew them into the shoreless ocean of colony affairs, amusements and conflicts, familiarizing them with a host of fundamental problems. It was hard for a live human being to avoid the whirlpools and little eddies appearing now and then in the collective; before one had time to turn around, one got sucked in and carried off. It sometimes happened that the current brought somebody right into my office, and threw him there, as if on shore.

One evening an interesting group--Oksana, Rakhil, Silanti and Bratchenko--was thrown up.

Oksana was holding Silanti by the sleeve and laughingly exclaiming:

"Come on, come on, what are you hanging back for?"

Silanti really was hanging back.

"He's carrying out a demoralizing policy in the colony, and you've never noticed it," said Oksana.

"What's the matter, Silanti?" I asked.

Silanti freed his sleeve angrily, and smoothed the top of his bald head. "It's like this, you see," he said. "This here sleigh was left in the yard. Semyon, and these here, took it into their heads to go tobogganing, you see. Anton--there he is!--let him tell you himself."

"They went on and on at me--tobogganing!" said Anton. "Well, I gave Semyon one with the saddle strap, so he was away. But these two would listen to nothing, and kept on tugging at the sleigh, what could I do? If I used the saddle strap, they'd cry. And then Silanti said to them--"

"That's just it!" cried the indignant Oksana. "Let Silanti repeat what he said!"

"What's there to make such a fuss about?" said Silanti. "I told them the truth, and that's all about it. I said: 'You want to get married, and that's why you break up sleighs.' You see how it is."

"That's not all! That's not all!"

"What more? That's all I said."

"He said to Anton: 'Harness her to the sleigh and make her pull you to Goncharovka, that'll quiet her down in a jiffy. Is that what you said?'"

"And I'll say it again--they're healthy wenches, with nothing to do, and we haven't enough horses, you see how it is!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Oksana. "Get out! Get out of here! Quick march!"

Silanti laughed and escaped with Anton from the office. Oksana threw herself on to the sofa, on which Rakhil had been dozing for some time.

"Silanti is an interesting personality," I said. "You should take up the study of it."

Oksana rushed out of the office, but stopped in the doorway to say, in laughing imitation:

"I can see right through him. He's made of glass!"

Rushing out of the door with these parting words, she fell into a crowd of colonists. I heard her voice ring out and then lose itself in the familiar colony vortex.

"Go to bed, Rakhil," I said.

"What? I'm not sleepy, am I? Are you?"

"I'm going."

"All right then.... Of course...."

Rubbing her left eye with her fist, like a child, she pressed my hand and blundered out of the office, catching her shoulder in the frame of the door.

OUR THEATRE

All that has been related in the previous chapter formed only a very slight part of our winter evening occupations. Looking back I feel a certain shame in confessing it--but almost all our spare time was devoted to the theatre.

In the new colony we got possession of a real theatre. It would be difficult to describe the rapture we experienced on having the mill shed placed entirely at our disposal.

Our theatre could have seated up to six hundred persons--as many as the spectators from several villages. The importance of the dramatic circle was greatly increased, and the demand for it increased accordingly.

True, there were certain inconveniences in the theatre. Kalina Ivanovich considered these inconveniences so great that he proposed turning the theatre into a cart shed.

"If you put a cart in it, it won't suffer from the cold," he said, "and you won't have to put a stove in. But for an audience you need stoves."

"All right, then, we'll put stoves in."

"It'll be as much good as a handshake to a beggar. You can see for yourself there's no ceiling there, just an iron roof with nothing under it. When you heat the stove it'll be just heating the kingdom of heaven for the cherubim and seraphim, not the audience. And what sort of a stove can you put in? You'll need some sort of an iron stove, and who's going to let you put in an iron stove--it would be asking for a fire. You'll have to begin the performance and call out the fire brigade at the same time."

But we did not agree with Kalina Ivanovich, especially as Silanti said:

"It's like this, you see. The performance will be free, and a fire won't be any trouble, no one will hold it against us."

We put in various iron stoves, and only heated them during performances. They were never able to heat the theatrical atmosphere, since all the heat from them flew right up and escaped through the iron roof. So that, although the stoves themselves always became red-hot, the spectators preferred to sit in their coats, taking care only that the side next to the stove should not be scorched.

We only once had a fire in our theatre, and that not from a stove, but from a lamp falling on to the stage. A stampede did break out, but it was rather an original one, the audience remaining in their seats, and the colonists clambering up on to the stage in unreigned delight, while Karabanov shouted at them:

"You idiots--haven't you ever seen a fire before?"

We made a real stage--spacious, high, with a complicated system of wrings, and a prompter's box. Behind the stage was a large free space, but we were unable to make use of it. In order to create for the actors a bearable temperature, we screened off from this space a small room, put a temporary stove into it, and made up and changed there, maintaining somehow or other order of precedence and the division of the sexes. In the rest of the space behind the wings, and on the stage itself, it was as cold as out of doors.

In the auditorium were a few dozen rows of plank benches, a vast ocean of seats, a marvellous field for cultural work, fairly asking to be sown and reaped.

Our theatrical activity in the new colony developed very rapidly, and in the course of three winters, its tempo never for a moment relaxing, and its scope never contracting, it expanded to such imposing dimensions that it is hard for me to believe now what I am writing.

During the winter season we produced about forty plays, but we never went in for the usual light entertainment found in clubs, offering only full-length, serious plays in four and five acts, mostly taken from the repertoire of the theatres in the capital. This may have been the most incomparable cheek, but it was certainly not hack work.

From our third performance, the fame of our theatre spread far beyond the boundaries of Goncharovka. We were visited by the inhabitants of Pirogovka, Grabilovka, Babichevka, Gontsy, Vatsy, Storozhevoye, by the dwellers in the Volovy, Chumatsky, Ozersky farmsteads, by workers from suburban settlements, railway workers from the station and from the engine works; and soon the town dwellers also began to come to us--teachers, people from the Department of Public Education, military men, Soviet employees, co-operative employees and supply workers, and just young men and girls, friends of our own boys and girls, and friends of their friends. By the end of the first winter, on Saturdays, a regular encampment of folk from afar would begin from dinner-time to form around our theatre shed. Moustached individuals in sheepskins and heavy coats would be unharnessing their horses, covering them with sacking and horse blankets and clattering with their pails around the well sweep, while their womenfolk, muffled up to the eyes, after dancing about in front of the shed to warm their feet, chilled by the journey, would run into the bedrooms of our girls, swaying on their high ironshod heels, to warm themselves and renew recently formed friendships. Many of them drew out bags and bundles from beneath the straw. They had brought with them provisions for the distant theatrical excursion--pies, wheat cakes, squares of lard scored across, and various kinds of sausages. A great part of these provisions was intended for treating the members of the colony, and there were sometimes regular feasts, until the Komsomol Bureau flatly prohibited the acceptance of any presents whatsoever from visiting spectators.

On Saturdays the stoves in the theatre were heated from two o'clock, to enable our visitors to warm themselves. But the closer their acquaintance with us, the more they tended to make their way into the premises of the colony. Even in the dining room a group of privileged visitors could be seen, general favourites whom our monitors felt entitled to invite to the table.

The performances came heavy on the funds of the colony. Forty or fifty rubles went on costumes, wigs and other appurtenances. One way or another about two hundred rubles a month was spent. This was a great outlay, but we never sank so low as to charge our spectators a single

kopek by way of entrance fee. It was the young people we aimed at, and the village youth, especially the girls, never had any pocket money.

At first no tickets were required for entrance to the theatre, but the time soon came when the shed could no longer hold all who wanted to come, and we had to introduce a system of tickets, distributed beforehand among the Komsomol organizations, the Village Soviets, and our own particular local representatives.

To our surprise we encountered remarkable eagerness for the theatre on the part of the rural population. Quarrels and misunderstandings over tickets were continually arising between individual villages. Agitated secretaries would use quite aggressive language to us:

"Why have we only been given thirty tickets for tomorrow?"

Zhorka Volkov, the box-office manager, would shake his head sarcastically in the face of the secretary.

"Even that's a lot for you."

"A lot! You sit here like bureaucrats, and you think you know what's a lot for us!"

"We sit here, and we see how the priest's daughters come in on our tickets."

"The priest's daughters! What d'you mean?"

"The priest's daughters. The red-haired ones."

Recognizing the description of the local priest's daughters, the secretary changed his tone, but stuck to his guns.

"Well, all right--the two daughters of the priest. But why did you cut us down twenty tickets? There used to be fifty, and now we only get thirty."

"We've lost confidence in you," replied Zhorka severely. "Two priest's daughters, and how many priests' wives and shopkeepers' wives we don't know. It's not our business to find out how far the rot has spread among you."

"And who's the son-of-a-bitch who gave us away, I'd like to know?"

"We don't keep a list of sons-of-bitches either. Thirty's a lot for you."

The secretary, stung to the quick, hastened home to investigate the newly-discovered rot, but his place would instantly be filled by another

malcontent.

"What d'you mean by this, Comrade? We have fifty Komsomols, and you send us only fifteen tickets!"

"According to the report of mixed detachment 6-P, only fifteen sober Komsomols came last time, and four of these were old women. All the rest were drunk."

"Nothing of the sort! Whoever says they were drunk is lying. Our members work at the distillery, and of course they smell of the fumes...."

"We checked up on them--their breaths smelt, it's no good trying to put it on to the distillery."

"I'll bring them to you, you'll see for yourself, they always smell, and you're just trying to pick holes, and invent things. What sort of a line d'you call this?"

"None of that! We always know when they only smell because of their work, and when they're drunk."

"Well, add five tickets at least--you ought to be ashamed of yourselves! You give out tickets to all sorts of girls in the town, and friends, and our Komsomols come last."

Suddenly we realized that the theatre was no mere entertainment or amusement for ourselves, but our duty, an inevitable social tax, the payment of which could not be evaded.

Our Komsomol Bureau thought it over earnestly. The dramatic circle could not carry such a weight on its shoulders. It had become unthinkable for a single Saturday to pass without a performance, and we gave a different play every week. To repeat a performance would have been to lower our banner, and spoil an evening for our nearest neighbours, who were our constant visitors. Various complications arose in the dramatic circle.

Even Karabanov cried for quarter.

"Am I a pack-horse, or what? Last week I was a high priest, this week a general, and now you want me to be a guerrilla fighter. D'you think I'm made of iron? Rehearsals every night up till two, and on Saturdays move tables and do scene shifting!"

Koval, supporting himself on his fists, which were pressed against the table, shouted:

"Perhaps you'd like a couch put under a pear tree for you to rest on? It's got to be done!"

"If it's got to be done, then organize it so that everyone works."

"We will organize it."

"Go on then--organize!"

"Call a Commanders' Council!"

At the Commanders' Council the Bureau resolved: no more dramatic circle--everyone must take part, and no nonsense!

In the Council they were fond of formulating matters by an order. This is how they formulated it:

#5

By resolution of the Commanders' Council, work on preparations for performances to be considered binding on each member of the colony, hence mixed detachments are assigned for work in connection with the performance of *The Adventures of the Non-Such Tribe*.

Further followed a list of mixed detachments, as if the matter was not one of high art, but of weeding beetroot, or earthing potatoes. The profanation of art began with the appointment of mixed detachment 6-A, consisting of twenty-eight persons under the command of Vershnev, for work on a given performance, instead of the dramatic circle.

And the mixed detachment meant compulsory attendance and no unpunctuality, offenders named in the evening report, the commanders' order, the familiar "Very good!", accompanied by a salute; the slightest dereliction of duty was brought before the Commanders' Council or the general meeting, as breach of colony discipline, of which the result at the best would be a talking-to from me, and a few extra jobs or home arrest on a non-working day.

This was a real reform. After all, the dramatic circle was a voluntary organization, and as such always a little inclined to excessive "democratism" and fluctuation in membership, moreover, a dramatic circle is always the battlefield of individual tastes and claims. This was especially noticeable during the choice of a play and the distribution of roles. And in our dramatic circle the personal element, also, was beginning to make itself felt. But a resolution of the Bureau and the Commanders' Council was accepted in the colony as a settled thing, admitting of no doubts, and a theatre in the colony was thus placed upon the same footing as work on the land, the repairing of the estate, order and cleanliness within doors. The particular part taken by this or that colonist in connection with a performance had become a matter of indifference so far as the colony's interests were concerned--each must do what was demanded of him.

As a rule I announced at the Sunday Commanders' Council the play for the following Saturday, and the names of the colonists cast for the respective roles. All these colonists were immediately included in 6-A Mixed, and a commander appointed from among their number. The

rest were divided up into theatrical mixed detachments, all hearing the number 6, and functioning till the end of a given performance. There were the following mixed detachments:

Six-A.....actors
Six-S.....spectators
Six-W.....wardrobe
Six-H.....heating
Six-Sc.....scenery
Six-P.....properties
Six-LE.....lighting- and stage-effects
Six-CU.....cleaning up
Six-SE.....sound-effects
Six-C.....curtain

If it is borne in mind that up till now there were only eighty colonists, it will be quite obvious that there was never a single colonist left over, and if the play chosen had a great many characters in it, our forces were quite inadequate. While making up the mixed detachments, the Commanders' Council naturally did its best to take into account individual desires and inclinations, but this was not always possible. It often happened that a colonist would ask:

"Why have I been appointed to 6-A? I've never acted in my life!"

"You're talking like a muzhik," he would be told. "Everybody has to act for the first time one day or other."

Throughout the week all these mixed detachments, especially their commanders, spent their spare time rushing about the colony, and even the town, like madmen. It was not our way to accept excuses, however good, and our mixed detachment commanders were often in difficulties. True, we had friends in the town, and there were many who sympathized with our cause. Thus, for example, we were almost always able to get hold of suitable costumes for any play whatsoever, and when this was impossible, 6-W Mixed knew how to make them for any historical period, and in any number, from all sorts of stuff, and from various articles in the colony itself. It was, moreover, considered that not only anything belonging to the colony, but also anything belonging to the staff was entirely at the disposal of our theatrical detachments. Six-P Mixed, for example, was firmly convinced that properties were so named because they were the property of the staff. With the development of our enterprise, permanent theatrical supplies began to be accumulated, to a limited extent, within the colony. Since we frequently produced plays of a military nature, demanding the firing of shots, we acquired a veritable arsenal, as well as all sorts of military uniforms, shoulder straps and medals. Gradually experts, and these not only actors, began to emerge from the colony collective. We had splendid machine gunners, producing, with the aid of inventions of their own, proper machine-gun fire, and there were artillerymen, Elijahs, who could produce the most convincing thunder and lightning.

One week was allowed for the study of roles. At first we tried to do the thing properly--copying out the parts and trying to memorize them--

but we soon gave this up. There was no time either for copying or memorizing, for after all we had our everyday work to do in the colony, and school to attend, and the learning of lessons had to come first. Ignoring all theatrical conventions, we relied entirely upon the prompter, and it was a good thing we did. The colonists became adepts at picking up their words from the prompter; we even allowed ourselves the luxury of fighting against individual interpolations and all sorts of license on the stage. But for a performance to go smoothly it was necessary for me to add to my duties as producer those of prompter, whose functions comprised not only prompting, but the direction of all that went on on the stage as well--seeing to correct staging, pointing out mistakes, timing shots, embraces and deaths.

We never suffered a dearth of actors. There were many gifted individuals among the colonists. Our star performers were Pyotr Ivanovich Gorovich, Karabanov, Vetkovsky, Butsai, Vershnev, Zadorov, Marusya Levchenko, Kudlaty, Koval, Gleiser and Lapot.

We tried to select plays with a long list of characters, for a great many of the colonists wanted to act, and we were anxious to increase the number of persons capable of behaving naturally on the stage. I attributed great importance to the theatre, since through its agency the colonists' way of speaking was greatly improved, and their horizons broadened. Sometimes, however, we did not have enough actors, and then we invited members of the staff to help us out. Once we even made Silanti go on stage. At rehearsals he showed himself to be but an indifferent actor, but as he only had to utter the one sentence. "The train will be three hours late," the risk was not great. But the reality exceeded our expectations.

Silanti came on at the proper moment, and seemed to be all right, but what he said was: "This here train, you see, it's three hours late, and that's how it is."

This statement produced an extraordinary impression on the audience, but that was nothing--it produced a still greater impression on the crowd of refugees waiting at the station. These waltzed about the stage in utter helplessness, paying not the slightest heed to my appeals from the prompter's box, the more so that I myself was obviously not unmoved. Silanti observed all these goings-on for a few moments, and then lost his temper.

"You've been told, you oafs, you! This here train will be three hours late--what's so funny?"

The refugees heard Silanti out with delight, and then rushed off stage in panic. I recovered my senses, and whispered:

"Get the hell out of here! Silanti, just you go to the devil!"

"Well, you see!

I stood the book on end--a signal for the curtain to be lowered.

It was difficult to get actresses. Levchenko and Nastya Nochevnaya could act after a fashion but no one excepting Lydochka could be found among the staff. And these women were not born for the stage; they were too shy, flatly refusing to take part in embracing or kissing, even

when the play absolutely demanded this. And we could not get on without lovers. In our search for actresses, we tried out all the wives, sisters, aunts, and other relatives of our staff, and the people at the mill, and persuaded friends in the town to lend a hand, and even then could hardly get ourselves provided. And so the day after their arrival at the colony, Oksana and Rakhil were already taking part in rehearsals, winning our admiration by their marked ability to kiss without the slightest embarrassment.

Once we managed to rope in a chance spectator, some friend of the miller's, arriving from town on a visit. She turned out to be a treasure--her beauty, her soft rich voice, her eyes, her gait--she had everything required for the part of some depraved great lady in a revolutionary play. At rehearsals we melted with pleasure, and looked forward to a brilliant success on the first night. The performance started off with the utmost verve, but in the first interval the treasure's husband, a railway telegraph operator, came backstage and said to his wife, in front of the whole troupe:

"I can't allow you to act in this play. Come on home!"

The treasure whispered in dismay: "How can I? What about the play?"

"The play is none of my business. Come on! I'm not going to allow my wife to be hugged and pulled about the stage by all and sundry!"

"We can't do that!"

"You've been kissed ten times in the first scene alone. It's disgusting!" At first we were simply aghast. Then we tried to talk the jealous spouse round.

"But Comrade, kissing on the stage means nothing," said Karabanov.

"I can see whether it means anything or not. D'you think I'm blind? I was sitting in the front row."

I addressed Lapot.

"You're a clever chap, try to get round him somehow or other!"

Lapot went to work with the utmost thoroughness. He caught hold of the jealous spouse by the button, seated him on a bench, and began murmuring caressingly in his ear.

"You're a funny chap! And such a useful, cultured cause, too! If your wife kisses somebody in such a good cause, nothing but good can come of it!"

"It may be good for somebody, but it's not a good for me," insisted the telegraphist.

"But it's good for everyone!"

"According to you, then, anyone can kiss my wife!"

"Funny chap! It's better than if she found one guy to do it."

"What guy?"

"It happens sometimes. And then, think! Here it's in front of everyone, and you see it, too. It would be much worse if it was somewhere under a bush, without you knowing anything about it."

"She wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't she? Your wife kisses so nicely--do you think, with her talent, she'll let it run to waste? Better she should do it on the stage."

The husband with difficulty allowed himself to be won over by Lapot's arguments, and, setting his teeth, permitted his wife to finish the play, on the sole condition that the kisses were not to be "real" ones. He left us still resentful. The treasure was upset. We were afraid the performance would be ruined. The husband sat in the front row, hypnotizing everyone, like a boa constrictor. The second act proceeded in a funereal atmosphere, but to the delight of all, by the third act the husband was no longer in the front row. I couldn't think where he had got to. The mystery was only cleared up after the performance.

"I advised him to go," said Karabanov modestly. "At first he didn't want to, but then he agreed."

"How did you do it?"

Karabanov's eyes flashed, he pulled a diabolical grimace, and hissed:

"Listen! We'd better come to an understanding. Today everything'll be all right, but if you don't go at once, I give you my colonist's word of honour, we'll make a cuckold of you. We have such guys here that your wife won't be able to resist them!"

"And then what?" asked the actors delightedly.

"Nothing! He only said: 'Very well, see you keep your promise,' and went to the last row." There were rehearsals every day, and the whole play would be gone through. We did not get enough sleep as a rule. It must be borne in mind that many of our actors were still unable to cross

the stage properly, and so whole episodes had to be learnt by heart, beginning with a single movement of a hand or foot, a single pose of the head, a glance, a turn. It was to all this that I turned my attention, trusting that the lines would be supplied by the prompter, anyhow. By Saturday evening the play would be considered ready.

It must, however, be admitted that we did not act badly--many of the townspeople were very pleased with our performances. We tried to act artistically, without overdoing it, or pandering to the tastes of the public, or striving after cheap success. We produced Ukrainian plays and Russian plays.

On Saturdays things got lively around the theatre from two o'clock onwards. If there were many characters, Butsai, assisted by Pyotr Ivanovich, would begin making them up immediately after dinner. From two to eight p. m. they could get as many as sixty people ready, and make themselves up afterwards.

When it was a matter of getting properties for a performance the colonists behaved more like wild beasts than human beings. If a lamp with a blue shade was needed on the stage they would raid not only the rooms of the staff, but the rooms of friends in town, and the lamp with the blue shade would be sure to be forthcoming. If they sat down to supper on the stage, the supper must be a real one, without any evasions. This was demanded not only by the thoroughness of 6-P Mixed, but by tradition. To have supped on the stage upon dummy dishes would have seemed to our actors unworthy of the colony. Our kitchen, therefore, was sometimes confronted with difficult tasks--the preparation of hors d'oeuvres and entrees, the baking of pies and cakes. For wine we used cider.

In my prompter's box I was always in a twitter during a supper scene: the actors at such moments became so engrossed in their roles that they ceased to heed the prompter, dragging the scene out till nothing was left on the table. I was usually forced to speed up a scene by such remarks as:

"That'll do! D'you hear? Stop eating, confound you!"

The actors would glance at me in astonishment, motioning with their eyes towards a half-eaten goose, and would only leave the table when, in a white heat of rage, I would hiss:

"Karabanov--get up from the table! Semyon, you devil, say: 'I'm off!' "

Karabanov would hastily bolt the half-chewed mouthful of goose, and say:

"I'm off!"

And in the wings, during the interval, I would be reproached.

"Anton Semyonovich, how could you? How often does one get a chance to eat such a goose? And you wouldn't let us finish it!"

But the actors were not as a rule anxious to stay too long on the stage, where it was as cold as out of doors.

In *The Riot of the Machines* Karabanov had to stay a whole hour on the stage, with nothing on but a loincloth. The performance took place in February, and, unluckily for us, the thermometer sometimes fell to thirty degrees below zero. Ekaterina Grigoryevna insisted on the performance being cancelled, assuring us that Semyon would certainly be frozen. But everything was all right--only Semyon's toes were frozen, and after the act Ekaterina Grigoryevna rubbed him with some sort of a warming mixture.

But the cold did sometimes stand in the way of our artistic development. We were giving a play called *Comrade Semivzvodny*. The scene was laid in the garden of a landowner, and there was supposed to be a statue. Six-P Mixed could find no statue, though they looked in all the town cemeteries, and they decided to do without. But when the curtain went up, to my astonishment I did see a statue--there was Shelaputin thickly powdered with chalk, and wrapped in a sheet, looking slyly down at me from a draped stool. I lowered the curtain and chivied the statue off the stage, to the great disappointment of 6-P Mixed.

The efforts of 6-SE Mixed (sound-effects) were particularly conscientious and ingenious. We were producing *Azev*. Sazonov was to throw a bomb at Plehve. The bomb was to explode. Osadchy, the commander of 6-SE mixed, declared:

"We'll make that a real explosion."

Since I was acting Plehve myself, I was more interested in this question than anyone else.

"And what d'you mean by 'real'?" I inquired.

"One which could blow the theatre to smithereens."

"That's a bit too much," I said cautiously.

"It'll be all right," Osadchy assured me. "It'll all come right in the end."

Before the scene with the explosion, Osadchy showed me his preparations--in front of the wings were placed a few empty tubs, beside each tub stood a colonist with a double-barrelled gun, charged with about enough to kill an elephant. On the other side of the stage, bits of glass were strewn about the floor, a colonist with a brick posted beside each bit. On the third side, opposite the entrance to the stage, about half a dozen kids were placed with lighted candles in front of them, and bottles containing liquid of some sort in their hands.

"What's the funeral for?" I asked.

"That's the chief thing. They've got paraffin. When the time comes they'll fill their mouths with paraffin and blow it on to the candles. It'll be splendid!"

"Confound you! There might be a fire!"

"Don't worry, only take care not to get any paraffin in your eyes--if there's a fire we'll put it out."

He pointed to yet another line of colonists, at whose feet were pails full of water.

Surrounded on three sides by these preparations, I began to feel in sober earnest the unfortunate minister's sense of impending doom. I told myself quite seriously that, inasmuch as I personally was not required to answer for all the crimes of Plehve, I had the right, if the worst came to the worst, to escape through the auditorium. I endeavoured once more to moderate the conscientious zeal of Osadchy.

"But can paraffin be extinguished with water?" I asked.

Osadchy was invulnerable, he knew all this side of the business and could explain it in the most erudite manner.

"When paraffin is blown on to the flame of a candle, it is converted into gas, and does not require extinguishing. Other objects may have to be extinguished."

"Me, for example?"

"We'll put you out first of all."

I submitted to my fate. If I was not burned to death I should at least be doused with cold water, and that at a temperature of nearly twenty degrees below zero! But how could I expose my pusillanimity in front of the whole of 6-SE Mixed, which had expended so much energy and inventiveness on the preparations for the explosion?

When Sazonov threw the bomb I once more had the opportunity of getting into Plehve's skin, and I did not envy him. The hunting rifles were fired at the tubs, and the tubs shivered, bursting their hoops and my eardrums, the bricks descended with terrific force upon the glass, five or six mouths blew the paraffin with all the force of youthful lungs on to the candle flames, and the whole stage was suddenly converted into a suffocating, flaming vortex. I could not have played my own death badly if I had wanted to, and fell down almost unconscious, beneath a deafening roar of applause and the enthusiastic yells of 6-SE Mixed. From above, 'black, greasy paraffin ash fell upon me. The curtain was drawn, and Osadchy helped me up by my armpits, asking anxiously:

"You're not burning anywhere?"

I was burning inwardly, but I said nothing about that--who knows what 6-SE Mixed had prepared for such a contingency!

In the same way we blew up a steamer during one of its unfortunate cruises to the revolutionary shores of the U.S.S.R. The mechanics of this event were still more complicated. Not only was it necessary for a spurt of flame to come out of every porthole, but it had to be shown that the steamer really did go up into the air. For this purpose a few colonists look up their position on the other side of the steamer, and threw up boards, chairs and stools. They managed to shelter their heads from all these objects, but the captain, Pyotr Ivanovich Gorovich, was not so fortunate--the paper gold lace on his sleeves caught fire, and he was badly bruised by the falling furniture. However, not only did he not complain, but we had to wait half an hour, till he had his laugh out, before we could learn for certain that all the captain's organs were in order.

There were some parts which were difficult for us to play. The colonists refused to admit, for example, of any shots "off stage." If you were to be shot, then you must prepare yourself for a severe ordeal. For your murder, an ordinary revolver was usually employed, the bullets removed from the cartridges, and all the free space stuffed with hemp and wadding. At the critical moment a volley of fire would be poured out on you, and as the marksman would inevitably be carried away by his role, he was sure to aim at your eyes. If several shots were to be fired, the whole of the barrel would be filled for your benefit, using the same infernal device.

The audience, after all, had the advantage of us: they could sit in warm coats, with stoves placed about the room, and the only prohibitions were against nibbling sunflower seeds and arriving drunk at the theatre. According to an old tradition, any citizen found, after the most searching investigation, to smell the least little bit of spirits, was considered drunk. The colonists were able to spot persons giving off this smell, or even the hint of it, among several hundred spectators, and were still better able to drag them from their seats, and turn them out of the theatre in disgrace, ruthlessly ignoring the most plausible protests:

"Upon my word, I've had nothing but a mug of beer I drank in the morning!"

As producer I had yet more sufferings, both during and before performances. There was a certain phrase, for example, which Kudlaty boggled every time, with ridiculous effect, and while the colonists acted splendidly in Gogol's *Inspector General*, by the end of the performance they had reduced me to blind fury, for even my strong nerves could not bear it when, in the last act, my fellow actors insisted on calling me Anton Semyonovich, while I was acting the part of the Governor--Anton *Antonovich*. In their version the scene went as follows:

Amos Fedorovich: Is it true, Anton Semyonovich? Has such an extraordinary stroke of luck come your way?

Artemi Filippovich: I have the honour to congratulate Anton Semyonovich on his extraordinary good fortune. I rejoiced cordially when I heard of it. Anna Andreyevna! Maria Antonovna!

Rastakovsky: Anton Semyonovich, I congratulate you! God send you and the young couple long life and an innumerable progeny. grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Anna Andreyevna! Maria Antonovna!

Korobkin: I have the honour to congratulate Anton Semyonovich!

The worst of it was that on the stage, in my Governor's uniform, I had no way of dealing with these monsters. I was only able to give vent to my wrath in the wings, after the final dumb-show scene.

"Confound you--what's all this? Were you making a fool of me? Was it on purpose?"

Astonished countenances gazed at me, and Zadorov, who had been playing the postmaster, asked:

"What's the matter? What's happened? It all went so well!"

"Why did you call me Anton Semyonovich?"

"And how ought we to.... So we did!... Damn!...the Governor is Anton *Antonovich*, so he is!"

"At the rehearsals you called me right."

"What the hell... that was rehearsals, and somehow on the stage one loses one's head...."

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

5

KULAK EDUCATION

On the 26th of March we celebrated the anniversary of A. M. Gorky's birthday. We kept other anniversaries too, but of these later. We tried to have our celebrations well attended, and our tables well provided, and the colonists, it must be said, enjoyed celebrating, especially preparing for it. But Gorky's birthday had a particular charm for us. On that day we welcomed in the spring. That was one thing. Sometimes it would happen that the boys would set out the festive boards--out of doors, of course!--so that we could all sit together and feast, when suddenly a hostile gust would come from the east, keen, cruel sleet would come down, the puddles in the yard would wrinkle over, and the drums, all

drawn up to salute the colours in honour of our celebrations, would be damp. Just the same a colonist would give a squinting glance towards the east land say: "How it smells of spring!" There was one feature of our Gorky celebrations which we invented ourselves and of which we were inordinately proud and fond. The colonists had long ago determined that we would celebrate on that day "with all our might," but that we would not invite a single outsider. Anyone taking it into his head to come, would be a welcome guest, just because he had come on his own initiative, but this was a family holiday, and there was no part for outsiders in it. And truly, everything was always very simple and intimate, drawing the Gorkytes still closer, although there was nothing domestic about the forms of the celebrations themselves. We began with a parade, solemnly bringing out the banner; speeches were made, and then there was a solemn march past the portrait of Gorky. After this we sat down to table and--I will indulge in no false modesty!--while we did not *drink* to the health of Gorky, we did eat--and how! Kalina Ivanovich, rising from the table, would say:

"I see now that we were wrong to blame the bourgeois, the parasites! After such a dinner, you know, even a dumb animal wouldn't work, let alone a human being."

Our menu was as follows--borshch, but it was no ordinary borshch: a borshch such as a housewife only makes for the name day of the head of the family; then pies, stuffed with meat, cabbage, rice, cream cheese, potatoes, and cereals, and every pie was such a size, it could not even have got into a colonist's pocket; after the pies came roast pork, not bought in the market, but from our own herd, raised by the tenth detachment since the autumn, specially for the Gorky celebrations. The colonists knew how to look after a herd of pigs, but nobody wanted to slaughter one--even Stupitsyn, commander of the tenth, refused.

"I can't kill it! I'm sorry for it! Cleopatra is such a good pig!"

Cleopatra was slaughtered, of course, by Silanti Otchenash, who explained his actions as follows:

"Let our enemies eat dead pig--we'll kill, as they say, the good ones! That's how it is!"

After the dispatch of Cleopatra, we could well have done with a rest, but big and little bowls of thick sour cream made their appearance on the table, and at their sides, piles of cheesecake fritters. And not a single colonist was in a hurry to rest, but, on the contrary, gave full attention to the fritters and sour cream. And after the fritters came fruit jelly, and not served, as for the gentry, in saucers, but in soup plates, and I nowhere observed a colonist eating his jelly without bread or a pie. It was only after this that dinner was considered over, and every one on rising from the table received a bag of sweets and spice-biscuits. In this connection, also, Kalina Ivanovich spoke a true word:

"Oh, if only Gorkies were born oftener!"

After dinner the colonists did not retire to rest, but set off in Mixed Sixth to prepare for the performance of *The Lower Depths*--the last play of the season. Kalina Ivanovich took a great interest in the performance.

"We'll see, we'll see what sort of a play this is. I've heard a lot about these here depths, but I've never seen them. And somehow I've never had

the chance to read the play."

It should be remarked that in this case Kalina Ivanovich greatly exaggerated the chance nature of his bad luck: for in reality he was barely able to penetrate the mystery of reading. However, Kalina Ivanovich is in high spirits today, and it would be a shame to cavil at him. The Gorky anniversary was celebrated this year with a new feature: on the suggestion of the Komsomol organization, the title of "Colonist" was first introduced. Both the colonists and the teaching staff discussed this innovation long and seriously, and at last agreed that it was a good idea. The title of "Colonist" was only given to those who truly valued the colony, and worked for its improvement. But those who lagged behind, who complained, muttered, or played truant, would remain mere "charges." It must be admitted that there were not very many of these--not more than about twenty. Older members of the staff also received the title of "Colonist." At the same time it was resolved: if a staff member did not receive this title during the first year of work, he would have to leave the colony.

Each colonist received a nickel-plated badge, made to our special order in a Kharkov factory. The badge was in the form of a life belt, inscribed with the letters "M.G." [Maxim Gorky], and on top was a red star.

On this day, Kalina Ivanovich, too, was given a badge at the parade. He was extremely happy about this, and did not conceal his delight.

"Long as I served that there Nikolai Alexandrovich, [Tsar Nicholas II] all I got for it was to be made a hussar, and these tramps, the parasites, have given me a medal! And there's nothing to be done about it--it's quite a pleasure, you know! See how it is when they get state power into their hands! They go naked themselves, but they give one a medal!"

Kalina Ivanovich's happiness was somewhat damped by the unexpected arrival of Maria Kondratyevna Bokova. A month before, she had been appointed to our Gubernia Department of Social Education, and while she was not our immediate chief, she still to a certain extent kept her eye on us.

While descending from the hired cab, she had noted with astonishment our festive tables, at which those colonists who had served up the dinner were finishing the feast. Kalina Ivanovich hastened to profit by her astonishment and disappear unnoticed, leaving me to pay for his sins too.

"What are you celebrating?" asked Maria Kondratyevna.

"Gorky's birthday." "Why didn't you invite me?"

"We don't invite any outsiders for this day. It's our custom."

"Give me some dinner, anyhow."

"That we can do. Where's Kalina Ivanovich disappeared to?"

"Oh, that awful old man! The beekeeper? Was it he who ran away from me just now? And you were mixed up in this wretched affair, too! They're always teasing me in the Gubernia Department of Public Education, now. The commandant says he'll dock two years off my pay. Where's that Kalina Ivanovich? Send him here!"

Maria Kondratyevna made a cross face, but I could see that Kalina Ivanovich was in no special danger. Maria Kondratyevna was in a good humour. I sent a colonist for him. Kalina Ivanovich approached, bowing from afar.

"Don't you come any nearer!" laughed Maria Kondratyevna. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! It's simply awful!"

Kalina Ivanovich seated himself on a bench and said:

"We did a good deed."

I had been the witness of Kalina Ivanovich's crime the week before. He and I had gone to the Department of Public Education and visited the office of Maria Kondratyevna on some trifling business. She had a huge office, crammed with furniture made of some special sort of wood. In the middle of the office was Maria Kondratyevna's desk. She was extremely popular: round her desk there was invariably a crowd of typical Department-of-Education people, with one of whom she would be talking, while another butted in on the conversation and a third simply listened: others would be using the telephone, writing at one side of the desk, reading; somebody's hand would be pushing a paper for signature towards her, and, in addition to all these busy ones, there would be a whole lot of people just standing about and talking. The room was always full of chatter, smoke, and litter.

Kalina Ivanovich and I were sitting on a sofa discussing business of our own. Suddenly a thin, violently agitated woman burst into the office, and started pouring out a stream of words into our ears. With the utmost difficulty we made out that it was something to do with a kindergarten, in which there were plenty of children, and a very good method, but no furniture. It was, apparently, not the first time that the woman was here, for she expressed herself with great energy, and displayed not the slightest respect for the department.

"Confound them, they organize a whole town of kindergartens, and don't give us any furniture. What are the children to sit on, I ask! They told us--come today, you'll be given furniture. I've dragged my children three versts, and brought the carts, and there's nobody here, and no one to complain to. Disgraceful, I call it! I've been coming here a whole month. And look how much furniture she has herself--and what for, I ask you?"

Loud as the woman's voice was, none of those standing round Maria Kondratyevna's desk paid the slightest attention to her, very likely no one heard her, owing to the noise going on in the room. Kalina Ivanovich had a good look at the furniture, slapped the sofa with his hand, and asked:

"Am I right, Comrade, in considering that this furniture would suit you?"

"This furniture?" repeated the woman joyfully. "Why, this is lovely furniture!"

"What's the trouble, then?" said Kalina Ivanovich. "Since it suits you and is standing here useless, just take this furniture away for your children."

The eyes of the excited woman, hitherto fixed attentively on Kalina Ivanovich's countenance, suddenly roiled in their sockets, and once again fixed themselves on Kalina Ivanovich.

"How?"

"Quite simply--take it away and put it on your carts."

"Good heavens--and then what?"

"If it's documents you're worrying about, take no notice--there'll be plenty of parasites to write you out more papers than you want yourself. Take it away!"

"And supposing they ask me--who shall I say gave me permission?"

"Say I allowed you."

"So you give me permission?"

"Yes--I do!"

"Good heavens!" groaned the woman ecstatically, and fluttered out of the room like a moth.

A moment later she fluttered back, this time accompanied by about a score of children. These flung themselves upon chairs, armchairs, little seats, and couches and, not without trouble, dragged them through the doors. The whole room was filled with the clatter they made, and at last Maria Kondratyevna became alive to it. She stood up at the desk and asked:

"What are you up to, there?"

"We're taking this out," said a dusky-skinned little chap, dragging a chair along with the help of a comrade.

"Can't you do it a little more quietly?" said Maria Kondratyevna, and once more plunged into her Department-of-Education affairs.

Kalina Ivanovich cast a glance of mock consternation in my direction.

"Did you ever see such a thing? The kids, the parasites, mean to carry off all the furniture!" I had long been gazing with delight upon the abduction of Maria Kondratyevna's office furniture, and could not find it in my heart to be indignant. Two boys dragged at the sofa from beneath us, and we allowed them the fullest liberty to take it, too. The preoccupied woman, after describing the last few circles around her charges, ran up to Kalina Ivanovich, seized his hand, and pressed it with emotion, gazing lovingly into the smiling, embarrassed face of this noble individual.

"Do tell me your name! I must know. You've simply saved us!"

"What d'you want to know my name for? They don't offer prayers for the living any more, and it's a bit early to hold a burial service."

"Oh, but do tell me!"

"I don't like to be thanked, you know."

"Kalina Ivanovich Serdyuk is the name of this good man," I said with feeling.

"Thank you, Comrade Serdyuk, thank you!"

"You're welcome! But take it away as quick as you can, or someone might come and countermand everything."

The woman flew off on wings of ecstasy and gratitude. Kalina Ivanovich righted the belt of his greatcoat, cleared his throat, and lit his pipe.

"Why did you tell her? It was nice the way it was. I don't like it, you know, when people thank me too much. But I should like to know if they get away with it!"

In a short time Maria Kondratyevna's visitors dispersed themselves among the other rooms of the department, and we were given an audience, Maria Kondratyevna had soon done with us, and, glancing round absent-mindedly, wondered aloud:

"Where can they have taken that furniture, I should like to know! They've left me an empty office."

"They've taken it to a kindergarten," said Kalina Ivanovich gravely, leaning against the back of his chair.

It only came out two days later, quite by chance, that the furniture had been carried off with the permission of Kalina Ivanovich. We were summoned to the Department of Public Education, but we were in no hurry to go.

"I'm not going there about a lot of miserable chairs!" Kalina Ivanovich had said. "I've got enough troubles of my own!"

And so, for all these reasons, Kalina Ivanovich felt distinctly embarrassed in the presence of Maria Kondratyevna.

"We did a good deed. What does it matter?" "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? What right had you to give permission?"

Kalina Ivanovich turned courteously on his chair.

"I have the right to allow anything, just like any other man. I allow you, for instance, to buy yourself an estate, I allow you, and there's an end of it! Buy one! And take one for nothing, if you like, I allow you to do that, too!"

"But I, too, can give permission," said Maria Kondratyevna, glancing round. "Permission, let's say, to carry off all these stools and tables."

"You can!"

"And then?" insisted Maria Kondratyevna in some embarrassment.

"Then nothing!"

"D'you mean--just take them and carry them off?"

"And who'll take them?"

"Somebody or other."

"Oh-ho! Let him try! I'd like to see the state he'd be in himself when he takes them!"

"He wouldn't be able to drive, he'd have to be driven!" said Zadorov, smiling. He had been standing behind Maria Kondratyevna for a long time.

Maria Kondratyevna blushed, looked up at Zadorov, and asked awkwardly:

"Do you think so?"

Zadorov exposed all his teeth in a broad smile.

"That's how it seems to me," he said.

"A highwayman philosophy," said Maria Kondratyevna. "Is that the way you bring up your charges?" she said to me, severely.

"More or less."

"What sort of an upbringing do you call that? Taking furniture out of an office--is that right? What are you bringing them up to be? If things are lying about, it means you can take them-- is that it?"

A group of colonists was listening to us, a lively interest in the conversation displaying itself on their faces. Maria Kondratyevna grew hot, and I could make out a note of suppressed hostility in her voice. I had no desire to continue the argument in this direction. I said peaceably:

"Let's talk this question out thoroughly, one day! After all, it's a very complicated one."

But Maria Kondratyevna would not give in.

"What's there complicated about it? It's very simple--yours is a kulak education."

Kalina Ivanovich realized that her irritation was serious, and seated himself closer to her.

"Don't get angry with an old man like me," he said. "Only you mustn't say that--kulak! Our pupils are Soviet-bred. Of course I was only joking. I thought: the owner is here, she'll laugh, and that's all, and perhaps it'll make her see that the children have no chairs. But the owner is a bad one--her furniture is carried off under her very nose, and now she's looking for the culprits --kulak education!"

"And your pupils would do the same, it means?" said Maria Kondratyevna, her resistance, however, weakening.

"Let them do the same!"

"But why?"

"To teach careless owners, that's why!"

Karabanov emerged from the crowd of colonists, and extended towards Maria Kondratyevna a stick, on which a snow-white handkerchief was tied--the colonists had all been given clean handkerchiefs in honour of the celebrations.

"It's no good, Maria Kondratyevna, you'd better raise the white flag!"

To my surprise, Maria Kondratyevna laughed and her eyes sparkled.

"I surrender, I surrender! You don't have kulak education, nobody swindled me, I surrender. the Ladies' Social Education surrenders!"

That evening, when, attired in someone else's leather jacket, I clambered out of the prompter's box, Maria Kondratyevna sat in the gradually emptying hall, observing attentively the last movements of the colonists. Toska Solovyov called out, in his high treble:

"Semyon, Semyon, have you given in your costume? Give in your costume before you go!"

He was answered by Karabanov's voice:

"Tosechka, you poor fool--I acted Satin!" [A character in mere rags from Gorky's *The Lower Depths*.--Tr.]

"Oh, Satin! Then keep it as a souvenir."

Volokhov was standing at the edge of the stage and shouting into the dark:

"Galatenko, that won't do--the stove must be put out."

"It'll go out itself," replied Galatenko in his sleepy hoarse voice.

"Put it out, I tell you! You heard the order--the stoves mustn't be left burning."

"Order, order!" grumbled Galatenko. "I'll put it out."

A group of colonists on the stage were taking the dosshouse beds to pieces, and someone was humming the song from the play.

"These boards must go to the carpenters' shed tomorrow," Mitka Zhevely reminded somebody, and suddenly he shouted: "Anton! Hi, Anton!"

Bratchenko replied from the wings:

"Here I am! Don't bray--you're not an ass!"

"Will you give me a cart tomorrow?"

"All right!"

"And a horse?"

"Can't you draw it yourself?"

"Not strong enough!"

"Don't they feed you enough oats?"

"No!"

"Come to me--I'll give you plenty."

I approached Maria Kondratyevna.

"Where are you going to sleep?"

"I'm just waiting for Lydochka. She's removing her make-up, and then she'll take me to her room. Anton Semyonovich, your colonists are dears, but they work too hard. It's very late, and they're still working, and I can just imagine how tired they are. Can't you give them something to eat? Or at least the ones who have worked."

"They've all worked, and there isn't enough to go round."

"Well, then, you yourself and your teachers. You acted today, and it was ever so interesting. Why shouldn't you get together and sit and talk, and, well, and have a bite? Why not?"

"We have to get up at six, Maria Kondratyevna."

"Is that the only reason?"

"It's like this," I said to this dear good woman. "Our life is much tougher than you think. Much tougher!"

Maria Kondratyevna meditated. Lydochka jumped down from the stage, saying:

"It was a good performance today, wasn't it?"

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

6

CUPID'S ARROW'S

Spring set in with our Gorky celebrations. But there was a particular sphere in which we had long been feeling the awakening of spring.

Our theatrical activities did much to create contacts between the members of the colony and the village youth, and at certain points of contact, emotions and plans not provided for by social-educational theories revealed themselves. The colonists posted by the will of the Commanders' Council in the most dangerous places--6-S Mixed, in which the letter "S" stood eloquently for the word "spectators"--were the greatest sufferers.

Those colonists who performed on the stage as members of 6-A Mixed (actors) were inevitably sucked in by the "poisonous quagmire" of the theatre. They frequently experienced, on the stage, moments of romantic uplift, and experienced, too, stage love, but precisely because of this they were spared for a certain time the throes of so-called first love. The members of the other 6-Mixed detachments were protected by equally helpful elements. In 6-SE Mixed, the boys were always handling violent explosives, and Taranets was hardly ever without a bandaged head, owing to injuries sustained during his innumerable pyrotechnical experiments. In this mixed detachment, too, love seemed to take no root, for the deafening noise made by exploding steamers, bastions, and ministers' carriages enthralled the hearts of its members, and the "sullen, smouldering flames of passion" could find no place there. Nor could these flames burn in the bosoms of boys moving furniture and scenery--the process which the pedagogues love to call "sublimation" being too strongly developed in their case. Even the heating detachment, whose activities were carried on in the very thick of the audience, were protected from the arrows of Cupid, for no Cupid, however gay and irresponsible, would have dreamed of aiming at these coal-smearred, smoke-grimed, black-faced figures.

It was the members of 6-S Mixed who were in the greatest danger. These would go about among the public in the best suits the colony had, and I would rate them for the slightest sign of slovenliness. The corner of a clean handkerchief peeped out coquettishly from their breast pockets, their hair was always a model of elegance, they had to be as courteous as diplomats, and as attentive as dentists. And, thus equipped, they easily fell victims to the spell of those charms which they know almost as well how to prepare in the villages of Goncharovka, Pirogovka, and the farmstead of Volovy, as they do in Parisian beauty parlours.

The first meetings at the door of our theatre during the checking of tickets and the search for places were innocuous: the masters and

organizers of these marvellous performances, with their moving words and their miracles of technique, seemed to the girls fascinating and remote, almost inaccessible, so much so, indeed, that the villiage Romeos themselves, sharing this admiration, did not suffer the pangs of jealousy. But another performance came round, and another, and another, and the story that is as old as the world was repeated. Paraska of Pirogovka or Marusya of the Volovy farmstead soon discovered that the combination of rosy cheeks, shining eyes, eyebrows dark or fair, and a print dress of dazzling newness and fashionable cut, together with the almost Italian music of the Ukrainian "I," as produced by girlish lips, was infinitely more potent than the Gorkyites' scenic skill, or any technique whatsoever. And when all this was put into action, nothing was left of the inaccessibility of the colonists. There came a time when a colonist came to me after a performance with the insincere request:

"Anton Semyonovich, may I see the girls from Pirogovk home--they're afraid to go alone."

Such a phrase was a rare conglomeration of lies, since, both the supplicant and myself knew very well that nobody was afraid of anything, and nobody needed to be seen home, and the plural number--"girls"--was a gross exaggeration. Besides, no permission was required. At a pinch the escort of the timid spectator would be carried out without permission.

For these reasons I gave permission, suppressing in the depths of my pedagogical soul a distinct sensation of discrepancy. Pedagogics, as is well known, flatly denies love, considering that this "dominant" only comes up when educational methods have proved a failure. In all times, and among all peoples, pedagogues have detested love. I, too, felt a jealous displeasure when some colonist, missing a Komsomol or general meeting, contemptuously throwing down his book, neglecting all the qualities of an active and class-conscious member of a collective, refused obstinately to recognize any other authority but that of a Marusya or a Natasha--beings immeasurably beneath me in pedagogical, political or moral respects. But I believed in thinking things over, and was in no hurry to claim rights of any sorts for my jealousy. My comrades in the colony, and still more the workers in the Department of Public Education, were more resolute than I was, and were greatly irritated by the unforeseen and unprovided-for intervention of Cupid.

"This must be resolutely opposed."

These discussions were always a help, for they threw light on the situation: one must depend on one's own common sense and the common sense of life. Dreaming was no good. If we were rich, I would marry off the colonists, and populate our neighbourhood with married Komsomols. What harm would there be in that? But it was a long way to such a consummation. Never mind! Even a poor life can offer suggestions. I did not persecute the lovelorn with pedagogical interference, the more so that they never exceeded the bounds of propriety. In a moment of frankness Oprishko showed me a photograph of Marusya-obvious proof that life was getting on with the business, while we were still meditating.

In itself, the photograph told little. A broad, snub-nosed face looked out at me, adding nothing to the average Marusya type. But on the other side was written in an expressive schoolgirl's hand: "To dear Dmitri from Marusya Lukashenko. When this you see, remember me!"

Dmitri Oprishko sat there on his chair, openly exhibiting himself to the whole world as a lost soul. There were only a few miserable traces left of his once sprightly bearing, even the jaunty forelock had disappeared from his head, and was virtuously and neatly flattened down. His

brown eyes, formerly lighting up so quickly at a witty word, or at a chance for romping and laughing, now expressed nothing but peaceable domestic cares, and submission to a tender fate.

"What d'you mean to do?"

Oprishko smiled.

"It'll be hard without your help. We haven't told her father anything yet. Marusya's afraid. But her father likes me all right--in a general way."

"Very well--we'll wait and see!"

Oprishko went away, quite satisfied, carefully hiding the portrait of his beloved against his breast.

The plight of Chobot was still sadder. He was a gloomy passionate individual, without a single distinctive trait. He had signaled his entry into the colony by a conflict involving the use of knives, but had since then steadily submitted to discipline, though always holding aloof from the seething centres of our life. He had an inexpressive, colourless countenance, vacant-looking even in moments of anger. He attended school under compulsion, and learned to read with the utmost difficulty. But I liked his mode of expression--a sort of great and simple rightness always made itself felt in his spare utterances. He was one of the first to be received into the Komsomol organization. Koval had a definite opinion of him:

"He'll never be able to give lectures, and he won't do for propaganda work, but give him a machine gun, and he'll die before he lets go of it!"

The whole colony knew that Chobot was passionately in love with Natasha Petrenko. Natasha lived in the home of Moussi Karpovich, ostensibly as his niece, but in reality as a simple farm hand. Moussi Karpovich did allow her to go to the theatre, but she was very poorly clad: a badly fitting skirt worn out long ago by someone else, gnarled boots, not her size, and an old-fashioned, dark, pleated blouse. We never saw her in any other attire. Such clothing made a pitiful scarecrow of Natasha, but this only brought out the attractiveness of her face. From the rust-coloured aureole of a tattered, soiled shawl there looked out, not so much a face, as the highest embodiment of innocence and purity, and a kind of child-like smiling confidence. Natasha never pulled faces, never expressed anger, indignation, suspicion, or grief. All she could do was to listen earnestly, her thick black lashes quivering almost imperceptibly the while, or to smile frankly and attentively, showing delightful small teeth, with one of the front ones slightly awry.

Natasha always came to the colony with a flock of girls, and was conspicuous against the affected boisterousness of this background by her simple, childlike reserve and good spirits.

Chobot invariably went to meet her; sitting glumly beside her on a bench, he was unable to embarrass her, or make any change in her inner life. I could not believe that this child was capable of loving Chobot, but the boys contradicted me in unison:

"Who? Natasha? Why, she'd go through fire and water for Chobot without a moment's hesitation!"

As a matter of fact we did not have much time to indulge in love affairs just then. The season was upon us when the sun would start its annual offensive, blazing away eighteen hours a day. Sherre, too, as if imitating the sun, imposed so much work upon us that we could only puff and pant wordlessly, remembering ruefully that only the previous autumn we had approved his sowing plan with great enthusiasm at the general meeting. Officially Sherre was supposed to have a six-field crop rotation system, but in reality it was a much more complicated affair. Sherre sowed hardly any grain crops. He had about seven hectares of winter wheat, besides a smallish field sown with oats and barley in some remote part of the estate, and he kept a bit of land for experimental purposes; on this plot he had sown some unheard-of species of rye, which, he declared, would keep the peasants guessing, for they would never recognize it as rye. So far it was we and not the peasants who were puzzled. Potatoes, beet, melons, cabbage, a veritable plantation of peas sprang up in many varieties, very hard to distinguish from one another. The boys used to say that Sherre was spreading a regular counterrevolution in the fields.

"He has kings, tsars, and queens all over the place!" they would say.

And indeed, Sherre, dividing all the plots by ideally straight boundary lines and hedges, used to stick small boards on wooden posts, with an inscription on each board to show what was sown and how much. The colonists, probably those who protected the crops from cows, one morning stuck their own signboards next to Sherre's, a trick which wounded Sherre grievously. He demanded an emergency Commanders' Council, and--a most unaccustomed thing from him--shouted at us.

"Sheer nonsense and tomfoolery! I name the varieties the way they're always named. If a variety is called 'King of Andalusia,' that's its name all over the world, and I can't think up names for myself. It's simply hooliganism! Why did they have to butt in with their General Beet, Colonel Pea, and their Captain Melon and Lieutenant Tomato?"

The commanders smiled, not quite knowing how to deal with vegetable battalions. They asked in a businesslike way:

"Who's responsible for this silly trick? First they're kings, and then just captains and God knows what?"

The boys could not help smiling, although they stood in a certain awe of Sherre. Silanti understood the tenseness of the conflict, and endeavoured to relieve it.

"It's like this, you see: a king that can be eaten, as they say, by cows, can't be dangerous--let him remain king."

Kalina Ivanovich, too, sided with Sherre:

"What's the row about? You want to show that you're true revolutionaries, you want to fight the kings, to cut off the heads of the parasites--is that it? Don't worry--we'll give you each a knife, and you shall cut away till you're all of a sweat."

The colonists knew what this meant, and accepted the declaration of Kalina Ivanovich with profound submission. With this, the matter of counterrevolution in our fields came to an end, and when Sherre transplanted two hundred rosebushes in front of the main building, with the inscription "Snow Queen," not a single colonist raised a protest. Karabanov merely said:

"Queen or not, it doesn't matter, so long as she smells nice."

It was the beet that gave us the most trouble. Candidly speaking, this is an obnoxious crop--easy enough to sow, but maddening to look after. Hardly does it show itself, with slow languor, above ground when it has to be weeded. The first weeding of beet is a tragedy. Young beet cannot be distinguished by a novice from a weed, and Sherre demanded senior colonists for this weeding, while these same seniors expostulated:

"What--weed the beet? Haven't we done enough weeding in our day?"

After the first weeding comes the second. The thoughts of all are turning towards cabbages and peas, and the time for haymaking is in the offing, when, lo and behold! Sherre calmly writes in his Sunday application: "forty persons for weeding the beet."

Vershnev, the secretary of the Council, reads this cool request to himself indignantly, and twangs with his fist on the table.

"What's this? Again the beets? When will it be over, confound and blast it! Perhaps you've given in an old application by mistake?"

"A new application," said Sherre calmly. "Forty persons, and seniors, please."

Maria Kondratyevna, who had taken a hut for the summer in our neighbourhood, was present at the Council, and the dimples in her cheeks peeped out playfully at the indignant colonists.

"How lazy you are, you boys! But you like beetroot in borshch, I'm sure!"

Semyon bent his head and declaimed with expression:

"In the first place, it's fodder beet, confound it! In the second place, why don't you come and help us weed it? If you do us the favour of working just one day, then I promise to get up a mixed detachment to work at the beet until we finish the blasted thing!"

Maria Kondratyevna smiled at me for sympathy, motioning with her head at the colonists:

"Just look at them!"

Maria Kondratyevna was on leave, and so she could be met with in the colony during the daytime too. But in the daytime it was dull in the colony, the boys, grimy, dusty, tanned, only coming back for dinner. Throwing their hoes into Kudlaty's corner, they would leap from the steep shore with the impact of Budyonny's cavalry, unfastening their shorts on the way, till the Kolomak was alive with their heated bodies, shouts, games and pranks. The girls squealed from the bushes on the shore:

"Come on, you've had enough, go away now! Fellows! Hi, fellows! It's our turn now!"

The monitor would pace the shore with an anxious face, and the lads drawing the still warm shorts on to their wet limbs, with drops of water shining on their shoulders, would gather about the tables set around the fountain in the old garden. Here they had long been awaited by Maria Kondratyevna, the only person in the colony preserving a white human skin and unbleached curls. This made her seem extraordinarily well-groomed in our crowd, and even Kalina Ivanovich could not refrain from remarking it.

"A fine figure of a woman, you know--she's wasted here, Anton Semyonovich! You shouldn't look at her so theoretically! She regards you as a human being, and you pay her no attention, just as if you were some muzhik."

"For shame!" I said to Kalina Ivanovich. "The only thing lacking is for me to go in for love affairs in the colony."

"Go on with you!" said Kalina Ivanovich in his old man's croak, lighting his pipe. "Mark my words, you'll be left out in the cold!"

I had no time to go in for theoretical and practical analysis of Maria Kondratyevna's qualities, and perhaps for that very reason she kept inviting me to tea, and was so offended when I courteously assured her:

"But I don't like tea--really I don't!"

One day, after dinner, when the colonists had all gone off to their work, Maria Kondratyevna and I remained at the table, and she said to me with simple friendliness:

"Listen to me, Diogenes Semyonovich! If you don't come to me this evening I shall consider you very rude."

"What have you got? Tea?"

"I have ice cream, d'you understand, ice cream, not tea! I'm making it specially for you."

"All right," I said reluctantly. "What time shall I come for ice cream?"

"At eight."

"But I have to take the commanders' reports at half past eight."

"Now he's a martyr to pedagogics! Very well, then--come at nine."

But at nine o'clock, immediately after the reports, when I was sitting in my office and regretting that I had to go for ice cream and had not time to shave, Mitka Zhevely came running up, crying out:

"Anton Semyonovich--come quick!"

"What's up?"

"The boys have brought Chobot and Natasha. That grandpa--Moussi Karpovich, you know...."

"Where are they?"

"Over there, in the garden."

I hastened to the garden. On a bench in the alley of lilacs was the terrified Natasha, surrounded by a crowd of our girls and women. The boys formed groups all down the alley, discussing something eagerly. Karabanov was holding forth:

"And quite right! A pity he did not kill the swine!"

Zadorov was trying to soothe the trembling, weeping Chobot.

"It's not so terrible! Here's Anton--he'll set everything right."

Interrupting one another, they told me the following story.

Moussi Karpovich had decided to punish Natasha, perhaps for forgetting to dry some squares of homespun, or something of that sort, and had already struck her twice with the reins when, just at that moment, Chobot came in. It was hard to discover exactly what Chobot had done--Chobot was silent--but neighbours from the farmstead, and some of our colonists, had come running at the sound of Moussi's cries and found the latter in a state of collapse, covered with blood, huddled terrified in a corner. One of Moussi Karpovich's sons was in an equally distressing condition. Chobot himself was standing in the middle of the hut, and in the words of Karabanov, snarling like a dog. Natasha was found later in the hut of a neighbour.

All this had led to certain negotiations between the colonists and the farmstead folk. Signs were not wanting that in the process of these

negotiations fists and certain other forms of defence had not been neglected, but the boys said nothing of this, only narrating with dramatic emotion:

"We didn't do anything special, we just gave--er--first-aid after the accidents, and Karabanov said to Natasha: 'You come to the colony, Natasha, don't you be afraid, you'll find good people in the colony, you know, we'll see to all this.' "

I invited all the participants in this affair into my office.

Natasha gazed seriously from wide-open eyes at surroundings so novel to her, and the traces of her fear could only have been discerned in imperceptible movements of her lips, and in one hot tear gradually cooling on her cheek.

"What's to be done?" said Kanabanov vehemently. "This business has got to be settled!"

"Let's settle it then!" I said.

"Marry them!" proposed Burun.

"There'll be plenty of time to marry them," I replied. "That's not what we have to do just now. We have a perfect right to take Natasha into the colony. Does anyone object? Quiet, now--don't shout so! We have room for the girl. Kolya, enter her in tomorrow's order for the fifth detachment."

"Very good!" barked Kolka.

Natasha suddenly flung off her dingy shawl, and her eyes blazed like flames in the wind. She ran up to me, laughing joyfully, as only children laugh.

"Really-truly? In the colony? Oh, thank you, Uncle!"

The boys covered their emotion with laughter. Karabanov stamped on the floor:

"How simple! So simple...damn it all... in the colony, of course! Just let them try and touch a colonist!"

The girls joyfully carried Natasha off to the bedroom. The boys went on chattering for a long time. Chobot, who was sitting opposite me, tried to thank me.

"I would never have believed it! Thank you for defending such an insignificant person! And a for getting married--that can wait!"

We discussed the occurrence late into the night. The boys cited similar cases, Silanti gave his opinion, and Natasha was brought to be shown to me in colonist attire, no bride, but just a tender little maiden. Last of all Kalina Ivanovich came in and summed up the evening's events as follows:

"There's nothing to make a fuss about! So long as you haven't cut a man's head off, he's alive, and so everything's all right. Come to the fields--you'll see for yourself! Those kulaks are as meek as Moses, now--they couldn't be quieter than they will be when they're dead and in their coffins."

It was past midnight when Kalina Ivanovich and I set out for the meadows. The warm still night seemed to be listening attentively to Kalina Ivanovich's words. The poplars, taut, spruce, faithful to their long-standing passion for keeping rank, kept watch over our colony, thinking their own thoughts. Perhaps they were astonished at the changes which had taken place all around them. They had originally drawn up to form a guard for the Trepkes, and now they were expected to keep watch over the Maxim Gorky Golony.

Maria Kondratyevna's hut, from the midst of a grove of poplars, looked straight at us from its darkened eyes. Suddenly one of its windows opened quietly, and someone jumped out of it. He started in our direction, but stopped for a moment, and plunged into the woods. Kalina Ivanovich broke off in his description of the evacuation of Mirgorod in 1918, and said quietly:

"That's Karabanov, the parasite! He's practical, you see, not merely theoretical. And you--educated man--are left out in the cold."

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

7

REINFORCEMENTS

When Moussi Karpovich came to the colony we thought he intended to haul us over the coals regarding the liberties which the infuriated

Chobot had taken with his head. The aforesaid head was, indeed, demonstratively bandaged, and Moussi Karpovich spoke more like a dying swan than his usual self. But he referred to the subject of such disturbing interest to us in a spirit of peace and Christian resignation.

"Don't think it's about the wench I've come! It's something quite different. God forbid I should quarrel with you--why should I quarrel with you? What for? Let things be the way they are.... It's about the mill I've come. I've brought you a nice proposition from the Village Soviet."

Koval bent his brows upon Moussi Karpovich.

"About the mill?"

"Why, yes! You're trying to get the mill--for rent, I mean, and the Village Soviet has sent in an application, too. So this is what we think--you're just as much a Soviet authority as the Village Soviet is. There can't be any question of you on one side, and us on the other."

"Aha!" exclaimed Koval somewhat ironically.

A brief diplomatic interlude then ensued. I persuaded Koval and the other lads to invest their souls in diplomatic attire and white ties, and Luka Semyonovich and Moussi Karpovich were enabled to make their appearance at the colony without endangering their lives.

At that time the whole colony was greatly preoccupied with the question of buying horses. Our famous trotters were visibly ageing, even Red had begun to grow a beard, while the Commanders' Council had already given Laddie invalid status and pensioned him off. He was allotted a place in the colony and an oat ration for the remainder of his days, and could only be put into harness with my personal consent. Sherre had always been scornful of Bandit, Mary, and Falcon.

"A good farm has good horses," he would say, "and if the horses are no good, the farm is no good, either."

Even Anton Bratchenko, who had been through the stage of infatuation with each of our horses in turn, but preferred Red to them all, began, under the influence of Sherre, to worship some future steed which he expected to turn up in our domain any moment. Among us, Sherre, Kalina Ivanovich and Bratchenko, and myself never missed a fair; we inspected thousands of horses, without having, so far, bought a single one. Sometimes the horses would be no better than our own, sometimes too high a price would be set on them, in yet other cases, Sherre discovered some carefully concealed defect or disease in them. And the truth must be told--horses of good quality were not to be found at a fair. War and revolution had worked havoc with the better strains, and new stud farms had not yet come into being. Anton would return from a fair in a state bordering on fury.

"How can it be? Aren't there any horses? And supposing we need a decent horse! Are we to go cap in hand to the bourgeois folk, or what?"

In his capacity of an old hussar, Kalina Ivanovich was fond of delving deep into the horse problem, and even Sherre, in this one instance relaxing from his state of permanent jealousy, believed in Kalina Ivanovich's erudition. One day, in a circle of experts, Kalina Ivanovich

declared: "Those parasites Luka and Moussi say that the muzhiks in the farmsteads have fine horses, a but they don't take them to the fairs--they're afraid."

"Nothing of the sort," said Sherre. "They haven't any decent horses. Only ones like those we've seen. Soon we'll be able to get fine horses from the stud farms, but it's a bit early for that yet."

"I tell you they have," insisted Kalina Ivanovich. "Luka knows--that son-of-a-bitch knows the whole district, and everything that goes on in it. And when you come to think of it, where is good stock to be found if not among the practical farmers? And the practical farmers live in the farmsteads! He lies low, the parasite, and rears a colt on the sly, because--the dirty skunk!--he's afraid it'll be taken from him. But if we go to one of them ourselves, maybe we'll be able to buy a horse."

I, too, tackled the problem without troubling in the least about ideology.

"We'll go next Sunday and have a look," I said. "And perhaps we'll buy something."

"Why not?" agreed Sherre. "We won't buy a horse, of course, but it'll be a good thing to drive somewhere. I should like to see what kind of crops these practical farmers have got."

On Sunday we harnessed our horses to the phaeton, and rolled gently over the soft dirt roads which united the villages. We passed Goncharovka, cut across the Kharkov highroad, went at a foot-pace through a sandy-bottomed pine wood, till we reached a "far-away country" in which we had never before been.

From the top of a high slope a fair-seeming prospect could be descried. Before us there stretched out endlessly to the horizon a plain which seemed to have been gone over with a steam-roller. It was not remarkable for variety, but in this very monotony may have lain its principal charm. The plain was thickly sown with corn; all around were rolling waves--golden, greenish-gold, golden-tawny--varied here and there by the bright green of millet, or the dimpled surface of a field of buckwheat. And against this golden background, with almost painful regularity, were ranged groups of snow-white huts, surrounded by low-lying, formless garden plots. Each group had its two or three willows, aspens, more rarely poplars, and its melon bed, complete with dingy brown shack. All was in conformity with the strictest style--the most exacting landscape painter could not have discovered one false stroke.

This picture was greatly to the taste of Kalina Ivanovich, too.

"Look how the kulaks live! They're orderly folk here!"

"Yes," admitted Sherre reluctantly.

"Let's drop in on that one over there," proposed Kalina Ivanovich.

Anton turned into a pathway trodden in the grass and drove up to a primitive gateway, composed of three slender willow trunks spliced together with bast. A mangy grey cur crawled from beneath a bench, stretching its limbs, and barked at us with lazy huskiness. The owner of the hut emerged, brushing something out of his unkempt beard, and regarding my quasi-military attire with astonishment not unmixed with anxiety.

"Good day, master!" said Kalina Ivanovich cheerfully. "Just back from church, I suppose?"

"I don't often go to church," replied the master of the house, in a voice as lazily husky as that of the guardian of his property. "My wife goes now and then. And where may you be from?"

"We've come on business. They say you have a nice horse for sale--is it true?"

The master's eyes travelled over our turnout. The fact that Red and black Mary were an ill-matched pair seemed to allay his anxiety somewhat.

"I don't know about that. How can I have nice horses? I *have* a horse--a three-year-old. Perhaps it would suit you?"

He went to the stable and led from its farthest corner a three-year-old mare, sprightly and well-fed.

"Never been in harness?" inquired Sherre.

"She's never been harnessed to go anywhere special, but as to driving--she can go in harness. She's a good one to go, I will say that!"

"She won't do," said Sherre. "She's too young for us. We need a working horse."

"She's young, of course," agreed the owner. "But she'd grow in a good home. That she would! I've been tending her three years. I've tended her well, you can see that, can't you?" The mare was certainly in good condition; with her clean, gleaming skin and well-combed mane, she was infinitely better groomed than her trainer and owner.

"And how much would you be asking for such a mare, eh?"

"Seeing that it's practical folks who want to buy her--sixty chervonets, and a good treat thrown in."

Anton fixed his gaze on the summit of a willow, and, at last getting the point, fairly gasped.

"How much? Six hundred rubles?"

"That's right--six hundred," said the owner modestly.

"Six hundred rubles for muck like that!" shouted Anton, unable to restrain his indignation.

"Muck yourself--a fat lot you know about it!" retorted the owner. "Try the horse--then judge!"

"It can't be said that the mare is muck," said Kalina Ivanovich pacifically. "She's a good mare, but she won't do for us."

Sherre smiled in silence. We all went back to the phaeton, and drove on. The grey dog once more yelped its respects to us, but its master, closing his gate, did not so much as look after us.

We visited a dozen or so farmsteads. There was a horse at almost every one of them, but we made no purchase.

It was almost evening before we got home. Sherre, who seemed to have lost interest in the fields, was absorbed in thought. Anton wreaked his irritation on Red, and kept flicking at him with the whip, muttering:

"Are you crazy? Have you never seen weeds before? I'll show you!"

Angrily watching the wormwood growing beside the road, Kalina Ivanovich kept up a grumbling monologue all the way.

"Look what bad people they are, the parasites! People come to them--well, whether you sell or whether you don't, you can at least behave like a human being, like a host, you swine! You can see, you parasite, that people have been travelling since the morning, you might offer them something to eat--you've got some borsch, haven't you, or at least potatoes....Just fancy, he can't find time to comb his beard--did you ever see the like? And asking six hundred rubles for a scurvy nag! *He* 'tended the horse,' forsooth! It wasn't he who tended it--did you notice what a lot of labourers he has?"

I had seen them--the tatterdemalions--standing motionless by stable and pigsty, in awestruck, tense observation of so extraordinary a spectacle as the arrival of townsfolk. They were overwhelmed by the fantastic combination of so much respectability in one yard. Sometimes one of these mute personages would lead a horse from its stable, shyly handling the reins to the master, or even give a pat to a horse's hindquarters, perhaps seeking thus to express affection for a familiar fellow creature.

At last Kalina Ivanovich fell silent, pulling irritably at his pipe. He only broke silence at the very entrance to the colony, when he cried cheerfully: "Starved us to death, the damned parasites!" At the colony we found Luka Semyonovich and Moussi Karpovich. Luka was amazed at the unsuccess of our expedition.

"It can't be!" he protested. "Well--since it was I who told Anton Semyonovich and Kalina Ivanovich about it, we shall have to see to this business ourselves. Don't you worry, Kalina Ivanovich! You'll ruin your nerves, and that's the worst thing that can happen to a man! It's bad

for you to upset yourself. Next week you and I will go, but let Anton Semyonovich stay at home, he looks too-tee-hee!-Bolshevik! It frightens the kulaks!"

Next Sunday Kalina Ivanovich and Luka Semyonovich set out for the farmsteads in Luka's carriage. Bratchenko, who regarded the whole business with a kind of desperate indifference, speeded him with the maliciously facetious words:

"Mind you take bread with you, or you'll die of hunger!"

Luka Semyonovich smoothed his gorgeous red beard over the front of his embroidered Sunday blouse, his red lips curving in an anticipatory smile.

"Comrade Bratchenko, how can you! We're going visiting, how can we take bread with us? There'll be real borshch today, and mutton, and maybe somebody will provide a bottle of something."

He winked at the deeply interested Kalina Ivanovich, and gathered up the smart crimson reins. The broad-chested, well-nourished stallion started off gaily beneath the straddling shaft bow, setting the heavy carriage in motion.

In the evening, all the colonists turned out as if at a fire alarm, to survey a surprising spectacle--Kalina Ivanovich returning in triumph. Luka Semyonovich's stallion was tied to the back of the carriage, and between the shafts was a beautiful big mare, dapple-grey. Both Kalina Ivanovich and Luka Semyonovich bore in their persons evidence of the hospitality which had been accorded them by horse owners. Kalina Ivanovich could hardly get out of the carriage, but did his utmost to prevent the colonists from noticing his condition. Yarabanov helped him to descend.

"So there *was* treating?"

"Of course there was! See what a fine beast we've brought!"

Kalina Ivanovich stroked the mare's huge hindquarters. It was indeed a fine beast, with its powerful, fringed legs, its vast stature, its Herculean chest, and well-knit, massive frame. Even Sherre could find no defects in it, though he spent a long time crawling under its belly, every now and then saying with kindly gaiety:

"Your foot--give me your foot!"

The boys approved of the purchase. Burun, narrowing his eyes gravely, walked all round the mare, and then announced:

"At last there's a horse that really is a horse in this colony!" Karabanov, too, liked the mare.

"Yes, that's a working horse," he said. "It's worth five hundred rubles. With a dozen horses like that we could eat pie."

Bratchenko received the mare with loving attention, walked all round it, giving vent to his satisfaction by clicking with his tongue, joyfully astounded by its vast, quiet power, its peaceful, confiding nature. New horizons opened before Bratchenko. He pestered Sherre with the insistent demand:

"Now we need a good sire. We could have our own stud--you know what I mean."

Sherre knew perfectly well what he meant. Casting a grave appraising glance at Dawn (that was the horse's name) he said through closed teeth:

"I'll look for a stallion. I've got my eye on a certain place. Just wait till we harvest the wheat, then I'll go there."

At this time, from early morn to sunset, work went on in the colony with rhythmic strokes on the smooth rails laid down with such precision by Sherre. The mixed detachments, some big, some small, some consisting of seniors, some composed purposely of younger boys alone, armed with hoes with scythes, wWith rakes, or merely with their own two hands, went into the fields and back again with the regularity of an express-train schedule, alive with laughter and joking, with cheerfulness and self-confidence, thoroughly aware what was to be done, and where and how to do it. Occasionally Olya Voronova, our assistant agronomist, would return from the fields, saying to the monitor on duty, between sips of water from the mug kept in the office: "Send help to Mixed Five."

"What's up?"

"They're behind with the binding. It's awfully hot!"

"How many are needed?"

"About five. Are there any girls free?"

"Only one."

Olya, wiping her lips on her sleeve, would disappear somewhere. The monitor, notebook in hand, would make for the pear tree, beneath which, since the early morning, had been posted the staff of the mixed detachment's reserve. The commander on duty would be followed by the bugler on duty at a quaint, short trot. In another minute would be heard the brief staccato of the call for reserves. From beneath bushes, from the river, from the bedrooms, the little ones would rush headlong, a circle would be formed beneath the pear tree, and a minute later five colonists would be making for the wheat field at a quick march.

We had already taken in the forty new children. The colonists spent a whole Sunday looking after them, washing them, dressing them, and

assigning them to their respective detachments. We did not increase the number of detachments, but transferred the whole eleven detachments to the Red House, leaving a definite number of places to be filled in in each. This enabled the newcomers to get themselves firmly knit up with the ranks of the original members, so that they were proudly conscious of being Gorkyites, even though as yet they could not march properly, but could only, in the words of Karabanov, toddle.

The newcomers were all very young, not more than thirteen or fourteen years old, and among them were delightful faces, especially charming after a little chap came rosy from the bath, clad in shining new sateen shorts. His hair might not yet have been properly cut, but Belukhin reassured us:

"They cut their hair themselves, today, and you know they're not exactly dabs. The hairdresser will be here tonight, and we'll have them all properly turned out."

The reinforcements walked about the colony with eyes bulging with amazement for the first day or so, taking in all the new impressions. They visited the hog-house, and gazed in astonishment at the stern Stupitsyn.

Anton refused on principle to have anything to do with the reinforcements.

"What are you all doing here? Your place is in the dining room, still."

"Why in the dining room?"

"What else are you fit for? You're nothing but machines for eating."

"Oh, I'm going to work!"

"I know the way you'll work! It'll take two overseers to look after you. Won't it, now?"

"But the commander said we were to start work the day after tomorrow. You'll see!"

"I'll see, will I? D'you think I don't know? It'll be--'Oh, how hot I am! Oh, how I'm longing for a drink of water! Oh, papa! Oh, mama!' "

The little chaps would smile in embarrassment.

"Mama! Mama! Nothing of the sort!" But by the end of the very first day Bratchenko had found his favourites. He picked out horse lovers according to a system of his own. And, lo and behold! The water barrel is trundling over the field path, and on the barrel is perched a new Gorkyite--Petya Zadorozhny, driving Falcon, to the accompaniment of injunctions from the stable door:

"Don't drive the horse too hard, now--you're not going to a fire with that barrel!"

In a day's time the newcomers were taking part in mixed detachments, stumbling and croaking in their unfamiliar, laborious efforts, but there is a row of colonists stubbornly moving up the potato field, and hardly ever breaking the line, and it seems to the newcomer that he, too, can keep his place in the line. It is an hour before he realizes that only one row has been assigned to two beginners, whereas the veterans have a row each. Sweating profusely, he quietly asks his neighbour:

"Will it soon be over?"

The wheat has been taken in, and work is beginning on the threshing floor. Sherre, covered, like everyone else, with dirt and sweat, checks the gears and inspects the stacks prepared for threshing.

"We'll start threshing the day after tomorrow--and tomorrow we'll go for the horse."

"I'll go," said Semyon, darting a surreptitious glance at Bratchenko.

"Go on then," said Anton. "Is it a good stallion?"

"Not a bad stallion," replied Sherre.

"Did you buy it at the sovkhos?"

"Yes. At the sovkhos."

"How much?"

"Three hundred."

"That wasn't much."

"Um'hm."

"A Soviet horse, then!" said Kalina Ivanovich.

"What d'you want to make that elevator so high for?" he added, looking at the thresher.

"A Soviet horse," replied Sherre. "It's not too high, the straw's very light."

On Sunday everyone rested, bathed, went rowing, and busied themselves with the newcomers, and in the evening, as usual, the aristocracy gathered together under the porch of the main building, inhaling the fragrance of the "snow queens," and profoundly impressing, with many a varied tale, the newcomers, who stood silently at a respectful distance.

Suddenly, from round the corner of the mill, in a cloud of dust, a rider, his horse shying violently at an old boiler lying in the way, came up at a gallop. Semyon flew right up to us on a golden steed, and we all suddenly fell silent, holding our breath. Before this we had only seen such a sight in pictures, in illustrations to fairy tales and to Gogol's *Terrible Revenge*. The horse bore Semyon at a pace which was at once easy and powerful, swinging its thick, luxurious tail, its mane--fluffy, glinting with a golden tinge--streaming in the wind. It moved so fast that our awe-struck minds could scarcely keep up with its ever-new and overwhelming points--the powerful neck, with its proud and playful turn, the slender legs approaching with so generous a stride.

Semyon reined in the horse in front of us, bringing the beautiful, small head close to its chest. The eye, coal-black, young and ardent, with fiery corners, suddenly shot a glance straight into the heart of the swooning Anton Bratchenko. Anton clapped his hands to his ears, gasped, and shuddered.

"Is that ours? Is it? The stallion? Ours?"

"Ours," said Semyon proudly.

"Get the hell off the stallion!" Anton suddenly yelled at Karabanov. "Are you going to sit there forever? Haven't you had enough? Look what a lather you've got him in! This isn't one of your kulak nags!"

Anton seized the rein, repeating his command with a glance of fury. Semyon climbed out of the saddle.

"That's all right, old man," he said. "I understand. If there ever was such a horse before, it must have belonged to Napoleon."

Anton flew into the saddle like a gust of wind, gently stroking the horse's neck. Then, in sudden embarrassment, he turned aside, wiping his eyes on his sleeve.

The boys laughed softly. Kalina Ivanovich smiled, cleared his throat, smiled again.

"There's no denying it," he said. "It's a grand horse. I'll say more--it's too good for us. We'll ruin it."

"Who will?" cried Anton, bending fiercely towards him. Then he turned to the colonists.

"I'll kill you!" he growled. "I'll kill anyone who touches him! I'll take a stick to you! I'll bash you over the head with a crowbar!" He turned the horse sharply round, and it bore him meekly to the stable, with mincing, coquettish steps, as if glad that at last a real master was in the saddle.

We called the horse "Molodets." [fine fellow]

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THE NINTH AND DETACHMENTS

In the beginning of July we got a three-year lease of the mill, at an annual rent of three thousand rubles. It was put entirely at our disposal, free of any partnership whatever.

Our diplomatic relations with the Village Soviet were again severed, and the days of the Village Soviet itself--in its present membership--were numbered. The acquisition of the mill was the victory of our own Komsomol organization, on the second sector of the fighting front.

Almost to our own surprise the colony was becoming appreciably richer, and acquiring the Style of a solid, well-regulated enterprise.

Only a short time before the purchase of a couple of horses had been a strain on our resources, but by the middle of the summer we were well able to assign fairly large sums for cows of good breed, a flock of sheep, and new furniture.

And Sherre, scarcely burdening our budget, had quietly embarked upon the construction of a new cowshed, and almost before we had time to turn round, there was a new building, at once handsome and solid, on one side of the yard, in front of which Sherre laid out flower beds, thus making mincemeat of the notion that a cowshed is a place of dirt and smells. In the new cowshed stood five Simmenthal cows, while one of our own calves, to the general astonishment, and even to that of Sherre, had suddenly developed into a bull known as Caesar, whose extraordinary display of points fairly dazzled us.

Sherre had great difficulty in getting a certificate for Caesar, but his Simmenthal points were so obvious that in the end one was issued. Molodets had a certificate too, and another certificated member of our farmyard was Vasili Ivanovich, a sixteen-pood hog, which I had brought to the colony some time back, from the experimental station--a thoroughbred English hog, named after Trepke the elder.

With these distinguished foreigners as a nucleus it had become easier to start building up pedigreed stock.

The domain of the tenth detachment--the hog-house--had become, under the command of Stupitsyn, a very important establishment, in output and purity of breed ranking second only to the experimental station.

Fourteen strong, the tenth detachment always worked in an exemplary manner. The hog-house was one of those places in the colony as to which no one for a moment entertained the slightest doubt. A splendid Trepke construction of hollow concrete, it stood in the middle of our yard, forming its geometrical centre, but it was so shiny and imposing that it never entered into anyone's head to consider its situation a profanation of the Gorky Colony.

Very few colonists were allowed into it, although newcomers were admitted as members of excursions. In the ordinary way, a pass signed by myself or Sherre was required to get in. And so, in the eyes of the colonists and villagers, the work of the tenth detachment was fraught with mystery, the initiation into which was regarded as a special honour.

Admission to the "waiting room" was comparatively easy to obtain, requiring only the permission of Stupitsyn, the commander of the tenth detachment. Here dwelt baby pigs intended for sale, and here, also, the village sows were brought for coupling.

The fee for coupling was three rubles, for which Ovcharenko, Stupitsyn's assistant and cashier, gave a receipt. And in the waiting room baby pigs were sold at a fixed price by the kilogram, although the peasants endeavoured to convince us that it was ridiculous to sell pigs by weight, that such a thing was unheard-of.

There was always a rush of visitors to the waiting room during farrowing time, for Sherre never kept more than seven pigs from every litter--the first-born and the biggest--giving away most of the others free to pig lovers. Stupitsyn would give instructions on the spot to the recipients of a newly-weaned pig, telling them how to feed it from a rubber teat, what consistency of milk to give, how to wash the pigling, when to put it on a diet of solids. Sucking pigs were only given away on the production of a certificate from the Poor Peasants' Committee, and, since Sherre always knew beforehand when a farrowing was to be expected, there was usually a schedule hanging on the hog-house door, showing when this or that citizen could come for his pigling.

This distribution of piglings spread our fame throughout the district, and we soon had many friends among the villagers. In all the surrounding villages good English hogs and sows were growing up, not fit, perhaps, for breed stock, but capable of fattening up gloriously.

The next section of the hog-house was the "nursery." This was a real laboratory, in which the strictest observation of each individual was maintained before deciding upon his future career. Sherre always had several hundred young ones on hand--their numbers rising in the spring.

The colonists knew many of these gifted youngsters by sight, and followed their development with the utmost interest and attention. The most promising were even known to me, to Kalina Ivanovich, to the Commanders' Council, and to many of the colonists. From the day of his birth, for example, the son of Vasili Ivanovich and Matilda was the centre of attention. Born a Hercules, he displayed from the start all the required points, and was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. He did not disappoint our expectations, and was soon placed in a special pen beside his sire, and named Pyotr Vasilyevich, after Trepke the younger.

Still further back came the feeding pen. This was the domain of receipts and weight charts, where bourgeois bliss and quiet reigned supreme. If, on being weaned, certain individuals gave evidence of philosophical doubt, or went so far as to give loud utterance to various philosophical conceptions, in a month's time they would be lying quietly in their straw, meekly digesting their rations. Their biographies would end in compulsory feeding, till a day at last came when an individual was handed over to the authority of Kalina Ivanovich, and Silanti, on the sandy slope near the old park, converted the individual, without a single philosophical qualm, into pork, while at the storeroom Alyoshka Volkov got a barrel ready for the reception of lard.

The very last compartment was the sow pen, but here only the high priests might enter in, so that I myself did not know all the mysteries of this holy of holies.

The hog-house brought us in a good income; we had never counted on becoming, in such a short time, a paying concern. Sherre's crop-raising, regulated to the ultimate detail, provided us with huge fodder reserves--beet, pumpkins, maize, potatoes. It was all we could do in the autumn to get these stocks under cover.

The acquisition of the mill opened wide horizons to us. Besides payment for milling (four pounds per pood) the mill brought us in bran, the most valuable of all fodder for our livestock.

The mill was also significant on another plane--it placed us on a new footing with the whole of the surrounding peasantry, thus enabling us to embark upon a most important and comprehensive policy. The mill was the colony's Foreign Office. It was impossible to make the slightest move without finding ourselves involved in the intricate web of the ever-changing peasant situation. There was a Poor Peasants' Committee in every village, most of them active and disciplined; there were middle peasants, round and firm as a pea, and, like peas, closed up each in his separate compartment and exclusive; there were "bosses," too--kulaks--grown grim in their strongholds, savage with bottled-up fury and sour memories.

Having got the mill into our hands, we announced from the very start that we wished to have dealings with collectives, and that we would give them priority. We asked for a list of collectives to be drawn up in advance. The poor peasants formed such collectives with ease, arrived punctually, obeyed their representatives implicitly, and settled their accounts quickly and quietly, so that the work of the mill ran smoothly. The "bosses" formed small collectives, close-knit, however, by mutual sympathies and the ties of blood. There was a sort of massive silence about their organization, and it was often hard even to make out which were the elders among them.

When, however, companies of middle peasants came to the mill, the work of the colonists became hard labour. They never came together, but

straggled in throughout the day. They did have a representative, but he gave in his own grain first, as a matter of course, and immediately went home, leaving behind him a crowd agitated by all sorts of suspicions and vaguely aware of unfairness. Having made the journey an excuse for breakfasting on copious draughts of samogon, our clients displayed strong tendencies to settle on the spot various domestic conflicts; and by dinner-time, after prolonged debate and a certain amount of scuffling, which fairly exasperated the colonists, many of the clients became patients in Ekaterina Grigoryevna's dressing station. Osadchy, the commander of the ninth detachment, which worked at the mill, went purposely to the improvised hospital, to have it out with Ekaterina Grigoryevna.

"Why should you bandage him? As if they could be cured! They're muzhiks--you don't know them! Start curing them and they'll only fall to cutting one another's throats. Hand them over to us--we'll cure them for you! You ought to see what's going on at the mill!"

The truth must be admitted--both the ninth detachment and Denis Kudlaty, the manager of the mill, knew how to cure the squabblers and reduce them to order, in the course of time earning great fame in this respect, and gaining a reputation for infallibility.

Up till dinner-time the lads would stand quietly at the hopper, amidst a raging sea of obscenity, whiffs of samogon, waving arms, the snatching of sacks one from another, endless calculations as to turn, mixed up with other calculations and recollections. When the boys could no longer endure all this, Osadchy would lock the door of the mill and resort to repressive measures. The members of the ninth detachment, clutching three or four of the tipsiest and most abusive in a brief embrace, would seize them beneath the armpits and conduct them to the bank of the Kolomak. With the most businesslike air, sweetly conversing and persuading the while, the colonists would seat their victims on the bank, there, with admirable thoroughness, to throw over them the contents of a dozen pails of water. The victims, at first unable to make out what had happened, would stubbornly return to the subject under discussion at the mill. Osadchy, his sunburnt legs planted wide apart, his hands thrust in the pockets of his shorts, would lend an attentive ear to the patient's mutterings, following his every movement with cold grey eyes.

"Three more 'bloodies'--let him have another three pails." The preoccupied Lapot would provide the amount required, with a sweeping gesture, after which he would look into the patient's face with assumed gravity, just as if he were a doctor.

The patient, at last becoming alive to the situation, would rub his eyes and feebly protest, shaking his head:

"Who gave you the right? Hey! You!" Osadchy would calmly give the order:

"One more dose."

"One more dose of H₂O," Lapot would sing out sweetly, pouring a pail of water with cautious thrift over the patient's head, as if it were the last drop of some precious medicine. Bending over the long-suffering, moist chest, he would command, with the same tender anxiety as before:

"Hold your breath....draw a long breath... again--hold your breath."

To the delight of all, the thoroughly bewildered patient would obey Lapot's commands with the utmost docility, now preserving complete immobility, now expanding his abdomen and hiccupping.... Lapot would straighten himself with a relieved expression.

"Condition satisfactory, pulse 370, temperature 15."

Lapot knew how to keep a straight face in such cases, and the whole procedure was carried out in a strictly scientific tone. But the lads on the bank of the river, standing there with the empty pails in their hands, could not restrain their guffaws, and a crowd of villagers on the top of the slope would smile in sympathy. Lapot would approach this crowd, and ask, with an air of grave courtesy:

"Who's the next? Whose turn for the water treatment?"

"The villagers received Lapot's every word with open mouths, as if it were nectar, beginning to laugh before each word was uttered.

"Comrade Professor," Lapot would say to Osadchy. "There are no more patients."

"Let the convalescents be dried," Osadchy would command.

The ninth detachment would begin zealously laying the patients, now really recovering their senses, on the grass, turning them over in the sunshine.

"Don't! I'll do it myself!" one of them would implore, grinning, his voice now quite sober. "I'm quite well now."

Only then would Lapot laugh, good-humouredly and frankly announcing:

"That one's recovered--he may be discharged!"

Others would go on resisting, even trying to maintain their old formulae: "You go to..." but Osadchy's terse reminder of the pail would bring them to a state of complete sobriety, and they would beg: "Don't! On my honour--swearing's a habit with me--it slipped out!" Lapot would examine such individuals thoroughly, as if their case were the worst of all, while the laughter of the colonists and villagers would pass all bounds, only interrupted in order not to miss some new pearl of speech.

"A habit, you say? Have you had it long?"

"How can you--God forbid!" would reply the patient, blushing and confused, but afraid to make any stronger protest, for the ninth detachment on the bank had not yet put down their pails.

"Not long, you say? And did your parents suffer from swearing?"

"Of course they did," said the patient, smiling foolishly.

"And your grandfather?"

"My grandfather, too."

"And your uncle?"

"Well, of course."

"And your grandmother?"

"Of course she... God forbid! My grandmother--she may not have...."

All the onlookers, and Lapot, too, rejoiced to hear that the patient's grandmother had been perfectly healthy.

Embracing the dripping patient, Lapot would say:

"It'll pass! It'll pass, I tell you! Come and see us more often. We charge nothing for treatment."

The patient, together with his friends and foes, would go off into fits of laughter, but Lapot continued seriously, while turning towards the mill, where Osadchy was already unlocking the door:

"If you prefer it we can visit you in your home. That's gratis, too. But you must apply two weeks in advance, and send horses for the professor. And you must provide the pails and water. I'll treat your father, if you like. Your mother, too."

"His mother doesn't suffer from that illness," someone would say, suppressing his guffaws for the moment.

"I beg your pardon--I asked you about your parents, and you said 'Yes, of course.' "

"I never!" the convalescent would exclaim in astonishment.

The villagers would be frantic with delight.

"Ha-ha-ha! Just fancy! Slandering his own mother!"

"Who?"

"Him--Yavtukh! The one who's ill! Oh, I shall die! Honestly--I shall die! Oh, the swine! And that young fellow--he won't even smile for a moment. A splendid doctor!"

Lapot would be borne back in triumph to the mill, and the order would be given in the engine room to resume work. The atmosphere in which work was now carried on would be the diametrical opposite of what it had been before. The clients would hasten to fulfil all Kudlaty's orders with an almost excessive zeal, each keeping to his turn without a murmur, and greedily drinking up every word uttered by Lapot, whose fund of language and mimicry was positively inexhaustible. By the evening milling was over, and the villagers, affectionately pressing the colonists' hands before getting into their carts, would exultantly revive the memory of their past enjoyment.

"And his grandmother, he says! What a lad! If we could have one such lad for each village, no one would think of going to church."

"Hi, Karpo! Are you dry now?" someone would exclaim. "And how's your head? Everything all right? Your Granny, too? Ha-ha-ha!"

Karpo would smile into his beard in confusion, as he settled the bags on his cart.

"Never gave it a thought," he would say, wagging his head. "And there I am--in the hospital!"

"Come on, now--swear! Or have you forgotten how?"

"Not now, he won't! Perhaps after he gets past Storozhevoye he'll swear at his horse!"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The fame of the ninth detachment's water cure spread far, and our clients would every now and then recall this splendid institution, and show a strong desire to get more closely acquainted with Lapot. The latter would extend his hand with a grave and friendly gesture.

"I'm only the senior assistant. That's the chief professor--Comrade Osadchy."

Osadchy would glance coldly at the visitors. These latter would clap Lapot cautiously on his naked shoulder.

"Assistant? If anybody starts swearing in the Village, now, he's told: Shall we bring you the water doctor from the colony? He's willing to visit us in our homes, you know!"

We soon managed to establish our own atmosphere in the mill. It was lively, cheerful, brisk. Discipline stole about on noiseless feet, always ready, with due caution, to take by the hand anyone chancing to infringe its severe laws, and put him in his place.

In July we organized re-elections to the Village Soviet. Luka Semyonovich and his friends surrendered their positions without a struggle. Pavel Pavlovich Nikolayenko became the chairman and, of the colonists, Denis Kudlaty was elected to the Viillage Soviet.

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THE FOURTH MIXED

In the end of July the fourth mixed worked the command of Burun with fifty members. Burun was the acknowledged commander of the mixed, and none of the colonists laid any claim to this difficult, but honourable post.

The fourth mixed detachment worked from dawn to dusk. The lads would often say that they worked "without signals," for no signal was sounded to summon members to their work, or to announce the cessation of work. Burun's fourth mixed was at present working at the threshing.

At four o'clock in the morning, after reveille and breakfast, the fourth mixed drew up along the flower bed opposite the main entrance to the White House. All the teachers were ranged at the colonists' right flank. They were not actually obliged to take part in the work of the fourth mixed, with the exception of the two who were on working duty, but it had long been considered etiquette in the colony to work in the fourth mixed, so that not a single self-respecting person would miss the order for its organization. On the right flank would be Sherre, Kalina Ivanovich, Silanti Otchenash, Oksana, Rakhil, our two laundresses, the secretary Spiridon, and the senior roller from the mill, on leave at the moment, wheelwright-instructor Kozyr, Mizyak, our red-haired, gloomy gardener, his wife, the beautiful Nadenka, the wife of Zhurbin, and a few others--I didn't even know them all.

And there would be many volunteers in the colonists' ranks--any members happening to be free at the moment from the ninth and tenth detachments, the second stable-workers' detachment, the third cowshed detachment--they would all be there.

Maria Kondratyevna Bokova, alone, though she did take the trouble to get up early, and came to us in an old cotton sarafan, did not take her place in the ranks, but sat in the porch chatting with Burun. For some time now Maria Kondratyevna had ceased inviting me either to tea, or to partake of ice cream, but she was just as nice to me as to the rest, and I did not feel offended with her in the least. I even liked her more than formerly. Her eyes had become graver and sterner, and her chaffing more good-natured. During this time Maria Kondratyevna had got to know many of the little ones and the girls, had made friends with Silanti, and had got the hang of some of our more difficult natures. Maria Kondratyevna was a charming, a delightful person, but nevertheless I urged her quietly: "Maria Kondratyevna, go and stand in line. Everyone will be glad to receive you in the workers' lines."

Maria Kondratyevna smiled at the morning glow, tucked up with her rosy fingers a rebellious, sun-kissed lock, and replied, a little huskily, in her deep chesty voice:

"Thank you, and what will I do today--thrash, eh?"

"Not thrash, but thresh," said Burun. "You'll write down the output of grain."

"And will I be able to do, this well?"

"I'll show you how."

"Haven't you found me work that is too easy?"

Burun smiled. "All our work is the same. Tell us about it in the evening, when the fourth mixed comes' to supper."

"My! How nice that sounds. Supper in the evening, after work!"

I noted Maria Kondratyevna's emotion, and turned aside to hide my smiles. Maria Kondratyevna, already standing on the right flank, was laughing musically at something or other, and Kalina Ivanovich, most gallant of fauns, was pressing her hand and laughing, too.

Eight drummers came running up, beating a light tattoo, and ranged themselves on the right flank. Four buglers, their boyish elastic figures swaying slightly, approached, and held themselves in readiness. The colonists drew themselves up, and fell serious.

"To the colours! Attention!"

Slender bare arms flew up along the ranks--the salute. Nastya Nochevnaya, colony monitor for the day, attired in her best, with a red armband, beneath the rolling of the drums and the silvery greetings of the trumpets, carried to the right flank the silk Gorky banner, guarded on either side by the cold gleaming steel of two fixed bayonets.

"Form fours--right! Forward march!" There was slight confusion in the ranks of the grown-ups, Maria Kondratyevna suddenly squeaked and glanced nervously at me, but the march of the drummers set everyone right. The fourth mixed had gone out to work.

Burun caught the detachment up at a run, shifted his feet to fall into step, and led the way to the place where a high, neat wheat stack, built by Silanti, had long adorned the field, side by side with several smaller stacks which were not quite so neat--stacks of rye, oats and barley, as well as that special rye which even the peasants were unable to recognize and took for barley. These stacks had been built by Karabanov, Chobot, Fedorenko, and it has to be admitted, work and sweat as the lads might, they had been unable to outvie Silanti.

The grave, oil-stained mechanics were awaiting the arrival of the fourth detachment beside the power engine hired from a neighbouring village. The threshing machine itself was our own, bought in the spring on the instalment plan, and, like everything else in our life, new.

Burun rapidly formed his brigades, having planned everything the day before--not for nothing was he a veteran fourth mixed commander. Our banner was raised above the stack of oats destined to be threshed last.

The wheat was finished by dinner-time. The top platform of the thresher was the gayest and most crowded place of all. Here were the girls, covered with the grey-gold wheat dust, their eyes gleaming, with Lapot as the sole representative of the boys. He was indefatigable, never resting either his back or his tongue. At the most important and responsible post could be made out Silanti's bald head and meagre moustache, saturated with the same dust.

Just now, Lapot was concentrated on Oksana.

"The colonists told you that was wheat just for fun. That's not wheat--it's pea."

Oksana received the still unbound sheaf of wheat and placed it on Lapot's head, but this by no means diminished the general satisfaction at Lapot's words.

I like threshing-time. Threshing has a special charm towards evening. Music has by now crept into the monotonous beat of the machine, and the ear has grown accustomed to the peculiar musical phrase, infinitely varied from moment to moment, and yet each one like the preceding one. And this music forms such a cheerful background to the complex movement, weary by now, but stubbornly indefatigable. A row at a time, as if by some magic invocation, the sheaves rise from the ever-diminishing stack, and, speeded on their final journey by a brief, gentle touch of the colonists' hands, leap into the entrails of the insatiable machine, leaving behind them a whirlwind of scattered particles, and the moans of flying grain torn from the living sheaves. And in this whirlwind, amidst the death throes of innumerable sheaves, the colonists laughed and joked, staggering from exhaustion and excitement, scorning their own weariness, bending, running, stooping beneath heavy

burdens, covered with chaff, but beginning to feel the refreshing coolness of the calm, summer evening. To the symphony of sounds, the monotonous tunes of the clicking machinery, the excruciating dissonances of the top platform, they added an exultant, essentially major, music of healthy human fatigue. It was hard to distinguish details, but just as hard to tear oneself away from the elemental fascination of the threshing floor. The colonists could be hardly recognized in those gold-grey figures, which made me think of photographic negatives. Red-haired, black-haired, flaxen, all were now alike. It seemed almost unbelievable that the ghostlike stooping figure, standing from the early morning, notebook in hand, in the very thick of the vortex, could be Maria Kondratyevna, and it was hard to recognize the clumsy, wrinkled shade at her side. I only knew it to be Eduard Nikolayevich from his voice, which was, as ever, courteous and reserved.

"Comrade Bokova, how much barley have we now?"

Maria Kondratyevna turned her notebook towards the sunset glow.

"Four hundred poods, already," was her reply in such a broken, weary soprano that I felt quite sorry for her.

It was all very well for Lapot, who could find a way out even in the excess of fatigue.

"Galatenko!" he yelled, loud enough to be heard all over the threshing floor. "Galatenko!"

Galatenko, who was balancing a two-pood load of straw on his head with the aid of a pitchfork, stood swaying for a moment as he yelled back from beneath it:

"What d'you want?"

"Come here a minute--I want you!" Galatenko cherished an almost religious devotion for Lapot. He loved him for his wit, his cheeriness, and his affection, for Lapot was the only one to appreciate Galatenko and to assure us that Galatenko had never really been lazy.

Galatenko flung the straw down in front of the engine, and hastened to the thresher. Leaning on the pitchfork, and secretly delighted at the excuse to relax a moment amidst the universal din, he began a conversation with Lapot:

"What did you call me for?"

"Listen, pal," said Lapot, bending down from above, and everyone around began to listen to the conversation in confident expectation of hearing something amusing.

"Well, I'm listening."

"Go to our bedroom."

"Well?"

"Under my pillow, there...."

"What?"

"Under my pillow, I say...."

"But what?"

"Under my pillow you'll find...."

"I understand it's under your pillow...."

"...a pair of spare hands."

"And what d'you want me to do with them?" asked Galatenko.

"Bring them here as quick as you can, these are no good any more," said Lapot, displaying his hands beneath general laughter.

"I see," said Galatenko.

He understood that everyone was laughing at Lapot's words, and, possibly, at himself. He had tried hard not to say anything silly or ridiculous, and he thought he had been successful, for only Lapot had spoken. But everyone laughed still more, the thresher was beginning to click idly, and Burun began to scold.

"What's all this? Why have you stopped working? It's all you, Galatenko!"

"I never... ."

Everyone fell silent as Lapot, in a voice of tense gravity, with a marvellous assumption of weariness, anxiety, and friendly confidence in Burun, said:

"You see, these hands are no good. Do let Galatenko go and fetch me my spare ones."

Burun immediately entered into the spirit of things, and said to Galatenko in slightly reproachful tones:

"But of course! Go and fetch them! Surely that's not too much trouble! How lazy you are, Galatenko!"

The threshing symphony was over. Now came the high-toned breathless cacophony of laughter and groans; even Sherre laughed, even the mechanics abandoned the engine and laughed, clutching at their grimy knees. Galatenko turned towards the dormitories, Silanti gazed at his back.

"So that's how it is, pal!"

Galatenko stood still, and seemed to be thinking. Karabanov shouted at him from the height of the straw tower:

"What are you waiting for? Go on!" But Galatenko grinned broadly. He understood now. Still smiling, he returned slowly to the threshing floor. The boys asked him from the straw:

"Where have you been?"

"Lapot, you see, told me to go and get some spare hands." "Well, why didn't you go?"

"He hasn't got any spare hands, he was just fooling."

Burun gave the order:

"That'll do--no more about spare hands! Go on working!"

"Enough is enough," said Lapot, "we'll have to go on using the old ones."

At nine o'clock Sherre stopped the engine, and went up to Burun.

"The boys are worn out. And there's half an hour's work left." "Never mind!" said Burun. "We'll finish it." Lapot shouted from above: "Comrade Gorkyites! There's half an hour's work left. And I'm afraid another half hour'll about finish us off. I don't agree."

"What d'you want, then?" asked Burun suspiciously.

"I protest! In half an hour we shall be done for. Shan't we, Galatenko?"

"Why, yes, that's true. Half an hour's a long time."

Lapot raised his clenched fist.

"We can't go on half an hour. We've got to finish everything, this whole heap, in a quarter of an hour. None of your half hours!"

"That's right!" shouted Galatenko. "He's right there!"

Sherre started the engine to the accompaniment of a fresh outburst of laughter. Everything was finished by another twenty minutes. And suddenly all were overcome by the desire to drop on to the straw, and sleep. But Burun gave the order: "Fall in!"

The buglers and drummers, who had long been awaiting their hour, rushed up to the front row. The fourth mixed escorted the banner to its place in the White House. I remained at the threshing floor, and from the White House the sounds of the salute to the colours floated back to me. In the dark a figure bearing in its hand a long staff stumbled against me.

"Who is it?" I exclaimed.

"It's me, Anton Semyonovich. I've come to you about the thresher. From the Volovy farmstead, you know, and my name is Volovik."

"All right! Come to the house."

We, too, set off for the White House. Volovik, an old man, apparently, was mumbling in the dark.

"It's fine here, like people used to live."

"How's that?"

"Well, look! You go out threshing with cross and banners, the proper way."

"Where d'you see the cross? That's only the banner. And we have no priest."

Volovik ran on a short way ahead, gesticulating with his stick.

"The priest doesn't matter," he cried. "What matters is that people make a festival. It's a sort of holiday. Look! For people to bring in the harvest is the festival of festivals, and our folk have forgotten that."

It was noisy at the White House. Tired as the colonists were, they were not too tired for a dip in the river, and after their bath there seemed to be no fatigue left. It was gay and noisy at the tables in the garden, and Maria Kondratyevna was ready to weep for all sorts of reasons-- because she was tired, because she loved the colonists, because, in her too, the true law of humanity had been revived, because she, too, had tasted of the delights of a free, working collective.

"Well, was your work too easy?" Burun asked her.

"I don't know," said Maria Kondratyevna. "It was hard, I suppose, but that's not the point. Such work is happiness, anyhow."

Silanti sat next to me at supper, and became confidential.

"They asked me, you know, to tell you: on Sunday the matchmakers, as they say, will come here about Olga. You see how it is!"

"From Nikolayenko?"

"You see, it's from Pavel Ivanovich, the old man, I mean. And you must put your best foot forward, Anton Semyonovich. There must be those hand towels, you see, bread and salt, and that's all about it!"

"Silanti, old chap, you see to all that!"

"I can see to it, as they say, but you know bow it is, brother, people are supposed to drink on such occasions, samogon or something, you know."

"No samogon, Silanti, but you can buy two bottles of sweet wine."

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

10

THE WEDDING

On Sunday we were visited by emissaries from Pavel Ivanovich Nikolayenko. They were people we knew--Kuzma Petrovich Mogorych and Osip Ivanovich Stomukha. Kuzma Petrovich was well known to everyone in the colony, for he lived not far from us, just the other side of the river. He was a garrulous person, with no solidity of character. He had a weed-grown, sandy field, on which he seldom worked, and on which grew all sorts of trash--mainly on its own initiative. Innumerable paths were trodden through this field, which lay in everyone's way. The countenance of Kuzma Petrovich was like his field, for on it, too, nothing useful would grow, and each tuft of his dingy sparse beard seemed like a weed, sprouting quite irrespective of its owner's interests. Over his countenance, too, ran innumerable paths--wrinkles, folds, and ruts. The only thing which distinguished Kuzma Petrovich from his field was his long thin nose. Osip Ivanovich, on the contrary, was very good-looking. He had the handsomest face and the best figure of any man in Goncharovka. He had a big red moustache, and fine, insolent, somewhat prominent eyes, his attire was half urban, half military, and he always looked smart and slender. He had many relatives among the more prosperous peasantry, but for some reason or other he had no land himself, and his sole apparent occupation was hunting. He lived right on the bank of the river, in a lonely hut which seemed to shun the village.

Although we had known that guests were to be expected, they caught us ill-prepared. And how were we to know the preparations necessary in such an unfamiliar business? True, all was solid, calm and imposing in my office when they entered. They found there no one but Kalina Ivanovich and myself. The visitors entered, pressed our hands, and seated themselves on the sofa. I did not know how to begin, and was glad when Osip Ivanovich made a simple opening.

"Formerly in such cases they used to tell a tale about hunters--we went a-hunting, and we found a fox, and the fox was the pretty girl.... But I think that isn't necessary now, though I'm a hunter myself."

"Quite right," I said.

Kuzma Petrovich shuffled his feet without rising from the sofa, and wagged his beard:

"All nonsense, that's what I say!"

Stomukba corrected him.

"It's not that it's nonsense--it's just that the times are changed."

"There are different sorts of times," began Kalina Ivanovich magisterially. "Sometimes the people's minds are in darkness and that's not enough for them--they have to invent all sorts of spooks to frighten themselves with, and live like dunderheads, afraid of everything--thunder, the moon a black cat. But now we have the Soviet government--now we're not afraid of anything, unless it's the stop-the-way detachment."

Stomukba interrupted Kalina Ivanovich, who had apparently forgotten that we were not gathered together for a philosophic chat.

"We'll say what we've come about quite simply--we've been sent to you by people whom you know--Pavel Ivanovich Nikolayenko and his wife, Evdokla Stepanovna. We ask you as father here, in the colony, if you are willing to give your, as it were, daughter Olya Voronova in marriage to their son Pavel Pavlovich, the latter being at present chairman of the Village Soviet."

"We request your answer," chimed in Kuzma Petrovich. "If you agree, and as the father is willing, then let's have the towels and bread, and if you don't agree we would ask you not to take it amiss that we have troubled you."

"Tee-hee! That's not enough," said Kalina Ivanovich. "According to your silly law you ought to take a pumpkin home."

"We won't hold out for pumpkins," smiled Osip Ivanovich. "Anyhow it's not the season for them."

"That's true," agreed Kalina Ivanovich. "But in the old times, a lass, if the silly thing was vain, would keep a room full of pumpkins--just in case, you know. And if the suitors did not come, she would make a gruel with them, the parasite! Pumpkin gruel is good, especially if it's made with millet."

"Well, and what is your paternal reply?" asked Osip Ivanovich.

I replied:

"Thanks for the honour. I'm not the father, however, and my authority is not paternal. You'll have to ask Olya herself, of course, and afterwards all sorts of details will have to be decided by the Commanders' Council."

"It's not for us to tell you what to do, you just do the right thing according to the new customs," agreed Osip Iwanovich quietly.

I went out of the office, and finding the colony monitor in the next room asked him to have the signal given for a meeting of the Commanders' Council. An unusually feverish and excited atmosphere prevailed in the colony. Nastya rushed up to me, asking, through laughter:

"Where are we to bring the towels? In here?" She nodded towards the office.

"Don't be in such a hurry with the towels, we haven't come to terms yet. You just stick around --I'll call you when you're needed."

"And who'll do the tying up?"

"Tying what up?"

"The towels! They have to be tied oh to the what d'you call them--matchmakers." Toska Solovyov was standing beside me, holding a great

wheat loaf under his arm, and in his hand a saltcellar, which he was shaking for the pleasure of watching the grains of salt jump. Silanti came running up.

"What are you shaking the bread-and-salt about for? You must put it on a dish."

He bent down, endeavouring to conceal the laughter with which he was consumed.

"Oh, these little fellows! And what about snacks?"

Ekaterina Grigoryevna made her appearance, to my intense relief.

"Help us with this business!" I implored her.

"I've been looking for them for ages. They've been dragging this bread about the colony since the early morning. Come along with me. We'll manage, don't you worry. We'll be in the girls' room, send for us."

The barelegged commanders came running into the office. I still have a list of the commanders during that happy epoch. It runs:

Commander of the First Detachment (cobblers) -Gud.

Commander of the Second Detachment (grooms) --Bratchenko.

Commander of the Third Detachment (cowherd) --Oprishko.

Commander of the Fourth Detachment (carpenters) --Taranets.

Commander of the Fifth Detachment (girls) -Nochevnaya.

Commander of the Sixth Detachment (smiths) -Belukhia.

Commander of the Seventh Detachment--Vetkovsky.

Commander of the Eighth Detachment-Karabanov.

Commander of the Ninth Detachment (millers)--Osadchy.

Commander of the Tenth Detachment (hog tenders) --Stupitsyn.

Commander of the Eleventh Detachment (small fry) --Georgievsky.

Secretary of the Commanders' Council--Kolya Vershnev.

Mill manager--Kudlaty.

Storekeeper--Alyosha Volkov.

Assistant agronomist--Olyla Voronova.

In reality many more than these met in the Commanders' Council. Members of the Komsomol organization--Zadorov, Zhorka Volkov, Yolokhov, Burun--had a perfect, acknowledged right, as well as those hoary veterans, Prikhodko, Soroka, Goles, Chobot, Ovcharenko, Fedorenko, Koryto, while on the floor would cluster those of the little fellows who were interested, among whom were invariably Mitka, Vitka, Toska, and Vanka Shelaputin. There were always teachers at meetings of the Council, too, as well as Kalina Ivanovich and Silanti Semyonodch. And so there were never enough chairs to go round, and people sat on window sills, or stood outside peering in at the windows.

Kolya Vershnev opened the meeting. The matchmakers, crowded by about a dozen colonists on the sofa, lost some of their solemnity among the medley of bare arms and legs.

I told the commanders of the arrival of the matchmakers. This was no news to the Commanders' Council, for everyone had long remarked the friendship between Pavel Pavlovich and Olya. Merely for form's sake Vershnev asked Olya:

"Are you willing to marry Pavel? Olya, blushing slightly, said: "Of course I am!"

Lapot pouted.

"That's not the way. You ought to resist so that we could persuade you. Otherwise it's no fun."

"Fun or no fun," said Kalina Ivanovich, "we've got to talk business. Just you tell us frankly what you mean to do about property and all that."

Osip Ivanovich touched his moustache.

"It's like this--if you give your consent, we'll take the wedding feast and the marriage ceremony upon ourselves, and afterwards the young couple will live with the old people. And since they'll live together, the property will be in common."

"And who's the new hut been built for?" asked Karabanov.

"That hut'll be for Mikhail."

"But isn't Pavel the eldest?"

"He's the eldest, of course, that's true. But the old man decided it should be so. You see, Pavel's taking a wife from the colony."

"Well, and what if she is from the colony?" Koval growled out disagreeably.

Osip Ivanovich did not know what to say at first. Kuzma Petrovich piped out in his reedy voice:

"That's how it works out. Pavel Ivanovich says: the wife has to go to the husband, because, you see, this one has a father, so there's a father-in-law--Mikhail is taking a wife from Sergei Grechany. And yours, you see, comes with Pavel Pavlovich, as a daughter-in-law. Pavel Pavlovich himself agrees to this."

"At that rate we'll soon be dealing in pumpkins," said Karabanov with a wave of his hand. "What do we care about Pavel Pavlovich's consent? It only means he has no guts, that's all. The Commanders' Council can't give Olya away like that. As far as that goes it would be the same thing as becoming a farm hand to the old devil."

"Semyon," said Kolka, frowning.

"All right, all right! I take back the word devil. That's one thing. The next thing is--what's this marriage ceremony you spoke about?"

"That's the proper thing--nobody ever got married without the priests. Such a thing has never happened in our village."

"Well, now it's going to," said Koval.

Kuzma Petrovich scratched his beard.

"Who knows what's going to happen, and what's not going to happen? Among us it's not considered nice. It's the same as living in sin."

Silence fell upon the Council. All were thinking of one and the same thing--the marriage would not come off. I was even afraid the lads, should things go wrong, would send away the matchmakers with little ceremony.

"Olya, would you like to be married by a priest?" asked Kolya.

"What's the matter with you--bias your breakfast disagreed with you? Have you forgotten I'm a Komsomol?"

"It's no go about the priests," I told the matchmakers. "Think out something else. You knew where you were going, didn't you? How could you think for a moment that we would agree to a church wedding?"

Silanti rose in his place, and got his finger ready for a speech.

"Silanti, do you wish to speak?" asked Kolya.

"There's something I want to ask."

"Ask away, then."

"Kuzma, you see, he's what you call a dreamer. Let Osip Ivanovich tell us what they want priests for? You'd do better fattening a pig."

"To hell with them!" laughed Stomukha. "Whenever I meet one of them, I turn back, and don't go hunting."

"It means it's Kuzma who wants all this."

Kuzma Petrovich smiled.

"Hee-hee, it isn't that! It's like this, you see--our grandfathers and our great-grandfathers did it that way, and Pavel Ivanovich says--we're taking a poor girl, without any, what d'you call it--dowry, and so on."

Kalina Ivanovich banged with his fist on the table.

"What's all this?" he cried. "What right have you to jabber? Who is this rich man to give himself airs in front of us? You think just because you and your Pavel Ivanovich have built a clay hut you can go about putting on airs! He thinks, the parasite, just because he has a table and a couple of benches and a leather coat put away in a chest, he's a millionaire!"

Kuzma Petrovich, alarmed, piped out:

"Who's putting on airs? We only just mentioned a dowry, as it were."

"Do you know where you are? This is the Soviet government. Perhaps you don't know what the Soviet government is like? The Soviet government can give a dowry that would make all your stinking grandfathers turn three times in their graves, the parasites!"

Kuzma attempted a feeble protest:

"We only...."

The boys roared with laughter, and applauded Kalina Ivanovich. Kalina Ivanovich grew angry in good earnest.

"Let the Commanders' Council think it well over," he said. "Look! They've come matchmaking to us, but we shall have to see if we can give our daughter Olga to such a pauper as this Nikolayenko, who's never tasted anything better than potatoes and onion, who grows goosefoot instead of rye, the parasite. But we're rich people, we have to think things over carefully."

The delight of the Commanders' Council and all present showed that there were no longer any problems to solve. The matchmakers were sent out of the office for a time, and the Commanders' Council embarked upon the discussion of a dowry for Olya.

The boys had been touched on the raw by the preceding negotiation, and assigned Olga a dowry which would have been splendid by any standards. Sherre was sent for, and there was some fear that he would raise objections to such great sacrifices, but Sherre, without even pausing to think, said sternly:

"That's right! However hard it may be for us, Voronova must be made a wealthy bride, the wealthiest in the district. Those kulaks must be put into their places."

Thus it was that any objections which did arise during the discussion of the dowry were only of this sort:

"Colt--nonsense! She must have a horse, not a colt!"

An hour later the matchmakers, who had been recovering their equilibrium in the fresh air, were called to the Council, and Kolya Vershnev, standing up behind the table, uttered, stammering slightly, the following imposing speech:

"The Commanders' Council has resolved as follows: to marry Olyla to Pavel. Pavel to move into a separate hut, and his father to give him what he can from his own farm. No priests, the wedding to be registered at the ZAGS [Registry office.--Tr.]. The first day of the wedding to be celebrated here, and you do what you like afterwards. Olyla to be given, to start a farm with:

A Simmenthal cow and a calf.

a mare and a colt,

five sheep,

an English sow....

Kolya grew quite hoarse during the reading of the endless list of Olya's dowry. Herein were included agricultural instruments, seed, fodder reserves, clothing, linen, furniture, and even a sewing machine. Kolya wound up as follows:

"We will always help Olya if necessary, and she and her husband are bound to give their help to the colony, whenever this is required. And Pavel to receive the title of Colonist."

The matchmakers blinked nervously, and looked as if they were about to assist at their own last rites. The laughing girls, no longer troubling their heads about what was right or what was wrong, came running up to tie the towels on to the matchmakers, and the younger boys, led by Toska, handed them bread and salt on a dish covered with a napkin. The matchmakers, confused and awkward, took the bread, but did not know what to do with it. Toska drew the dish from beneath Kuzma Petrovich's armpit, saying cheerfully:

"Hi! Give that back, or I shall get into trouble with the miller. It's his...what d'you call it?... plate."

The girls laid a cloth on my table, and set out three bottles of sweet red wine, and a dozen or so glasses. Kalina Ivanovich poured out a glass for everyone, and said, raising his own:

"That she may grow and obey!"

"Obey who?" asked Osip Ivanovich.

"Everyone knows who--the Commanders' Council, and the Soviet government in general."

We all clinked glasses, tossed them off, and ate sausage sandwiches.

Kuzma Petrovich bowed:

"Thanks for arranging everything so nicely. It means we can go and congratulate Pavel Ivanovich and Evdokia Semyonovna."

"Go ahead--congratulate them!" said Kalina Ivanovich.

Osip Ivanovich pressed our hands.

"You're splendid folk. There's no beating you!"

The matchmakers, hushed and meek as schoolgirls, went out of the office and made for the village. We watched them out of sight. Suddenly Kalina Ivanovich narrowed his eyes gaily and shrugged his shoulders in mock discontent.

"That won't do! Going away like stuffed owls! Run after them, Petya, and tell them to come to my room, and you, Anton, harness the horses in an hour's time and drive up."

An hour later the boys, amidst laughter, bundled the matchmakers into the carriage, still with the towels tied to them, but having lost many other marks of official emissaries, including articulate speech. Kuzma Petrovich, it is true, had not forgotten the bread, and was clutching it lovingly to his chest. Molodets drew the heavy carriage over the sandy path as if it had been a feather.

Kalina Ivanovich spat.

"He sent such poor ones on purpose, the parasite!"

"Who did?"

"Why, that Nikolayenko! He wanted to show us--as the bride is, so are the matchmakers."

"It's not that," said Silanti. "It's like this, you see! Some people wouldn't have gone as matchmakers when there weren't going to be priests, and these here, they don't give a hang for the priests, not they! And the old fox, you know who I mean, he said: 'Make believe you must have priests, and if they refuse, to hell with it.... That's how it is, you see.'"

The wedding being arranged for the middle of August, commissions set to work, and a performance was prepared. There was any amount of trouble, and still more expenditure. Kalina Ivanovich could not help feeling gloomy.

"If we are to marry off all our girls like this, Anton Semyonovich," he said, "you'd better take the boys, and me, old fool that I am, and we'll go out begging alms...but it can't be helped, I know that."

On the day of the wedding the colony was surrounded by sentries--two detachments had to be allotted by way of a guard. We sent out invitations--properly printed--to not more than seventy persons. These invitations ran as follows:

"The Commanders' Council of the Maxim Gorky Labour Colony requests your presence at a dinner, to be followed by a theatrical performance in celebration of the departure from the Colony of Colonist Olga Voronovna, and her marriage to Comrade Pavel Pavlovich Nikolayenko.

"Commanders' Council."

By two o'clock in the afternoon everything was ready in the colony. The festive tables were set out in the garden around the fountain. The decoration of this place was the contribution of Zinovi Ivanovich's art circle: slender poles, from which the ingeniously placed garlands of birchshoots hung gracefully, had been stuck into the earth all round the alfresco dining room, and no one, calmly admiring these garlands, gave a thought to the difficult task it had been for the boys to hang them there. The tables themselves were adorned with jars of white roses--Sherre's "snow queens."

Today the extent to which the colony had developed and the improvement in its outward appearance, were most happily and incontrovertibly apparent. The broad, sanded paths of the park emphasized the wealth of greenery of the orchard terraces, on which every tree, every group of bushes, every line in the flower beds, had been thought out in the silence of the night, watered with the sweat of mixed detachments, and beautified, as by precious stones, with the care and love of the whole collective. The high and low places of the riverbanks had been disciplined with a stern but loving hand: a flight of wooden steps, a birchen rail, a rectangular carpet of flowers, narrow, winding paths, a miniature embankment strewn with sand, all furnished additional proof of the superiority of man over nature, even of barefooted representatives of humanity like ourselves. And in the spracious yards of this barefooted master, he, the stepchild of old humanity, had managed to heal the deep wounds of the past with the hand of an artist. As far back as autumn the colonists had planted two hundred rosebushes here, but nobody could have counted the number of asters, carnations, stock, vermilion geraniums, blue Canterbury bells, and all sorts of other unknown and unnamed flowers. The yard was surrounded by hard roads, linking up the areas around individual buildings, squares and triangles of rye grass lent significance and freshness to unoccupied spaces, and here and there stood green garden benches.

Everything had become pleasant, homelike, beautiful and rational in the colony, and seeing all this I was proud of my own participation in the adornment of our planet. But I had my own aesthetic whims. Neither flowers, nor paths, nor shady nooks could for a moment distract my attention from those boys in their dark-blue shorts and white shirts. There they were--running about, moving quietly among the guests, busying themselves around the tables, standing at their posts, keeping out the hundreds of idlers who had come to gape at the extraordinary wedding. There they were, the Gorkyites! Graceful and well-knit, they have fine, elastic figures, muscular and healthy bodies which owe nothing to medicine, and fresh, red-lipped countenances. Those countenances are the work of the colony--such countenances are not brought into the colony from the streets.

Each of them has his path in life, and the Gorky Colony, too, has its path. I can discern the beginning of these paths, but how hard it is to see, through the mists surrounding the future, their direction, their continuation, their end. Elements still unconquered by man, as yet beyond the grasp of planning and mathematics, are whirling about in these mists. And in our progress among these elements, we have our own aesthetics, so that the aesthetics of flowers and parks are no longer capable of moving me.

Another reason for this may have been that Maria Kondratyevna came up to me with the question.

"Why are you indulging in melancholy all by yourself, Daddy?"

"How can I help being melancholy when everyone has deserted me, even you?"

"I would be happy to console you. I was looking for you, I didn't want to look at the wedding presents without you. Come on!"

All Olya's possessions had been gathered together in two classrooms. The guests were crowding about the display, cross, envious women pursing up their lips and glancing at me with angry attention. They had superciliously ignored our bride and married their sons to farmstead lasses, and now it appeared that the wealthiest brides had been within their reach. I recognized their right to be indignant with me.

"What are you going to do if the matchmakers begin to come in crowds?" asked Bokova.

"I'm safe," I replied. "Our girls are very particular."

Up ran a little chap, scared out of his wits.

"They're coming!"

The summons to a general meeting was already being sounded in the yard. At the porch, as the occasion required, a line of colonists and a platoon of drummers drew up in front of the banner. Our couple came into sight round the corner of the mill, the horses decked out with red ribbons, with Bratchenko in the driver's seat, also wearing a ribbon. We saluted the young couple. Anton pulled at the reins, and Olya flung herself joyfully on my neck. Excited, laughing and crying, she said:

"Mind you don't desert me--I feel so frightened!"

A brief meeting was held. Maria Kondratyevna touched and surprised me by presenting the young couple in the name of the Department of Public Education with a library of books on agriculture. Two colonists bore a great pile of books after her on flower-decked boards.

After the meeting we made the young couple stand beneath the colours and escorted them to the tables in full marching array. The place of honour had been prepared for them, and the standard-bearers stood behind them. A colonist monitor changed guard. Twenty colonists, in snow-white jackets, began to serve the dinner. Taranets' special mixed detachment cast an attentive eye on the pockets of the visitors, noiselessly dumping into the Kolomak several bottles of samogon, which had been extracted with the skill of conjurors and the courtesy of hosts.

I sat on one side of the young couple, and Pavel Ivanovich and Evdokia Stepanovna sat on their other side. Pavel Ivanovich, a stern individual with a beard like that of Saint Nicholas, the miracle worker, sighed heavily, either because he was vexed at his son's having become independent, or because he could not bear to look at the bottle of beer, Taranets having only just taken a bottle of samogon from him.

The colonists are wonderful today, I never get tired of looking at them. Animated, good-humoured, gracious, and with a touch of irony which is all their own. Even the eleventh detachment, lording it at the other end of the table, engaged the five guests under their care in lengthy and sprightly conversation. I wondered somewhat uneasily if they were not being a little too frank. I went to see. Shelaputin, who still retained his

childish treble, was pouring out beer for Kozyr, and saying:

"You were married in church, and look how badly it turned out!" "Let's marry you all over again!" suggested Toska.

Kozyr smiled.

"It's too late for me to be remarried, sons."

He crossed himself, and drank up his beer. Toska laughed.

"You'll have the bellyache now."

"God forbid! Why?"

"Why did you cross yourself then?"

Next to him sat a villager with a tangled, straw-coloured beard, a guest on the list of Pavel Ivanovich. He had never been in the colony before, and everything he saw astonished him.

"Lads! Is it really true that you're the bosses here?"

"Of course we are!" replied Shurka.

"What d'you need to farm the land for?"

Toska Solovyov turned right round towards him.

"Don't you know what for? We'd have to be farm hands otherwise, and now we don't have to."

"And what are you going to be?"

"Oho!" said Toska, flourishing a meat pie. "I'm going to be an engineer--Anton Semyonovich says I am, too--and Shelaputin is going to be a pilot."

He glanced ironically at his friend, Shelaputin, whose future as a pilot was as yet unrecognized by anyone in the colony. Shelaputin said, chewing energetically:

"M'hm, I'm going to be a pilot."

"Well, and what about working on the land, don't any of you want to?"

"Of course, we do! Some of us do. But our chaps will be different peasants from yours," said Toska, casting a swift glance at his interlocutor.

"You don't say! How d'you mean different?"

"I mean we'll be different. There'll be tractors. Have you ever seen a tractor?"

"No, I can't say I have."

"Well, we have. There's a sovkhos--we took some sows there once. They've got a tractor--like a beetle it looks."

The long line of guests was linked up by our detachments. I could easily discern the outlines of each detachment, and discover from their noise where their centres were. It was liveliest of all where the ninth detachment was, for Lapot was there, and colonists and guests were laughing and groaning around him. Lapot himself, together with his friend Taranets, had prepared an elaborate hoax against the chief personages of the mill, who were at the ninth detachment's table, placed by special order under his care. These were the sturdy, fluffy miller, the lean and angular bookkeeper, and the mechanic, a very humble individual. In his day Taranets had been a pickpocket, and it was child's play for him to extract a bottle of samogon from the miller's pocket and substitute for it another, filled with water from the Kolomak.

For a long time the miller and the bookkeeper sat shyly at the table, from time to time easting a glance towards Taranets' mixed detachment. But Lapot winked at them consolingly.

"You're our own folk, I'll see to everything!"

Drawing down to himself the head of the passing Taranets, he whispered something in his ear. Taranets nodded.

"You pour yourself out a glass under the table," advised Lapot confidentially, "and just colour it with beer, and everything'll be all right." As a result of acrobatical manoeuvring under the table, glasses full of suspiciously pale beer stood beside the thirsty ones, and their happy owners nervously prepared themselves snacks beneath the attentive gaze of the silently watching ninth detachment. At last all was in readiness, and the miller, winking slyly at Lapot, raised his glass to his beard. The bookkeeper and the mechanic still looked cautiously to the right and left, but all around was quiet. Taranets was leaning nonchalantly against the trunk of a poplar. Lapot lowered his lids to conceal the sudden sparkle which had awakened in his eye.

"Well, here's to everyone!" said the miller.

The ninth detachment, bending their heads, watched their three guests toss off their glasses. A certain lack of conviction could be felt in the last few gulps. The miller placed his empty glass on the table and shot a cautious glance at Lapot, but Lapot was chewing vacantly, his thoughts apparently somewhere far away. The bookkeeper and the mechanic tried their utmost to behave as if nothing special had happened, and even stabbed with their forks at their snacks.

The experienced miller inspected his bottle beneath the table, but someone took him gently by the hand. He raised his head--bending over him was the saucy, freckled countenance of Taranets.

"For shame!" said Taranets, actually reddening with indignation. "You were told no samogon must be brought and you, one of our own folk! Look--you've drunk it up! Who else has been drinking?"

"The devil knows!" said the miller in confusion. "I can't make out whether we've had anything or not!"

"You can't make out? I like that! Come on now, breathe! You can't make out, can't you? You smell like a barrel of samogon! For shame--bringing such stuff to the colony!"

"What's it all about?" inquired Kalina Ivanovich from afar.

"Samogon!" said Taranets, displaying the bottle. Kalina Ivanovich shot a menacing glance at the miller. The ninth detachment had long been in a state bordering on collapse, no doubt because Lapot was telling them something funny about Galatenko. The boys had their heads on the tables, unable to bear any more humour.

There was enough merriment here to last out the dinner, for every now and then Lapot would ask the miller:

"Wasn't it enough? And there isn't any more? Too bad! And was it good? Not very? What a pity Fedor interfered! Why couldn't you leave them alone, Fedor,--our own folk, after all!"

"Oh, no!" said Taranets gravely. "Look at them--they can hardly stay in their seats."

Lapot had a long program to be carried out. He still had to raise the miller solicitously from behind the table, whispering to him the while:

"Come on, we'll take you out through the garden--people are beginning to notice."

Karabanov's eighth detachment was on sentry duty for the day, but he himself kept turning up in the vicinity of the tables, just where the philosophical discussions aroused by the unusual wedding were blazing the fiercest. Here were Koval, Spiridon, Kalina Ivanovich, Zadorov, Yershnev, Volokhov and the director of the Lunacharsky Commune, the wise Nesterenko, with his red goatee.

All was not well with the commune across the river, they were unsuccessful with their land, unable to balance and distribute tasks and privileges, to cope with mutinous female characters, to instil patience for the present, faith in the morrow. Nesterenko summed it all up mournfully:

"We need to get hold of new sort of people... and where is one to get hold of them?"

"That's not the way to talk, Comrade Nesterenko," broke in Kalina Ivanovich eagerly. "That's not the way! Those new ones, the parasites, don't know how to do anything properly. It's the old ones you need more of!"

Things became still noisier at the tables. Apples and pears were brought from our own orchard, and from afar could be made out barrels of ice cream--the pride of the monitors for the day.

And then, suddenly, from behind the house came the wheezing of an accordion, and the wailings of the village women, the curse of nuptial rites, rent the air. Five or six women, whirling and stamping in front of the blear-eyed, tipsy accordion player, were slowly approaching us.

"They've come for the dowry," said Taranets.

A flushed, gaunt woman seemed to be stamping about for my especial benefit, thrusting out her elbows and scraping the sand with her big, awkward boots.

"Daddy darling, daddy dear, give away your daughter for a drink, dress your daughter up...."

A bottle and a ribbed glass--brown, oddly enough--suddenly appeared in her hands. With drunken recklessness she filled the glass, spilling the liquid on the earth and over her dress. Taranets came and stood between her and myself.

"That'll do," he said.

He got the bottle and glass away from her with ease, but she had already forgotten all about me, and was throwing herself avidly upon Olga, with drunken hilarity.

"Olga Petrovna, pretty one! What's this? You can't wear your plaits down your back any more! Tomorrow we'll make you cover your head, and you'll be like all married women."

"I will *not* cover my head!" said Olga with unexpected severity.

"You won't? You'll let your plaits hang down?"

"I *will!*"

All the women began squealing and chattering, advancing upon Olya, Volokhov, furious, exasperated, shoved them away, asking their leader bluntly:

"And if she doesn't wear a kerchief--what then?"

"Let her not, then, let her not! You know best! It's not a proper wedding, anyhow!"

The diplomatic elders came up and scattered the tittering, drink-sodden women in all directions. Olga and I went out of the park.

"I'm not afraid of them," said Olga. "But it's going to be hard."

Colonists rushed past us, bearing furniture and bundles of clothing. Gogol's *Marriage* was to be given, preceded by a lecture on "Marriage Rites of Various Nationalities" by Zhurbin. The end of the festivities was not yet in sight.

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

11

LYRICAL INTERLUDE

Soon rafter Olga's wedding, a long-expected calamity overtook us--the time had come for our Rabfak candidates to leave us. Although we had begun talking about the Rabfak as long ago as the days of Raissa and her baby, and had been preparing for it daily ever since; although there was nothing we had longed for so eagerly as having our own Rabfak students, and although the whole business was a joyous and triumphant one--when the day of parting came there was a lump in every throat, and tears welled up in everyone's eyes. No one wanted to face the terrible fact: the colony had lived, worked, and laughed, and suddenly its own members were leaving it. Somehow no one had quite expected this fact to materialize.

After breakfast, everyone put on clean suits, and set out the festive tables in the garden, while the standard-bearers removed the cover from the banner in my office, and the drummers slung their drums over their shoulders. But not even these festive notes could quench the gnawing flames of melancholy. Lydochka had been crying her blue eyes out since the early morning, the girls were frankly blubbering on their beds, and Ekaterina Grigoryevna, who could hardly restrain her own emotion, was trying in vain to console them. The lads were grave and silent, Lapot divested of all his charm. The younger ones ranged themselves in lines of unprecedented straightness, like so many sparrows on a telegraph wire. Perched demurely on benches and railings, their hands folded between their knees, they fixed their eyes on objects a great deal higher than their usual field of vision--roofs, treetops, the sky. And never before had there been so much nose-blowing.

I shared their childish dismay, I shared their grief--the grief of those who have an inordinate respect for justice. I agreed with Toska Solovyov --why was Matvei Belukhin not to be in the colony tomorrow? Could not matters be arranged nationally enough for Matvei not to leave, and Toska not to cherish his vast, irremediable, unmerited sorrow? But Toska was not the only chum whom Matvei was leaving, and Matvei was not the only one to be leaving. Burun, Karablanov, Zadorov, Krainik, Vershnev, Goles, Nastya Nochevnaya--they were all leaving, and each of them had dozens of chums, and Matvei, Semyon, Burun were real human beings, human beings whom it had been bliss to imitate, whose absence would mean beginning life all over again.

And it was not these emotions alone which oppressed the colony. It was apparent, both to myself and to the colonists, that the colony had its head placed on the executioner's block, and that the axe was ready to descend upon its neck.

The Rabfak candidates themselves looked as if they were being prepared for sacrifice to the "innumerable gods of necessity and fate." Karbanov never left my side, smiling and saying:

"Life's like that--something's always wrong. It's the greatest good fortune to get into the Rabfak, it's a dream, you might say, it's what everybody's always looking for, it's God knows what! But when you come up against it, perhaps it isn't, after all! Perhaps really our happiness is ending today. It's sad to leave the colony, so sad.... I could howl--if it weren't for people seeing me, how I'd howl! Perhaps I'd feel better if I could! There's no such thing as truth in the world!"

Vershnev, angry-eyed, regards us from a corner of the office.

"There's only one truth--human beings."

"I like that!" laughed Karabanov. "D'you mean you've been looking for truth among cats?"

"N-n-n-no, it isn't that ... it's that people have got to be good, or else what the hell's the good of truth? You see, if a person's a swine, he'll be a nuisance when we reach socialism, too. That's what I've learned today."

I looked intently at Nikoliai.

"Why today?"

"Today you can see people like in a mirror. I don't know how it is: everything used to be just work, and every day a working day, and today everything is suddenly c-c-clear. Gorky wrote the truth, but I couldn't understand it before, at least I did understand it, but I didn't realize how important it was. A Man--that's not just any rotter! And it's true--there are some who are just ordinary people, and some who are real men."

With words like these the Rabfak candidates tried to conceal the fresh wounds inflicted by their departure from the colony. But their efforts were less strenuous than ours, for the luminous Rabfak awaited them, while nothing luminous awaited us.

The night before, the teachers had gathered together in the porch of my apartment, some seated, others standing, all thinking and huddling shyly together. The colony was asleep, and the night was still, warm, and starry. The world seemed to me a sort of magic potion of the most complex consistency--delicious, seductive. But it was impossible to resolve it into its ingredients, and no one could tell what bitternesses were dissolved in it. At such moments a man is beset by philosophical conjectures, by the longing to gasp the incomprehensible. And if the morrow is to carry away "forever" the friends whose social development he has, not without difficulty, helped to create out of chaos, a man is apt to gaze speechlessly into the calm sky, and almost, at moments, to believe that the nearby popbars, willows, and lime trees are whispering the solutions to his problems.

And we, a helpless huddle of mortals, each of us individually, and all of us together, maintained silence, indulging in our own thoughts, listening to the whispering of the leaves, and looking into the eyes of the stars. It is thus that savages behave after an unsuccessful hunt.

And there was I, thinking, thinking with the rest. On that night, the night on which I turned out my first real batch of graduates, I indulged in a lot of nonsensical meditations. I told nobody of them at the time, and it probably seemed to my colleagues that they alone had weakened, that I remained unshakable, sturdy and deep-rooted as an oak. They may even have been ashamed to show their weakness in my presence.

I thought how full of hardship and injustice my life had been. How I had sacrificed the best period of my life simply that half a dozen "delinquents" might enter a Rabfak, how at the Rabfak, and in the big town, they would come under new influences, which I could not control...and who could tell how it would all end? Perhaps my labour and my sacrifices would turn out to have been simply a useless clot of misapplied energy!

And I thought of other things, too. Why all this injustice? Hadn't I done good work myself? Hadn't it been a hundred times harder and more worth while than singing songs at a club concert, or even acting in a good play, even in such a theatre as the Moscow Art Theatre? Why, then, should actors be applauded by vast audiences, why should they retire to rest in their own homes, conscious of human attention and gratitude, and I have to while away the dark night in a godforsaken labour colony? Why did no one, not even the inhabitants of Goncharovka, applaud me? Not only this--I was perpetually reverting anxiously to the fact that I had spent a thousand rubles for the outfitting of my Rabfak candidates, that such expenditure was not provided for in our budget, that the inspector from the Department of Finance had looked at me severely and critically, saying in answer to my inquiry:

"Lay out the money, if you like, but bear in mind that any deficit will have to come out of your own salary."

The memory of this conversation made me smile. A whole department suddenly set to work in my brain. In one room someone was eagerly composing savage philippics against the inspector, in the next room was a daredevil loudly exclaiming: "What the hell!", and next door, bending over the tables, an obsequious rabble seemed to be calculating how many months it would take to cover the deficit of one thousand rubles out of my salary. This department worked conscientiously, despite the fact that other departments were also working in my brain. In a neighbouring building a solemn meeting was being held, all our teachers and Rabfak students were on the platform, an orchestra a hundred strong was thundering out the "Internationale," and a learned pedagogue was making a speech.

Once again I could smile. What on earth could the learned pedagogue have to say that was any use? He hadn't seen Karabanov, revolver in hand, on the highroad, or Burun perched on someone else's window sill--Burun the agile burglar, whose companions in burglary had been shot. What had he seen?

"What are you thinking about all the time?" Ekaterina Grigoryevna asked me. "Thinking and smiling."

"I'm holding a solemn meeting," I said.

"That's obvious. But now just tell us what we're going to do without a nucleus?"

"Aha! Another field for the future science of pedagogics--the field of nuclei!"

"What field?"

"I'm talking about the nucleus. If there's a collective, there has to be a nucleus."

"It all depends what sort of nucleus."

"The sort we require. We must have a higher opinion of our collective, Ekaterina Grigoryevna. Here we are worrying about a nucleus, and the collective has already produced one without our so much a noticing it. A good nucleus multiplies by division. Put that down in the notebook for the future science of education."

"All right, I will," agrees Ekaterina Grigoryevna meekly.

The next day the teaching collective was listless, and the celebration went off in a stiff, official manner. I had no desire to intensify this mood, and acted as if I were on the stage, impersonating a cheerful individual celebrating the attainment of his most cherished desires.

At noon we dined at the festive tables and, somewhat to our own surprise, there was much laughter. Lapot, acting the parts, showed what our Rabfak candidates would be in seven or eight years. He showed us engineer Zadorov, dying of consumption, with doctors Burun and Vershnev at his bedside, sharing the fee, while the musician Krainik came in demanding immediate payment for the funeral march, which, otherwise, he threatened not to play. But both in our laughter and Lapot's jokes, it was not so much genuine amusement, as well-trained wills, that prevailed.

At three o'clock we lined up and brought out the colours. The Rabfak candidates ranged themselves on the right flank. Anton came out of the stables driving Molodets, and the younger boys loaded the cart with the baskets of the departing ones. The command was given, the drums rolled, and the column set out for the station. Half an hour later we emerged from the shifting sandy valley of the Kolomak, and entered with relief upon the tough, short grass of what had once been a spacious highroad, traversed long ago by Tatars and Dnieper Cossacks. The drummers squared their shoulders, and the sticks in their hands became lighter and more spirited.

"Dress the line! Heads up!" I commanded sternly.

Karabanov turned without stopping or losing step, displaying his unique talent of conveying in a simple smile his pride, his joy, his love, his confidence in his own powers, his own splendid future. Zadorov, who was marching beside him, understood his movement immediately, and hastened shyly, as always, to conceal his emotion, merely directing a swift, animated glance at the horizon, and looking up at the banner. Suddenly Karabanov broke out into shrill, buoyant singing. The others, delighted, took up the song. Immediately all within me was as festive as a May Day parade. I seemed to feel that the colonists shared my mood; the great fact had suddenly dawned on us--the Gorky Colony was seeing off its first and best. It was to do them honour that the silken banner rippled, the drums thundered, the columns swayed in their stately march; the sun, which seemed to be glowing with joy, sank into the west as if making way for us, as if singing a sweet song with us, a cunning song, that seemed to be about an enamoured Cossack, but was really about the detachment of Rabfak students leaving for Kharkov, on the orders given yesterday by the Commanders' Council to the "seventh mixed detachment under the command of Alexander Zadorov." The boys enjoyed their own singing, and kept casting sidelong glances towards me--they were glad I was enjoying myself with them.

Eddies of dust had long been revolving in the distance behind us and soon we could make out a rider in its midst. It was Olya Voronova.

Jumping down, she offered her horse to me.

"Get up! It's a good saddle--a real Cossack one. I was nearly late."

"I'm no General," I said. "Let Lapot ride, he's S.C.C. [Secretary of the Commanders' Council.--Tr.] now."

"Right!" said Lapot, and, clambering into the saddle, he moved to the front of the column, swaying in his seat, and twisting a nonexistent moustache.

The command "at ease" had to be given, partly to enable Olya to have her say, and partly because Lapot's antics were too much for the

colonists.

At the station a mood of solemn melancholy, streaked with reckless gaiety, prevailed. The students got into their carriage, and looked proudly down upon our ranks and the people on the platform--these latter somewhat agitated by our arrival.

When the second signal had been given, Lapot made a brief speech.

"See you don't let us down, sons! Shurka, you keep them in order, and don't forget to send this carriage to a museum. And let there be an inscription on it: 'In this carriage Semyon Karabanov went to the Rabfak.'"

We went back by the meadows, by narrow footpaths and planks laid across streams, every now and then jumping brooks and ditches. This caused us to break up into small friendly groups, and under cover of the falling dusk, souls were turned inside out and displayed, in no boastful spirit. Said Gud:

"I'm not going to any Rabfak. I'm going to be a shoemaker, and make good shoes. Is that any worse? Not a bit! But it is sad the kids have left us, isn't it?"

Gnarled, bowlegged, massive Kudlaty regarded Gud sternly.

"You'll make a rotten shoemaker, too," he said. "You put a patch on for me last week, and it had come off by the evening. That sort of cobbler is worse than a doctor. A good cobbler, now, he might be better than a doctor."

An exhausted stillness prevailed in the colony that evening. And then, just when the signal "Bedtime" had been given, Osadchv the commander on duty, brought in Gud--drunk. Or maybe not so much drunk, as lyrically sentimental. Paying no heed to the general indignation, he stood in front of me and said softly, gazing at my inkstand:

"I've been drinking, because it's the right thing to do. I may be a shoemaker, but I have a soul, haven't I? I have. Can I bear it quietly when Zadorov and so many of our boys have gone the devil knows where? I can't bear it quietly. So I just went and drank on my own earnings. Did I put soles on the miller's boots? I did. I drank on my own earnings. Did I cut anybody's throat? Did I insult anybody? Did I so much as lay a finger on a girl? I did not lay a finger. And he starts yelling: 'Come on to Anton! Come on, then!' Who's this Anton? Is it you, Anton Semyonovich? Who is it? A wild beast? No, it's not a wild beast. What sort of a man is he--perhaps he's a worthless man? No, he's not a worthless man. Very well, then. I've come. Here I am. You see before you the bad shoemaker Gud."

"Are you in a state to listen to what I say?"

"I am. I can listen to what you say."

"Very well, then, listen! To make boots, that's a necessary, a fine thing. You'll be a good shoemaker, and you'll become the director of a boot factory so long as you don't drink."

"Not even when such a lot of people leave us?"

"Not even then."

"So, in your opinion, I've been wrong to drink."

"You've been wrong."

"And since we can't do anything about it now," here Gud's head dropped low, "you'll have to punish me."

"Go to bed. I won't punish you this time."

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Gud to the onlookers. Then, with a scornful glance around, he saluted in the colonist way:

"Very good, Comrade!"

Lapot took him by the arm and led him solicitously to the bedroom, as if he felt him to be the quintessence of the colony's grief.

Half an hour later Kudlaty came to my office to see about the issue of boots for the autumn. He drew the new boots lovingly out of the box, allotting them according to the colonists' detachments on his list. There were constant cries:

"When are you going to change them? These are tight for me!"

Kudlaty answered again and again, till he lost patience, and shouted:

"I've told you over and over again--I'm not going to change today, tomorrow they can be changed. Blockheads!"

Seated at my desk, the weary Lapot, screwing up his eyes, said to Kudlaty:

"Salespeople and customers must be mutually courteous, Comrade."

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

12 AUTUMN

Winter drew round once more. By October the endless "burty" had been filled with alternate layers of beets and straw and Lapot proposed to the Commanders' Council:

"Be it resolved: to heave a sigh of relief."

"Burty" are deep trenches, twenty metres long. Sherre had prepared about a dozen such trenches for the winter, and even then said it wasn't enough, and that we should have to economize in beets.

Each beet had to be laid in its trench as carefully as if it were an optical instrument. Sherre was capable of standing over a mixed detachment from morning till night, nagging at them ceaselessly.

"Don't throw them about like that, comrades, if you please! Bear in mind that if you give a hard knock to a single beet, it will begin to decay, and then it will rot, and the decay will spread to all the rest. Do be careful, comrades, please do!"

Exhausted by the monotony of the work, and thoroughly sick of beets, the colonists never missed an opportunity of making Sherre's admonitions an excuse for distraction and rest. Choosing from the heap a nice-looking, round, pinkish beet, the whole mixed detachment headed by its commander--some Mitka or Vitka--would gather round it, the commander raising his hands with outspread fingers, and slaying in a stage whisper:

"Don't go too near! Hold your breath! Who has clean hands?"

Litters would appear. When the commander of the mixed detachment lifted the beet tenderly from the heap, a cry of alarm would be uttered:

"What are you doing? What are you doing?"

All would stop in terror, and nod their heads, when the same voice continued:

"You got to be careful!"

The first pair of overalls that came handy would be rolled up into a soft, comfortable pillow, the pillow placed on the bitter, while the rosy, round, well-nourished beet resting on it really was a touching sight. Sherre would chew at a grass-stalk to conceal his smiles. The litter would be lifted from the ground, and Mitka would whisper:

"Gently, comrades, gently! Bear in mind, decay may set in...."

There was a remote likeness to Sherre's voice in that of Mitka, and Eduard Nikolayevich was therefore careful not to throw away his grass-stalk.

The winter ploughing was over. We had only begun to dream of a tractor, and it was quite impossible to do more than half a hectare a day with a plough and two horses. Sherre, therefore, grew extremely anxious, watching the work of the first and second mixed detachments.

In these detachments worked some of our most experienced colonists, under the command of such "hearts of oak" as Fedorenko, Koryto and Chobot. Possessing strength very little inferior to that of the two plough horses, and knowing the work of ploughing in all its details, these comrades had a happy way of applying the methods of ploughing to other spheres of life also. In the collective, in their friendly relations, and in their private lives, they were fond of the straight, deep furrow, the heavy gleaming clods of earth. And the work of their brains seemed to go on not in their heads but in some other places--in the muscles of their steel-strong hands, in their armoured chests, in their firm monumental thighs. In the colony they held out steadily against the attractions of the Rabfak, avoiding with silent scorn all talk on scholastic themes. Their convictions were unshakable, and none of the other colonists had such proudly good-natured gestures, such confidently laconic speech.

As active members of the first and second mixed detachments, these colonists enjoyed the profound respect of all, even though certain wits were not always able to refrain from sarcasms in their regard.

This autumn the first and second mixed detachments got all muddled up over a contest. At that time emulation had not yet become the symbol of Soviet work, and I even had to suffer, in the torture chambers of the Department of Public Education, on its account. My sole justification was that emulation sprang up in our midst spontaneously, and that I had no hand in it myself.

The first mixed detachment worked from six a.m. till noon, and the second from noon till six p.m. The mixed detachments were formed for a week. The next week the combination of the colony's forces in mixed detachments had always changed a little, although there was a certain amount of specialization.

Every day, just as a mixed detachment was finishing its work, Alyosha Volkov, our assistant agronomist, would go out into the field with his two-metre level to ascertain the number of square metres ploughed by the mixed detachment.

The mixed detachments worked well at ploughing, but the amount done varied according to the soil, the horses, slopes in the ground, the weather, and other external factors. On a board hung for all sorts of announcements, Alyosha Volkov chalked up the figures:

Oct. 19 1st mixed Koryto... 2,850 sq.m.
1st mixed Vetkovsky 2,300 " "
2nd mixed Fedorenko 2,410 " "
2nd mixed Nechitailo 2,270 " "

Quite spontaneously the boys began to take an interest in comparing the results of their work, each detachment trying to outvie its predecessors. It was discovered that the best commanders, and the most likely to head the list, were Fedorenko and Koryto. They had been close friends for long, but this did not prevent them from following each other's results jealously, and finding all sorts of faults in each other's work. And here Fedorenko reacted to a dramatic experience in a way which made it apparent that he also had his nerves. For some time he had been ahead of the other detachments, his results from day to day ranging on Alyosha Volkov's board from 2,500 to 2,600. Koryto's detachment tried to reach these records, but was always forty or fifty square metres behind, and Fedorenko made fun of his friend.

"Stop it, pal! Anyone can see you're still a young ploughman...."

The horse Dawn fell sick in the end of October, and Sherre only sent one pair into the fields, asking the Commanders' Council to appoint Fedorenko to Koryto's detachment, in order to increase the effectiveness of the work.

At first Fedorenko did not see the dramatic possibilities of the situation, for he had been much worried about Dawn's illness, and the necessity for speeding up the winter ploughing with only one team of horses. He flung himself zealously into the work, only coming to his senses when Alyosha Volkov wrote on the board:

Oct. 24th 2nd mixed Koryto... 2730 sq. m.

The proud Koryto triumphed in his victory, and Lapot went about the colony declaring:

"How can Fedorenko compete with Koryto? Koryto's a regular agronomist, what's Fedorenko in comparison to him?"

The boys tossed Koryto in the air with shouts of "hurrah," while Fedorenko, his hands in his trouser pockets, turned pale with envy.

"Koryto an agronomist!" he roared. "I've never seen an agronomist like that before!"

Fedorenko was being continually pestered with innocent questions:

"You admit Koryto won?"

But Fedorenko had been thinking things over. In the Commanders' Council he said:

"What's Koryto swaggering about? There'll be only one team this week, too. Give me Koryto in the first mixed, and I'll show you three thousand metres."

The Commanders' Council Fedorenko's resourcefulness, request. Koryto shook his head.

"Oh, that Fedorenko!" he said. "He's a cunning devil!"

"Mind!" Fedorenko adjured him. "I worked conscientiously for you--you'd better not try any shirking!"

Even before the work had begun, Koryto had to admit that his situation was a difficult one.

"What's to be done? There's Fedorenko to consider, and then there's the ploughing. And if the kids start saying I've let Fedorenko down by not working hard enough, that won't be too good, either."

Fedorenko laughed, and Koryto laughed, going out in the fields the next morning. Fedorenko placed an enormous stick on the plough, to which he drew his friend's attention.

"See that!" he said. "Out in the field I shan't baby you, you know!"

Koryto reddened, at first from the gravity of the situation, and then from laughter.

When Alyosha returned from the field with his level, feeling in his pocket for a bit of chalk, the whole colony came out to meet him, and the lads asked impatiently:

"Well--how was it?"

Alyosha wrote on the hoard, slowly and silently:

Oct. 26th 1st mixed Fedorenko... 3010 sq. m.

"Oh, fancy that!--Fedorenko-three thousand!"

Fedorenko and Koryto came back from the field. The boys greeted Fedorenko as a conqueror, and Lapot said:

"Didn't I say Koryto could never compete with Fedorenko? Why, Fedorenko's a regular agronomist!"

Fedorenko looked mistrustfully at Lapot, afraid to say what he thought about Lapot's crafty behaviour, for this all took place not in the fields, but in the yard, and Fedorenko no longer had the confidence he felt when holding the tense, quivering handles of the plough.

"How is it you were beaten, Koryto?" asked Lapot.

"It was irregular, Comrade Colonists! I'll tell you how it was--Fedorenko took a stick into the field, and that's how it was!"

"Of course I took a stick," corroborated Fedorenko. "One has to clean the plough every now and then."

"And he said: 'I shan't baby you.' "

"And why should I baby you? I slay it again--what's the use of babying you--you're not a girl?"

"And how many times did he hit you with the stick?" inquired the lads.

"Oh, I was so terrified of the stick, and worked hard, so's he didn't have to use it. And, by the way, you didn't use that stick for cleaning the plough, Fedorenko."

"It was a spare stick, I found a very convenient--er--stick in the field."

"If he never once hit you, you have no grounds for complaint," explained Lapot. "You adopted the wrong policy from the start, Koryto. You should have worked slowly, you know, and argued with the commander. He would have lammed into you with the stick. Then things would have been quite different: the Commanders' Council, the Komsomol Bureau, the general meeting and all that...."

"I didn't think of it," said Koryto.

Thus Fedorenko came off the winner, thanks to his determination and ingenuity.

The autumn drew to an end, abundant, closepacked, dependable. We did miss the colonists who had gone to Kharkov, but live human beings and days of toil as before brought to nightfall satisfactory portions of laughter and cheerfulness, and even Ekaterinla Grigoryevna admitted.

"You know what--our collective's wonderful! It's as if nothing had happened."

I now understood still better that, as a matter of fact, nothing special had happened. The success of our Rabfak candidates in the examinations at Kharkov, and the constant feeling that, though they were living and studying in another town, they were still the colonists of the seventh mixed, increased the stock of optimism in the colony. Zadorov, the commander of the seventh mixed, sent regular weekly reports, which were read at our meetings to the accompaniment of a pleasant, approving hum. Zadorov drew up his reports in detail, indicating who was sweating away at what, and adding comments of his own.

"Semyon is thinking of falling in love with a girl from Chernigov. Write and tell him to snap out of it. Vershnev is fussing because medical science isn't taught at the Rabfak, and he says he's sick of learning grammar. Tell him to stop putting on airs."

Another time Zadorov wrote:

"Oksana and Rakhil often come to see us. We give them lard, and they help us in all sorts of ways--Kolya has difficulties with his grammar, Golos, with arithmetic. So we want to ask the Commanders' Council to make Oksana and Rakhil members of the seventh mixed. They keep the rules."

And again:

"Oksana and Rakhil have no boots, and no money to buy any. We've had to have our boots repaired, we walk a lot, on pavements all the time. There's nothing left of the money Anton Semyonovich sent, because we had to buy textbooks and a set of draughting instruments for me. Oksana and Rakhil have to buy boots, they cost seven rubles a pair at the market. They feed us all right, here, but unfortunately only once a day, and we've finished all our lard. Semyon eats a lot of lard. Write and tell him not to eat so much if you send us any more."

At the general meeting the colonists enthusiastically resolved: to send money; to send more lard; to make Oksana and Rakhil members of the seventh mixed; to send them colonists' badges; not to say anything to Semyon about the lard he eats--they had their commander, let the commander issue lard himself, as a commander should; to write to Vershnev not to fuss, and to Semyon to be careful about that Chernigov girl, and not get his head filled with sentimental ideas. If necessary, the Chernigov girl could write to the Commanders' Council herself.

Lapot had a way of making a general meeting businesslike, brisk and lively, and could draw up splendid formulas for corresponding with our Rabfak students. The idea of the Chernigov girl appealing to the Commanders' Council pleased everyone, and was destined to undergo development in the future.

The life of the seventh mixed in Kharkov brought about a radical change in the tone of our school. The conviction was forced upon all that the Rabfak was a reality--that anyone could get into it, given the desire. And we observed a remarkable influx of energy in school studies from the autumn. Bratchenko, Georgievsky, Osadchy, Schneider, Gleiser, and Marusya Levchenko started working to get into the Rabfak in earnest.

Marusya had completely thrown off her hysteria, and during this period had quite fallen in love with Ekaterina Grigorjevna, accompanying her everywhere, helping her when she was on duty, and following her with an ardent gaze. I was pleased to see that Marusya had become a great stickler for neatness in dressing, and had learnt to wear severe high collars, and blouses of the most elegant cut. Marusya was blossoming into a beauty under our very eyes.

In the junior groups, too, the fragrance of the as yet remote Rabfak began to distil itself, and the eager juniors were frequently heard inquiring which would be the best Rabfak for them to aim at.

Natashia Petrenko attacked her studies with a zeal which was remarkable. She was about sixteen, but still illiterate. From her very first days in our school she displayed extraordinary ability, and I confronted her with the task of completing her studies for the first and second classes during the winter. Natashia thanked me with a flicker of the eyelashes, saying briefly:

"Why not?"

She had already stopped calling me "Uncle," and was rapidly settling down in the collective. She was beloved by all, for her indefinable beauty of disposition, for her serenely-confiding smile, for the sweetness of her expression. She still kept up her old friendship with Chobot, and Chobot, silently and morosely, still protected this precious creature from foes. But Chobot's position became more and more difficult every day, for there were no foes around Natasha--on the contrary, she began to make friends both among the girls and the boys. Lapot himself adopted quite a new tone towards Natasha--without the slightest sarcasm or tricks, attentive, affectionate, solicitous. Chobot therefore always had to wait for Natasha to be alone, so as to have a talk with her, or rather to hold silent communion with her on certain extremely confidential matters.

I began observing symptoms of growing anxiety in Chobot's bearing, and was not surprised when he came to me one evening and said:

"Anton Semyonovich, let me go and see my brother!"

"I didn't know you had a brother."

"Well, I have. He has a farm somewhere near Bogodukhov. I've had a letter from him."

Chobot handed me the letter. In it was written:

"And as to what you say about your circumstances, you just come to me, my dear Brother Mykolia Fedorovich, and stay with me, for my hut is a large one, and very few people have a farm like mine, and my heart will rejoice at having found my brother, and since you're fond of the girl, just bring her along, too."

"So I thought I'd go there and see."

"Have you spoken to Natasha?"

"I have."

"Well?"

"What does Natasha understand? I shall have to go, and see for myself--I haven't seen my brother since I left home."

"Well, then, you go to your brother, and see for yourself. Your brother's probably a kulak, isn't he?"

"I wouldn't say he was a kulak, he used to keep only one horse. Of course I don't know how things are with him now."

Chobot left in the beginning of December, and was away a long time.

Natasha hardly seemed to notice his absence--serenely reserved as ever, she plodded steadily away at her studies. I realized that this girl could have gone through three classes in the winter.

The new attitude of the colonists towards school completely changed the character of the colony itself. It had become infinitely more civilized, and nearer to the usual scholastic organization. By now it would have been hard to find a single colonist who doubted the necessity and importance of study. This new mood was further keyed up by the feeling for Maxim Gorky which was shared by all. In one of his letters to the colonists, Alexai Maximovich had written:

"I would like my Childhood to be read by the colonists in the autumn evenings. From it they will see that I was just like them, only from my early youth I had the sense to stick to my desire to study, and was never afraid of work. I have always believed it's dogged as does it!"

The colonists had long been corresponding with Gorky. Our first letter dispatched with the brief address--"Italia, Sorrento, Massimo Gorky" - -was, to our surprise, received by him, and Alexsi Maximovich immediately replied to it with a kind, friendly letter, which we read into holes in a few weeks. Ever since, a regular correspondence had been kept up between us. The colonists wrote to Gorky in detachments, and brought me their letters for "editing," but I considered that no editing was required, and that the more natural they were, the more Gorky would enjoy reading them. And so my work as editor was limited to remarks such as:

"Couldn't you have found a better piece of paper?"

"Where are all the signatures?"

When a letter arrived from Italy every colonist wanted to hold it for a minute, to marvel over the fact that Gorky himself had written the

address on the envelope, and to cast a critical eye over the portrait of the king on the stamp.

"How can they stand it so long, those Italians? What's the use of a king?"

Only I was permitted to open the letter and I had to read it aloud once or twice before it could be handed to the secretary of the Commanders' Council and read by admirers to their hearts' content, while Lapot imposed the sole condition:

"Don't pass your fingers under the words. You've got eyes, you can read without your fingers."

The boys derived a whole philosophy of life from every line of Gorky's, all the more convincing since the lines themselves admitted of not the slightest doubt. A book was quite another matter. One could argue about a book, one could denounce a book if it said what was not right. But this was no book, this was a real live letter from Maxim Gorky himself.

At first, the boys regarded Gorky with an almost religious veneration, considering him a creature superior to all others, and the idea of imitating him seemed to them almost blasphemous. They could not believe that it was events from his own life that were described in *Childhood*.

"A writer like him? Look what a lot of life he's seen! Seen, and written about--even when he was a little chap he could never have been just like everybody else."

I had the greatest trouble in persuading the colonists that Gorky had written the truth in his letter, that even a talented person had to work hard and to study. The living features of a living human being, of that very Alyosha whose life was so like that of many of the colonists, became gradually familiar, and comprehensible to us. Then it was that the boys longed still more to see Alexei Maximovich, and dreamt of his coming to the colony, while at the same time never quite believing in the possibility of this.

"Him come to the colony! D'you think you're such a fine chap, better than all the rest? Gorky has thousands like you--no, tens of thousands."

"What about it? D'you think he writes letters to them all?"

"And d'you think he doesn't? He could dash off twenty letters a day--just count up how many that would be a month! Six hundred letters. So you see!"

Regular investigations into this matter were made, and the boys came specially to me to ask how many letters a day I thought Gorky wrote.

"One or two, I should think. And not every day of course," I replied.

"It can't be! He must write more!"

"No, he doesn't! He writes books, and he needs time for that. And how many people go to see him, do you suppose? And what do you think-- doesn't he have to rest?"

"So, according to you, if he writes to us, we are his friends--Gorky's friends!"

"Not his friends," I told them, "but Gorkyites. He's our chief. And if we keep on writing to him, and still more, if we meet him, we shall become his friends. Gorky hasn't many such."

The image of Gorky in the colony's collective at last attained normal proportions, and it was only then that I began to observe, not awe before a great man, not the respect due to a great writer, but a real, pulsating love for Alexei Mmaximovich, and real gratitude on the part of the Gorkyites for this remote, remarkable, but for all that, essentially human personality.

It was extremely hard for the colonists to manifest this love. They did not know how to write letters which should express their love, they even shrank from expressing it, owing to their austere habit of denying expression to all emotion whatsoever. And then Gud and his detachment found a way out. In a letter to Alexei Maximovich they asked him to send his foot measurements, so that they could send him a pair of high boots. The first detachment was quite sure Gorky would fulfil their request, since boots always have their value. Very few people ordered boots from our shoemakers' shop, and when they did, the order gave much trouble, requiring prolonged search at the market for suitable material, or good lasts, while leather for soles and linings had also to be bought. It needed a good shoemaker to make boots which would not pinch the foot, and which would, at the same time, look smart. Gorky would always find a pair of high boots useful, and moreover he would find pleasure in the fact that they had been made by the colonists, and not by some Italian cobbler.

A shoemaker acquaintance from town, considered a great swell in his own line, coming to the colony to have a sack of grain ground, confirmed the colonists in this opinion.

"Italians and Frenchmen don't wear high boots like ours, and they don't know how to make them. But what sort of boots do you mean to make for Gorky? You've got to know what sort he likes--all in one piece, or with a cap?--and what sort of heel and tops. If they're to be soft, that's one thing, but some people like a stiff top. And then, what sort of leather--you'll have to make them of kid, with box-calf tops. The length, now, that's another question."

Overcome by the complexity of the matter, Gud consulted me.

"Supposing the boots turn out rotten! It'll be a bad business. And what sort shall we make--kid, or patent leather? And who's to find patent leather? Me? Perhaps Kalina Ivanovich would. But all he says is, who are you, parasites, to make boots for Gorky? He says Gorky has his boots made by the king's shoemaker in Italy."

Kalina Ivanovich corroborated this statement.

"And did I tell you wrong? There's no such firm as Gud & Co. yet. And you can't make proper boots. He must have a boot that will go over a sock, and won't give him corns. And look how you work! Even when one wraps three layers of nag round the foot, it hurts, the parasite! A fine thing if you were to give Gorky corns!"

Gud fell melancholy, he actually grew thin thinking over all these complications. The reply came a month later.

"I don't need any boots," wrote Gorky. "I live almost in the country, and you can do without boots here."

Kalina Ivanovich lit his pipe, and threw up his head proudly.

"He's a wise man, he understands that it would be better to go without boots than put on your boots. Even Silanti curses the day he was born when he wears your boots, and he's used to anything."

Gud blinked and said:

"Of course, a good pair of boots can't be made if the shoemaker's here, and the customer's in Italy. Never mind, Kalina Ivanovich, there's plenty of time! If he ever comes to us, you'll see what a pair of boots we'll make him!"

Autumn ran its length peaceably.

The arrival of Lyubov Savelyevna Dzhurinskaya, inspector from the People's Commissariat for Education, was an event. She had come all the way from Kharkov to see the colony, and I received her, as I usually received inspectors, with the caution of a wolf accustomed to being hunted. Maria Kondratyevna, rosy-cheeked and gay, accompanied her.

"Allow me to introduce you to this savage," said Maria Kondratyevna. "I used to think he was an interesting person, myself, but now I know he's simply a saint. He makes me feel awful--my conscience begins to torture me."

Dzhurinskaya took Bokova by the shoulders with the words:

"Off with you--we can do without your frivolity!"

"With pleasure!" agreed Maria Kondratyevna affectionately, her dimples showing. "My frivolity can find people to appreciate it here. Where are your kids? At the river?"

"Maria Kondratyevna!" came Shelaputin's high soprano right from the riverbank. "Mania Kondratyevna! Come here--we have such a fine sleigh!"

"And is there room for us both?" asked Maria Kondratyevna, already on her way to the river.

"Plenty! Kolya's coming, too! But you've got a skirt on, it'll be awkward if you fall."

"Never mind--I know how to fall," cried Maria Kondratyevna, shooting a glance at Dzhurinskaya.

She sped off towards the frozen slope leading to the Kolomak, and Dzhurinskaya, following her with a loving glance, said:

"Strange creature! She feels thoroughly at home with you."

"Worse than that," I replied. "Soon I shall find myself putting her on penalty duty for making too much noise."

"You recall me to my duties. I've come here to talk to you about discipline. So you don't deny that you inflict punishments, those penalty duties... then they say there are certain other practices here--arrests...is it true that you put your charges on bread and water?"

Dzhurinskaya was a tall woman with an open countenance, and clear, youthful eyes. Somehow I felt that with her I might dispense with anything in the way of diplomacy.

"I don't put anybody on bread and water, but I do sometimes make them go without dinner. Penalty duties too. I put them under arrest sometimes, not in a lockup, of course, but in my office. Your information is correct."

"But look here--all that is forbidden."

"It's not forbidden by the law, and I don't read the writings of all sorts of scribes."

"You don't read works on pedagogy! D'you mean it?"

"I gave up reading them three years ago."

"You ought to be ashamed! Do you read at all?"

"I read a lot. And I'm not ashamed--bear that in mind! And I'm extremely sorry for those who do read books on pedagogy."

"I shall have to convert you--really, I shall! We've got to have Soviet pedagogics."

I decided to bring the discussion to an end, and said to Lyubov Savelyevna:

"Look here! I'm not going to argue. I'm profoundly convinced that here, in the colony, we have real Soviet pedagogics. More, that ours is communist education. You can be convinced other by experience, or by serious research--a work on the subject. Such things are not to be decided in mere conversation. Will you be here long?"

"Two days."

"Splendid! You have all sorts of methods at your disposal. You can look about you, talk to the colonists, eat with them, work with them, rest with them. Draw whatever conclusions you like, have me dismissed from my post, if you like. You can write out all your conclusions, and dictate me any method you like. That's your right. But I shall go on doing thing the way I consider necessary, and as best I can. I don't know how to educate without punishment, I still have to learn that art."

Lyubov Savelyevna stayed not two, but four days with us, and I scarcely saw her during all that time. The boys said of her:

"Oh, that's a tough dame--she knows what's what!"

During her stay rat the colony Vetkovsky came to me.

"I'm leaving the colony, Anton Semyonovich."

"Where will you go?"

"I'll find somewhere. It's getting dull here. I'm not going in for the Rabfak, and I don't want to be a carpenter. I'll just go about and have a look at the world."

"And then what?"

"We'll see. You just give me my papers."

"All right. There'll be a Commanders' Council in the evening. The Commanders' Council can decide whether they'll let you go."

At the Commanders' Council Vetkovsky took up a hostile position, endeavouring to limit himself to formal replies.

"I don't like it here. Who's going to make me stay? I shall go wherever I like. It's my business what I shall do. Perhaps I'll steal."

Kudlaty was furious.

"D'you mean it's none of our business? You're to steal, and it's not our business? And supposing I up and give you a sock in the jaw for this sort of talk, will you still believe it's none of our business?"

Lyubov Savelyevna turned pale and seemed to be about to speak, but she was too late. The irritated colonists shouted at Vetkovsky. Volokhov stood in front of Kostya.

"You ought to be sent to the hospital! That's all about it! Give him his papers, indeed! Why don't you tell us the truth? Perhaps you've found work?"

Most of all raged Gud.

"We don't have any fences here, do we? No, we don't! Since you're such a rotter--good riddance to you! D'you think we're going to barness Molodets, and go after you? We shan't go after you! Go where you like! What did you come here for?"

Lapot closed the discussion.

"That'll be enough of expressing opinions. It's clear, Kostya--we shan't give you your papers."

Kostya drooped his head, muttering:

"I don't want any papers--I'll go without papers. Give me ten rubles for the way."

"Shall we?" asked Lapot.

All fell silent. Dzhurinskaya became all ears, even closing her eyes as she leaned her head against the back of the sofa. Koval spoke.

"He appealed to the Komsomol organization about this here matter. We turned him out of the Komsomol! But I think we can give him ten rubles."

"Quite right!" came from somewhere. "We don't grudge him ten rubles."

I took out my pocketbook.

"I'll give him twenty rubles. Write out a receipt."

In the midst of general silence, Kostya wrote out a receipt, tucked the money into his pocket, and put on his cap.

"Good-bye, comrades!"

No one answered him. Then Lapot jumped up and shouted after him, just as he was going out:

"Hi, you! When you've spent the twenty rubles, don't be shy, come back to the colony. You can work it off."

The commanders dispersed in vexation. Lyubov Savelyevna came to herself and said:

"How terrible! Someone should have talked to the lad." Then, after a moment's thought, she added:

"But what a terrible force this Commanders' Council of yours is! What people!"

She left the next morning. Anton brought the sleigh round. In it was some dirty straw, and bits of paper. Lyubov Savelyevna was already seated in the sleigh, when I asked Anton: "What's all that rubbish in the sleigh?"

"I didn't have time..." muttered Anton, getting red.

"Put yourself under arrest till I come back from town."

"Very good!" said Anton, and moved away from the sleigh. "In the office?"

"Yes."

Anton strolled off to the office, resentful of my severity, and we drove away from the colony. It was not till we were almost at the station that Lyubov Savelyevna took me by the arm, saying:

"Why such severity? You have a splendid collective. It's a sort of miracle. I'm simply overwhelmed...but tell me--are you quite sure that boy of yours--Anton--is under arrest now?"

I looked at Dzhurinskaya in astonishment.

"Anton is a person of great dignity," I said. "Of course he's under arrest. But taking them all round they're a pack of cubs!"

"Don't say that! All because of your Kostya! I'm sure he'll come back. It's marvellous! You get on marvellously! And Kostya's the best of all." I sighed, and did not answer.

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

13

THE SEAMY SIDE OF LOVE AND POETRY

The year 1925 began. And it began with unpleasantness.

At the Commanders' Council, Oprishko declared that he wanted to get married, and that old Lukashenko would not give him Marusya unless the colony gave him as good a "dowry" as Olga Voronova had had, and that with such worldly goods Lukashenko was ready to take him into his own home, and they would farm the land together.

At the Commanders' Council Oprishko adopted the unpleasant mien of heir to Lukashenko and a man of position.

The commanders fell silent, not knowing how to take the whole business. At last Lapot, glancing at Oprishko over the point of a pencil which happened to be in his hand, said quietly:

"All right, Dmitro, so what do you think yourself? If you go in with Lukashenko, does it mean you'll become one of the villagers?"

Oprishko looked at Lapot over his shoulder, smiling sarcastically:

"Put it in your own way--a villager."

"And how would you put it?"

"We'll see when the time comes!"

"I see," said Lapot. "Well,--who wants to speak?"

Volokhov, the commander of the sixth detachment, took the floor.

"The boys have to think about their own lives, of course. Nobody's going to stick in the colony all their life. And what qualifications have we? Those in the sixth, or the fourth, or the ninth detachments are more or less all right--they can become carpenters, blacksmiths, or flour mill workers. But nobody gets any qualifications whatever in the detachments working in the fields. So if Oprishko wants to be a peasant, let him. But somehow there's something fishy about him. You're a Komsomol, aren't you?"

"What if I am a Komsomol?"

"It seems to me," continued Volokhov, "that it would do no harm to talk this over in the Komsomol organization first. The Commanders' Council must be told how the Komsomols regard it."

"The Komsomol Bureau has its opinion on this matter," said Koval. "The Gorky Colony does not exist for the purpose of breeding kulaks. Lukashenko's a kulak."

"Why do you call him a kulak?" objected Oprishko. "It doesn't mean anything that he has an iron roof to his house."

"And hasn't he two horses?"

"Yes, he has."

"And a farm hand?"

"No, he hasn't."

"What about Sergei?"

"The Department of Public Education sent him Sergei from a children's home for adoption."

"It's all one," said Koval. "Whether he's from the Department of Public Education or not, he's a farm hand just the same."

"If they give him one..."

"Give! A decent person wouldn't accept one!"

Oprishko, who had not expected such a reception, said vaguely:

"Why do you go on like this? You gave Olga. ..."

Koval had an answer for him.

"Olga was quite a different proposition. In the first place she married one of our own people, she and Pavel are joining the commune now, and our property will find a good use. And in the second place, as a colonist, Olga was very different from you. And thirdly, it doesn't look well for us to be breeding kulaks."

"And what am I to do, now?"

"Anything you like!"

"No, that won't do!" interposed Stupitsyn. "If they're in love, let them get married. Dmitri can get a 'dowry,' too, so long as he goes not to Lukashenko, but to the commune. Olga will boss the show there."

"Marusya's father won't let her go."

"Let Marusya send her father to the devil."

"She can't do that."

"It means she doesn't love you enough.... She's a kulak, anyhow!"

"What's it to do with you, whether she loves me, or whether she doesn't?"

"You see, it has something to do with us. It means she's marrying you out of interest.... If she loved you...."

"Perhaps she does love me, but she obeys her father. And she can't join the commune."

"Oh, she can't! Then why should the Commanders' Council worry about her?" retorted Kudlaty roughly. "You want to get in with a kulak, and

Lukashenko needs a rich son-in-law in his hut. And why should we care? Declare the Council closed."

Lapot grinned delightedly from ear to ear.

"The Council is closed owing to the lukewarm state of Marusya's affections."

Oprishko was dumbfounded. He went about the colony like a thundercloud, bullying the little ones, and the next day got drunk and kicked up a row in the bedroom.

The Commanders' Council met to try Oprishko for drunkenness. Everyone was morose, and Oprishko stood morosely leaning against the wall. Lapot said:

"You're a commander, of course, but you're here on a private charge, and you must stand in the middle."

Such was our custom--the accused must stand in the middle of the room.

Oprishko let his morose glance rove over the chairman's face, and muttered:

"I haven't stolen anything, and I'm not going to stand in the middle."

"We'll make you," said Lapot softly.

Oprishko took a look at the Council, and understood that they would make him. Shoving himself away from the wall, he lurched into the middle of the room.

"All right, then."

"Stand at attention!" ordered Lapot.

Oprishko shrugged his shoulders, and smiled sardonically, but he dropped his arms to his side, and drew himself up.

"And now tell us how you dared to get drunk and raise hell in the bedroom--you, a Komsomol, a commander, and a colonist! Tell us!"

Oprishko had always cultivated two styles--he could swagger with the best, with the air of the utmost recklessness, when it suited him, but was in tact at all times a cautious and canny diplomat. The colonists knew him very well, and Oprishko's meekness astonished no one. Zhorka Volkov, commander of the seventh detachment, only recently promoted to the post formerly held by Vetkovsky, waved his hand toward

Oprishko, saying:

"There he goes! All of a sudden he's a reformed character! Now he's a lamb, and tomorrow he'll be swaggering about again."

"Wait--let him speak!" growled out Osadchy.

"What d'you want me to say? I've done wrong,--what more can I say?"

"No, you tell us how you dared!"

Oprishko, his eyes gleaming unctuously, stretched out his arms towards the Council.

"What is there to dare about? I drank to drown my sorrows, and when a man's drunk he can't answer for his actions."

"Oh, can't he?" said Anton. "But you will! You're much mistaken if you think you haven't got to. Turn him out of the colony, that's all! And turn out anybody who gets drunk. And no quarter!"

"But he'll be done for!" said Georgievsky, his eyes widening. "He'll be done for out in the streets."

"Let him, then!"

"It was all from grief, you know! Why are you so hard on a fellow? A fellow is grief-stricken, and you bother him with your Commanders Council!" said Osadchy, with a glance of frank irony at Oprishko's virtuous countenance.

"And Lukashenko won't have him without a few odds and ends," said Taranets.

"What's it to do with us?" cried Anton. "If Lukashenko won't have him, let Oprishko find himself another kulak!"

"Why turn him out?" began Georgievsky irresolutely. "He's an old colonist. It's true he's done wrong, but he can reform. And we mustn't forget that he and Marusya are in love. They must be helped somehow."

"What is he--a waif?" asked Lapot, with astonishment. "Why should he have to reform? He's a colonist."

The floor was taken by Schneider, the new commander of the eighth, Karabanov's successor in this heroic detachment. The eighth detachment boasted such giants of strength as Fedorenko and Koryto. With Karabanov at their head, they had successfully rubbed off each other's awkward corners, and Karabanov could propel them into any task, however difficult, which they would fulfil with Cossack gusto, while

holding high the banner of the colony's honour. At first Schneider seemed out of place in the detachment. He had come to it undersized, puny, dusky and ringleted. Since the ancient affair with Osadchy, anti-Semitism had never raised its head in the colony, but the attitude to Schneider for long remained an ironical one. Sometimes his combinations of Russian words and forms were truly comic, and he had little skill in field work. But time passed, and gradually new relationships worked themselves out in the eighth detachment: Schneider became the favourite of the detachment, and the Karabanov heroes were proud of him. Schneider showed himself to be a clever lad, with a deep and sensitive spiritual nature. From his great black eyes he would flood with light the toughest detachment dilemma, always finding the right resolution. And while he scarcely added an inch to his stature during his stay in the colony, he became very strong, and developed muscles which enabled him to don without shame the sleeveless vests worn in the summer; and no one had to look after Schneider when the quivering handles of the plough were delivered over to him. The eighth detachment unanimously promoted him to commandership, and Koval and I interpreted this appointment as follows: "We can hold the detachment together ourselves, but Schneider will be its adornment."

The very day after his appointment to the command Schneider showed that he had not passed through the school of Karabanov for nothing, and he seemed determined to maintain as well as adorn his position. Fedorenko, used to the thunder and lightning of Karabanov, became no less used to the calm and comradely adjurations occasionally directed at him by the new commander. And now Schneider spoke:

"If Oprishko had been a new boy he might have been forgiven. But now he must not be forgiven on any account whatever. Oprishko has shown that he doesn't care a fig for the collective. Do you think he won't do it again? You all know he will. I don't want Oprishko to be unhappy. What good would that do us? But let him live without our collective, then he'll understand. And others must be shown that we're not going to have kulak tricks like this. The eighth detachment demands his expulsion."

The demand of the eighth detachment was a decisive factor--there were hardly any new members in the eighth detachment. The commanders looked towards me, and Lapot offered me the floor.

"It's a clear case. Anton Semyonovich, tell us what you think."

"Turn him out," I said briefly.

Oprishko realized that there was no help for him, and threw off the cloak of diplomatic reserve.

"Turn me out? Where am I to go? D'you want me to steal? Do you suppose there's no authority above you? I shall go to Kharkov!"

There was laughter in the Council.

"That's a good one! You go to Kharkov! They'll give you some paper or other, and you'll come back to the colony and live here as a full member. You'll have a fine time, fine time!"

Oprishko realized that he had been talking rank nonsense, and remained silent.

"So only Georgievsky is against," said Lapot, his eyes roving over the Council. "Commander on duty!"

"Here!"

It was Georgievsky, drawing himself up, who answered to the command.

"Turn Oprishko out of the colony!"

"Very good!"

Georgievsky saluted in the approved fashion, and nodded towards Oprishko to follow him to the door.

A day later we learned that Oprishko was living at the Lukashenko hut. We had no idea what were the terms of the agreement between them, but the boys declared that Marusya had had the final word in the matter.

The winter was drawing to its end. In March the younger boys floated down the Kolomak on drifting ice floes, a pleasure accompanied by duckings which, however inevitable according to the calendar, nevertheless invariably took them by surprise, the forces of nature upsetting them fully dressed from improved rafts, ice floes, land overhanging branches. There was of course the usual number of influenza victims.

But the influenza passed, the mists lifted, and soon Kudlaty was beginning to find padded coats lying about in the middle of the yard, and to make the usual springtime scenes, threatening everyone with shorts and collarless shirts a fortnight earlier than designated by the calendar.

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14

"NO WHINING!"

In the middle of April our Rabfak students came to us for the spring holidays.

They arrived lean and pallid, and Lapot recommended handing them over to the tenth detachment to be fattened up in the feeding section. I was glad they did not try to show off their student ways in front of the colonists. Karabanov had hardly time to greet everyone before he was running about the farm and the workshops. Belukhin, the little ones hanging round him, told us about Kharkov and the life of the students.

In the evening we sat down beneath the starry sky and discussed the problems of the colony in the good old way. Karabanov was extremely displeased by our latest events.

"It was right to do it, of course," he said. "Since Kostya said he didn't like it here, then you did right--to hell with him, let him find something better! And Oprishko's a kulak, that's obvious, and his place is among kulaks. But still, when you come to think of it, there must be something wrong. We must think it over. In Kharkov, you know, we've seen a different sort of life. Life's different there, and people are different."

"And here in the colony--are our people bad?"

"The people in the colony are good," said Karabanov, "very good. But just look round, and you'll see there are more kulaks every day. How can the colony go on living here? You have to keep on snapping and snarling, or else make off."

"That's not the point," drawled Burun thoughtfully. "We must all fight the kulaks. That's a special matter. That's not the point just now. The point is that there's nothing to do in the colony. There are a hundred and twenty colonists, plenty of workers--and what is the work? Sowing and harvesting, sowing and harvesting. Oceans of sweat for a very small result. It's all so petty.... Another year of it and the boys will be bored and start yearning for something better."

"Grisha's right!" Belukhin moved closer to my side. "Our fellows, the waifs, as we're called, are proletarians, it's industrial work they need. Of course, it's jolly and all that to work in the fields, but what do we get out of the fields? If we go into the village, it means we join the petty bourgeoisie, that seems a shame, and then one can't go empty-handed to them, one has to own the means of production--a hut, a horse, a plough, and all that. It won't do to get oneself taken into a kulak family like Oprishko. And where are we to go? There's nothing but the engine-repair works, and the workers there don't know what to do with their own children."

All the Rabfak students threw themselves joyfully into work in the fields, and the Commanders' Council, with exquisite courtesy, appointed them commanders of mixed detachments. Karabanov returned from the field in a state of great excitement.

"Oh, how I love work in the fields! What a pity that there's no sense in it, damn it! Wouldn't it be nice if you could work in the fields, and reap, and have textiles growing up, and boots, fields of machines, tractors, accordions, spectacles, watches, cigarettes waving in the wind... My, my!... Why didn't the rotters consult me when they made the world!"

The Rabfak students were to spend the First of May with us. This added much to a holiday that was in itself a joyful one for us.

The colony was before woke up in the morning to the sound of the bugle, and the mixed detachments set off into the field in marching order, never looking back, or wasting energy on analyzing life. Even the most backward ones--Evgenyev, Nazarenko, Perepelyatchenko, and a few others--had begun to catch up with the rest, and were no longer a worry.

By the summer of 1925, the colony had grown into a perfectly compact collective, and moreover a very healthy-spirited one--from the outside, at any rate. But Chobot was an obstacle to our progress, and I could not manage him.

Returning from his visit to his brother in March, Chobot told us that his brother was fairly prosperous, but that he had no farm hands--he was a middle peasant. Chobot did not ask the colony for any help, but raised the question about Natasha.

"What's the use of talking to me," I said. "Natasha must decide for herself."

A week later he came to me again, in a state of the utmost excitement.

"I can't live without Natasha! Talk to her--tell her to come with me!"

"Listen, Chobot, you're a funny chap! It's you who must talk to her--not me!"

"If you tell her to go, she'll go, but when I do, nothing comes of it, somehow."

"What does she say?"

"She doesn't say anything, she just cries."

Chobot gazed at me tensely alert. It was of importance for him to see what impression his communication had made on me. I could not conceal from him that it had made a painful impression.

"That's no good," I said. "I'll have a talk with her."

Chobot looked at me from bloodshot eyes, looked into the very depth of my being, and said hoarsely:

"Talk to her. But bear in mind--if Natasha doesn't come I'll do away with myself!"

"What's this idiotic talk?" I shouted at him. "Are you a man or are you a mere milksop? You ought to be ashamed of yourself "

But Chobot did not let me finish what I was saying. He flopped on to the bench, and wept tears of inexpressible grief and despair. I regarded

him in silence, laying my hand on his burning forehead. Suddenly he leaped up, seized me by the elbow, and poured out a current of hurried, confused words:

"I'm sorry... I know I'm a nuisance... but there's nothing else I can do ... you see I'm the sort of chap ... you see everything and know everything ... I'll go down on my knees ... I can't live without Natasha!"

I spent the whole night talking to him, and feeling all through the night my own helplessness. I told him of the great life, the bright prospects, the variety of human happiness. I talked to him about the need of carefulness and planning, of Natasha's need to study, her remarkable gifts, how she would help him, too, and must not be buried in a remote Bogodukhov village, where she would die of boredom. But none of this reached Chobot's consciousness. He listened to my words morosely, and only whispered:

"I'll work my head off, I'll do anything, if only she'll come with me!"

I left him in his former state of confusion, a being who had lost his controls and brakes. The next evening I asked Natasha to come to me. She heard my short question out with the merest vibration of the eyelashes, then lifted her eyes to my face, and said, in a voice of the most brilliant purity, quite devoid of any shame:

"Chobot saved me...but now I want to study."

"So you don't want to marry him, and go with him?"

"I want to study. But if you tell me to go, I'll go".

I looked once again into those clear, open eyes, intending to ask her whether she knew what Chobot's mood was. But somehow I could not, and said instead:

"All right, you go quietly to bed."

"So I'm not to go?" she asked childishly, holding her head a little on one side.

"No, you're not to go, you're to study," I replied moodily, and fell to thinking, so that I did not even notice how she went quietly out of the office.

Chobot I saw the next morning. He was standing at the main entrance to the White House, obviously waiting to see me. I invited him into the office with a nod of my head. He followed my movements in silence as I was fidgeting with the keys and drawers of my desk, and then said suddenly, as if to himself: "So Natasha's not going!"

I glanced up at him, and realized that he was aware of nothing but his loss. Leaning one shoulder up against the door, he fixed his gaze on a pane of glass in the top corner of the window, and whispered something.

"Chobot!" I shouted.

He did not seem to hear me, but straightened himself and went away without looking back at me, silent and light-footed as a ghost.

I kept my eye on him. After dinner he took his place in the mixed detachment. In the evening I called his commander, Schneider.

"How's Chobot?"

"He's keeping mum."

"How did he work?"

"Commander of the mixed detachment Nechitailo says he worked well."

"Don't take your eyes off him for the next few days. If you notice anything, tell me immediately."

"I know--of course I will," said Schneider.

Chobot maintained silence for several days, but went about his work, and made his appearance in the dining room. He seemed to shun me.

On the eve of the holiday I gave an order entrusting him personally to put up slogans on all the buildings. He conscientiously got out the ladder and came to me with a request.

"Give me an order for nails."

"How many?"

He raised his eyes to the ceiling, whispered something, and replied: "A kilogram will be enough, I think.

I checked up on his work. He was conscientiously and carefully straightening the slogans, and saying to his comrade on the next ladder:

"Higher ... a little more.... That'll do.... Nail it on!"

The colonists were fond of holiday preparations, and loved the First of May best of all, because it was a spring holiday. But this year the First of May arrived in a sorry state. It had been raining the day before from the early morning. It would stop for half an hour, and start drizzling again, a fine, dull, persistent rain, as in the autumn. But in the evening the stars began to twinkle in the sky, and the only spot of gloom was a dull, dark-blue bruise in the west, which cast an unfriendly, dingy shadow over the colony. The colonists ran all over the place so as to be finished before the meeting with all sorts of jobs--costumes, the hairdresser, the bath, clean linen. On the fast-drying porch the drummers were cleaning the brass fittings of their instruments with chalk. These were tomorrow's heroes.

Our drummers were very unusual. These were no half-baked performers of Pioneer detachments, producing a confused torrent of sound. Not for nothing had the Gorky drummers been having lessons for six months from the regimental performers, and nobody but Ivan Ivanovich had protested.

"They have an appealing method, you know--appalling!" he told me.

Ivan Ivanovich, his eyes transfixed with horror, described this method to me. It consisted in a marvellous jingle, in which figured a wench, tobacco, cheese, and tar, and one other word which is unquotable, but did yeoman service in the drumming line. This "appalling method" did its business, and the marches of our drummers were distinguished by beauty and expressiveness. There were several of them--"The March," "Reveille March," "March of the Colours," "Review March," "Fighting March," and each has its particular ttilts, its sharp neat staccatoes, muffled tender rumblings, sudden explosive phrases, and playful dance rhythms. Our drummers did their work so well that even inspectors from the Department of Public Education, upon hearing them, were forced to admit that they did not introduce any particularly alien ideology into the cause of social education.

In the evening, at the meeting of the colonists, we checked upon our preparedness for the holiday, and only one detail could not be finally elucidated --would there be rain tomorrow? There were facetious proposals to include in the order for the day: the monitor is expected to guarantee good weather. I said I was sure it would rain, and Kalina Ivanovich and Silanti, and other weather experts were of the same opinion. But the colonists protested against our fears, shouting:

"Well, what if it does?"

"You'll get wet."

"We're not made of sugar, are we?"

I was compelled to take a vote on the question whether we were to go to town if it rained from the morning. Three hands were raised against, one of which was my own. The meeting laughed triumphantly, and someone yelled:

"Our side wins!"

After this I said:

"Remember now, it's been resolved we're to go, even if it rains rocks."

"Let it!" shouted Lapot.

"See you don't whine, then! You may be very brave today, and tomorrow droop your tails and whine: 'Oh, it's wet! Oh, it's cold!...' "

"Do we ever whine?"

"That's settled then--no whining!"

"Very good--no whining!"

Morning confronted us with a grey, lowering sky, and gentle, treacherous rain, sometimes increasing into waterspouts and flooding the earth, and then once more silently drizzling. There was not the slightest hope of sunshine.

In the White House I was met by the colonists in marching array; they peered with curiosity into my face, but I assumed a stony mask, and soon ironical reminiscences began to be heard here and there: "No whining!"

The standard-bearer was sent to me, evidently by way of reconnoitering.

"Are we to take the banner?"

"How can we go without the colours?"

"You see--it's raining."

"D'you call that rain? Keep the cover on till we get to the town."

"Very good!" said the standard-bearer meekly.

At seven o'clock the bugles were sounded. The column set off for the town punctually to schedule. It was ten kilometres to the centre of the town, and with every kilometre the rain increased in its strength. We found no one in the town square, it was obvious that the demonstration had been cancelled. On the way back the rain had become a torrent, but we no longer cared: everyone was wet through, and the water was pouring out of my boots as from a brimming pail. I halted the column, and said to the boys:

"The drums are wet--let's have a song. I must draw your attention to the fact that some of the ranks are in bad order, marching out of step, and another thing--you must hold your heads higher."

The colonists roared with laughter. The rain was running in rivulets down their faces.

"Forward-march!"

Karabanov started off with a song that seemed so highly appropriate to the situation that the song, too, was met with laughter.

"Things are getting worse and worse,
But we don't give a tinker's curse."

By the second round the song was taken up and sent floating out over the deserted, rainflooded streets.

Chobot marched by my side in the first row. He neither sang nor took any notice of the rain, staring stubbornly ahead of him at some point beyond the drummers, and quite unaware of my steady observation of him.

When we got past the station I allowed them to break ranks. No one had a single dry cigarette or wad of plug tobacco, and so everyone pounced upon my leather cigarette case. I was surrounded, and reminded proudly:

"Still, nobody whined!"

"Wait a bit, the rocks will begin to come down when we get round that corner--then what'll you say?"

"Rocks won't be so good, of course," said Lapot. "But there are worse things than rocks--machine guns, for example."

Before entering the colony grounds we again lined up, formed ranks, and resumed our singing, although it was extremely difficult for the singers to drown the increasing noise of the pouring rain, while, like a pleasant surprise, like a salute to us on our return, the first thunder of the year pealed out. We entered the colony with heads proudly erect, at a brisk march. As always, we saluted the colours, and only then all made to run for the bedrooms. But I shouted out to them: "Long live the First of May! Hurrah!" The boys tossed their wet caps into the air, shouting, and, not waiting for the command, rushed up to me. They tossed me up into the lair, and fresh streams of water ran an to me from my boots.

An hour later, yet another slogan was nailed up in the club. There were only two words written on a lengthy streamer: "No Whining!"

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15 DIFFICULT DAYS

Chobot hanged himself on the evening of May the 3rd.

I was awakened in the early morning by the night-watch detachment, and I guessed what had happened as soon as I heard the rap on the window pane. They had just cut Chobot down, close to the stables, and were trying, by the light of lanterns, to bring him back to life. After prolonged efforts Ekaterina Grigoryevna and the boys had managed to restore his breathing, but he never regained consciousness, and died towards evening. The doctors called from the town explained to us that it would have been impossible to save Chobot. He had hanged himself from the ledge over the stables--standing on this ledge, he had evidently placed and tightened the noose round his neck, and then jumped, the fall breaking the spinal cord in his neck.

The boys received the news of Chobot's suicide guardedly. No one expressed any special grief, though Fedorenko said:

"Poor Cossack--he would have made a good Budyonny soldier!"

But Lapot answered Fedorenko:

"He would never have made a Budyonny soldier! He lived and died a kulak, and it was greed which killed him."

Koval looked with scornful ire towards the curb, where Chobot's coffin stood, refused to be one of the guard of honour around it, and did not come to the funeral.

"I would hang fellows like Chobot myself--getting under people's feet with their idiotic affairs."

Only the girls cried, and even then Marusya Levchenko would dry her eyes, and exclaim wrathfully:

"The fool, the blockhead! How d'you like that --go and keep house with him, indeed! What a bit of luck for Natasha! A good thing she didn't go with him! There's plenty of Chobots in the world--she can't make them all happy! Let a few more of them hang themselves!"

Natasha was not crying. She looked at me with terrified astonishment when I went to the girls in their bedroom and asked in a low voice:

"What am I to do now?"

Marusya answered her for me.

"Perhaps you'd like to go and hang yourself! Be thankful that fool had the sense to get out of the way! He would have tortured you your whole life if he had lived. What's she to do, indeed! When you're in the Rabfak, there'll be time enough to think...."

Natasha raised her eyes to the wrathful Marusya, and snuggled up to her.

"All right, then."

"I'll be Natasha's guardian," said Marusya, looking at me with defiantly blazing eyes.

I bowed, scraping my foot facetiously. "Oh, do, Comrade Levchenko!" I said, "and may I join in with you?"

"Only if you promise not to hang yourself! You know there are guardians who are absolutely worthless. Not so much guardians as nuisances!"

"Very good!" I replied, saluting. "I'll try to avoid the noose."

Natasha broke away from Marusya and smiled at her new guardians, even flushing up a little.

"Come and have breakfast, poor little girl," said Marusya gaily.

My heart was somewhat easier about this aspect of the matter.

In the evening there arrived the coroner and Maria Kondratyevna. I persuaded the coroner not to interrogate Natasha, and he showed himself a man of tact, merely drawing up a brief statement, and, after eating the dinner we gave him, taking his departure. Maria Kondratyevna remained behind to mourn. Very late, when everyone was asleep, she came into my office with Kalinla Ivanovich, and sank wearily on to the sofa.

"Your colonists are brutes! Their comrade dies, and they go on laughing! And that Lapot of yours fools about just as before."

The next day I went to see the Rabfak students off. On the way to the station Vershnev expressed his thoughts and feelings:

"The fellows d-d-d-on't understand what it's all about. A m-m-man decides to die because life is not good. They think it's b-b-b-because of Natasha, it's just his life he couldn't bear."

Belukhin wagged his head.

"Nothing of the sort! Chobot would never have had a decent life. He wasn't a man, he was a slave. There aren't any more masters, so he tried to make a kind of god of Natasha."

"You're going too deep into things, lads." said Semyon. "I don't like that! A fellow hangs himself, very well,--strike him off the rolls! We must think of the morrow. I tell you what: the colony had better get the hell out of here, before you all begin hanging yourselves."

On the way back I pondered over the paths open to our colony. A full-grown crisis seemed to have sprung up in our midst and many of the things I valued most were threatening to hurl themselves into an abyss--things bright and living, created almost miraculously duping five years of work by the collective, things the immense value of which no conventional modesty could make me conceal from myself.

In a collective like ours the obscurity of individual paths could not form a crisis. Individual paths are never clearly defined. And what could a clearly defined individual path imply? Nothing but isolation from the collective, concentrated pettiness--the old tedious thought of where bread for the morrow was to come from, of the eternally vaunted qualifications. And what qualifications? Carpenter, cobbler, miller.... No, no, I am perfectly convinced that for a sixteen-year-old boy in our Soviet life the most precious qualification is the qualification of the fighter and the human being.

I thought of the strength of the colonists' collective, and suddenly I realized what was wrong. Why, of course--how could I have taken so long to discover it? It had all come about because we were at a standstill. A standstill can never be allowed in the life of a collective.

I was as happy as a child. How wonderful! What marvellous, all-embracing dialectics! A free working collective can never mark time. The universal law of general development was only just beginning to show its true strength. The forms ruling the existence of a free human collective implied progress. The forms ruling death--a standstill.

Yes, for almost two years we had been at a standstill--the same fields, the same flower beds, the same carpentry shop, and the same yearly round.

I hurried back to the colony to look into the eyes of the colonists and test my great discovery.

At the porch of the White House two hired cabs were standing, and Lapot met me with the information:

"A commission from Kharkov has come."

"That's good," thought I. "We'll get this matter settled right away."

Three persons were waiting for me in my office: Lyubov Savelyevna Dzhurinskaya; another woman, stout and no longer young, but with bright, steady eyes, in a dark crimson dress past its first freshness; and an insignificant individual, betwixt blonde and carrot, who had either no beard at all, or a very little one. He held a briefcase in one hand, and his glasses sat very much awry, so that he was always having to straighten them with the other hand.

Lyubov Savelyevna forced a cordial smile, while introducing me to her companions.

"And here's Comrade Makarenko! Let me introduce you! Varvana Victorovna Bregel, Sergei Vasilyevich Chaikin."

I had nothing against receiving in the colony Varvara Victorovna, who was the highest authority over me, but why this Chaikin? I had heard of him as a professor of pedagogics. Was he perhaps the manager of some children's home?

"We've come specially to look into your method," said Bregel.

"I protest categorically," I said. "There's no such thing as my method."

"What method do you use then?"

"The usual Soviet method."

Bregel smiled sourly.

"It may be Soviet, but it certainly isn't a very usual one. We must look into it, however." Then began one of those highly unpleasant conversations, in which people play with terminology, in the full conviction that terminology can define reality. To cut it short, I said:

"I'm not going to talk like this. If you like I'll make you a report, but I warn you it won't take less than three hours."

Bregel agreed to this. We sat down there and then in the office, and locked ourselves in, while I applied myself to the desperate task of putting into words the impressions, conceptions, doubts and experiments accumulated during the period of five years. It seemed to me that I was speaking eloquently, finding precise expression for extremely subtle ideas, using the dissecting knife with bold caution in spheres hitherto

mysterious, throwing down lines for the future, and for the difficulties of the morrow. At any rate I was absolutely sincere, sparing nobody's prejudices, and not afraid to show that "theory" seemed to me in certain of its aspects to have become both ineffective and alien.

Dzhurinskaya listened to me with a joyful, burning countenance, Bregel remained inscrutable, and I did not worry my head over Chaikin. When I had finished Bregel rapped with her plump fingers on the table, and said in a manner which made it hard to say whether she was being sincere or sarcastic:

"Aha...very interesting, I must say, exceedingly interesting. Isn't it, Sergei Vasilyevich?" Chaikin tried to straighten his spectacles, bent over his writing pad, and, very courteously, as becomes a scholar, with all sorts of mincing grimaces, and a flimsy assumption of respect, uttered the following speech:

"Of course all this needs thorough elucidation ...but even on the face of it I feel a certain doubt about some of the--er--theorems, which you have been good enough to expound to us with an enthusiasm which, of course, testifies to your sincerity. Very well. For example, a thing we already knew, but you seem to have passed over in silence--a certain, as it were, competition has been organized here, between your charges: the one who does the most gets praised, the one who does the least is blamed. You ploughed your fields, and there was such competition, wasn't there? You said nothing about this, probably unintentionally. I should like to hear from you whether you are aware that we consider competition a method grossly bourgeois, inasmuch as it substitutes for the direct attitude to things, an indirect one. That's one thing. And then--you give pocket money to your charges, on red-letter days, of course,--and the amount of the pocket money is not the same for everyone, but varies in accordance, so to say, with each one's deserts. Doesn't it seem to you that you are substituting for the inner stimulus an external one, and a grossly materialist one at that? To proceed: punishment, as you style it. You must be aware that punishment breeds slaves, while what we want is a free personality, whose behaviour shall be determined, not by fear of the stick, or any other penal measure, but by inner stimuli, and by political consciousness...."

He said a lot more, this Chaikin. Listening to him, I remembered Chekhov's story about the man who killed a bore with a paperweight. Then I decided that there was ~o need to kill Chaikin--all he needed was a good whipping, not with a birch, of course, or any such old-regime instrument of chastisement as a whip, but with an ordinary belt, such as a worker keeps his trousers up with. That would have been the ideologically correct way. Bregel, interrupting Chaikin, asked me:

"What are you smiling at? Is it funny, what Comrade Chaikia says?"

"Oh, no," I Said. "It's not a bit funny."

"Is it sad, then?" said Bregel, for the first time herself smiling.

"No! Certainly not! It's not sad either. It's just commonplace."

Bregel gazed at me attentively, and sighed.

"We make it hard for you, don't we?" she said humorously.

"Never mind--I'm used to people making things hard for me. Some are even worse."

Bregel suddenly began to shake with laughter.

"You're always joking, Comrade Makarenko," she said, when she had composed herself. "But still, can't you give Sergei Vasilyevich any answer at all?"

I cast an imploring look at Bregel and said:

"I think the Scientific Pedagogical Committee had better take up these questions, too. They do everything the right way there, don't they? Let's have dinner, instead!"

"All right," said Bregel, slightly offended. "Oh, yes, and what's all this about turning out your pupil Oprishko?"

He has been expelled for drunkenness."

"And where is he now? On the streets, of course!"

"No, he's quite near, living with a kulak."

"D'you mean you sent him there as a ward?"

"Something of the sort," I smiled.

"He's living there? You're sure of that?"

"Yes, I'm quite sure. He's living with a local kulak, Lukashenko. That worthy man already has two other waifs as 'wards.' "

"We shall have to look into that."

"Do!"

We went to dinner. After dinner, Bregel and Chaikin desired to look about for themselves, and I took off my cap to Lyubov Savelyevaa, with the words:

"Dear, sweet, darling People's Commissariat for Education! We're cramped here, and we've done all we can. We'll all be neurasthenics in six months' time. Give us something big, something to make our heads go round with work. You've got all sorts of things. Principles aren't all that you have!"

Lyubov Savelyevna laughed, and said:

"I quite understand you. That can be done. Come on, let's talk it over! But wait a bit--you talk of nothing but the future! Are you very offended by this inspection?"

"Oh, not a bit! How could it be otherwise?"

"And the conclusions--don't Chaikin's questions worry you?"

"Why should they? The Scientific Pedagogical Committee will take them up, won't it? It's their funeral!"

That night Bregel told me her impressions before going to bed.

"You have a splendid collective. But just the same your methods are awful."

I rejoiced in the depth of my soul--thank goodness she didn't know how our drummers were trained!

"Good night," said Bregel. "Oh, by the way--no one thinks of blaming you for Chobot's death...."

I bowed in token of my profound gratitude.

KNIGHTS OF THE DNEIPEP

One more summer came round. Once more, keeping place with the sun, we went into the fields in mixed detachments, once more the fourth mixed, the Red Banner detachment, was called into action, Burun, as always, at its head.

The Rabfak students came to the colony in the middle of June, bringing with them, as well as their triumph at having got their removes, two new members--Oksana and Rakhil--who, as colonists, had no choice in the matter and were bound to come to the colony. And with them came the Chernigov girl, a creature remarkably blackbrowed and black-eyed. Her name was Galya Podgornaya. Semyon took her to the general meeting of the colonists, showed her to everyone, and said:

"Shura wrote to the colony that I had taken a fancy to this Chernigov lass. It's all nonsense, word of a Komsomol, it is! The thing is Galya hasn't any what you might call territory to go to in the holidays. Judge us, Comrade Colonists, who's in the right, and who's, perhaps, in the wrong." Semyon seated himself on the ground--the meeting was being held in the park.

The Chernigov girl gazed in amazement at our society--barelegged, bare-armed, and some practically naked. Lapot pursed up his lips, narrowed his eyes, blinked his great, smooth eyelids, and said huskily:

"Be so kind, Comrade Chernigovka, as to tell us ... er ... that ... er. ..."

The Chernigova and the whole meeting pricked up their ears.

"...er... do you know 'Our Father'?..."

The Chernigov girl smiled, somewhat flustered, blushed, and answered hesitatingly: "No."

"Aha! You don't!" Lapot pursed his lips still more, and again blinked. "And do you know the 'I believe in'?"

"No, I don't."

"M'hm! And could you swim the Dnieper?"

The Chernigov girl looked away in confusion.

"I couldn't say. I'm a good swimmer, I think i could...."

Lapot turned to the meeting with an expression like that on the countenance of a fool trying hard to think: lips pouted, eyelids blinking, one finger raised, nose in the air--and all without the faintest hint of a smile.

"So we'll sum up as follows: 'Our Father' she knows not, 'I believe in'--ditto. She can swim the Dnieper. Or perhaps she can't?"

"She can!" shouted the meeting.

"All right. If she can't swim the Dnieper, can she at least swim the Kolomiak?"

"She can! She can!" yelled the laughing boys.

"So it means she'll do for our Knights-of-the-Dnieper Colony?"

"She'll do!"

"Which unit?"

"The fifth!"

"In that case put sand on her head, and take her to her unit."

"I say!" shouts Karabanov. "It was only atamans that had sand put on their heads...."

"Tell me, oh Cossack!" said Lapot, addressing Semyon. "Does life develop, or does it not?"

"It develops, of course. What about it?"

"Why, formerly only the chief atamans got their heads sprinkled with sand, and now every body does."

"Aha!" said Karabanov. "Quite right!"

The idea of going to the Zaporozhye Region had come to us after a letter from Dzhurinskaya, in which she communicated to us vague rumours of a plan for a big children's colony to be organized on the island of Hortitsia, adding that she had heard that the People's Commissariat for Education would like the Gorky Colony to be its nucleus.

No detailed working out of this plan had as yet been begun. Dzhurinskaya replied to my inquiries that a final decision could not be expected

for some time, everything depending on the plans for the Dnieprostroy.

We had no clear idea as to what was going on in Kharkov, but a great deal was going on in the colony. It would be hard to say what the colonists dreamed of--the Dnieper, the island, the wide fields, or some factory. Many played with the idea of a steamer of our own. Lapot teased the girls by saying that, according to an old tradition, women were not allowed on the island of Hortitsa, so that something would have to be arranged for the girls on the banks of the Dnieper.

"Never mind," Lapot consoled them. "We'll visit you, and when we want to hang ourselves, we can do it on the island--it'll be much nicer for you."

The Rabfak students took part in the jokes and dreams about our inheriting an island on the Dnieper, and gave themselves up willingly to the spirit of play, which they had not yet quite outgrown. The colony laughed till it cried as it looked on, evening after evening, at the broad parodies of life on the Dnieper enacted in the yard--for which purpose most of them made a thorough study of *Taras Bulba*. [Gogol's novel on the life of the Zaporozhye Cossacks.-Tr.] The imitative powers of the boys were inexhaustible. Now Karabanov would appear in the yard in trousers made from the stage curtain, and deliver a lecture on the way to make such trousers, which, according to him, required a hundred and twenty arshins of stuff. Now the terrible execution of a Dnieper Cossack accused by the community of theft, would be enacted. Heroic efforts were made to keep the legendary tradition intact: the execution had to be carried out by rods, while only he who had previously drunk up a tankard of vodka was entitled to wield the rod. For lack of a "tankard of vodka" for the executioner, a huge pot of water was substituted, more than the thirstiest soul alive could have drunk up. Another time the fourth mixed, setting out for work, would bring a mace and a bunchuk to Burun. The mace would be made of a vegetable marrow, and the bunchuk of bast, but Burun had to accept all these honours with respect, and bow to all the points of the compass.

Thus passed the summer. The Dnieper project was still only a project, and the boys had even become tired of playing at it. In August the Rabfak students went away, taking with them a new consignment. Five commanders had left our ranks, but none left behind him such a gaping wound as did the commander of the second detachment, my closest friend and one of the original members of the corky Colony--Anton Bratchenko who had after all gone to the Rabfak. Osadchy, too, who had cost me so dear, left. He had been the most arrant bandit, and now he was going to the technological Institute at Kharkov, a slender, handsome youth, tall, strong, reserved, filled with a kind of peculiar virility and force. It was of him that Koval said:

"There's a Komsomol for you--Osadchy! It's sad to have to part with such a Komsomol."

It was quite true. For the last two years Osadchy had borne on his shoulders the complex responsibilities of the commandship of the mill detachment--a task fraught with endless cares and necessitating incessant reckonings with the villagers and the Poor Peasants' Committee.

Georgievsky too--the son of the Irkutsk governor, who had never been able to wash out the blot on his escutcheon, although in the official forms stood the words: "parents unknown"--was leaving us.

And Schneider, the commander of the glorious eighth detachment, and Marusya Levchenko, commander of the fifth, were both going.

The moment we had seen off the Rabfak students we noticed how very juvenile the Gorkyite society had become. In the Commanders' Council itself were boys only recently belonging to the juniors--in the second detachment Vitka Bogoyavlensky; in the third, in the place of Oprishko, Kostya Sharovsky; in the fifth--Natasha Petrenko; in the ninth--Mitya Zhevely; while at last the huge Fedorenko achieved commanderhip in the eighth detachment. Georgievsky handed over the junior detachment, after three years of uninterrupted leadership, to Toska Solovyov.

Once again we dug for beet and potatoes, spread straw in the stable, sorted and put away grain for the spring sowing, once again the first and second mixed detachments went ploughing, this time without any competition. And only then did we get an official permit from the People's Commissariat for Education in Kharkov to inspect the Popov estate on the Dnieper.

The general meeting of the colonists, on hearing my communication and handing the paper from the People's Commissariat for Education from one to another, felt that this was a serious matter. For we had another paper in our possession in which the People's Commissariat for Education requested the Zaporozhye Regional Executive Committee to place the Popov estate at the disposal of the colony.

At that time we thought these papers represented a final solution of the question; now we had nothing to do but draw a breath of relief and forget our incessant discussions condemning abandoned estates, unsuccessful colonies, moribund monasteries and aristocratic country homes not yet called into new life; now we could forget the legend of the Hortitisa island, pack up our possessions, and go.

The general meeting selected Mitka Zhevely to go with me to inspect and take over the Popov estate. Mitka was now fifteen years old. He had long been a head taller than anyone else in the ranks of the juniors, had mastered the complex art of commander of a mixed detachment, had been a Komsomol for over a year, and had recently been found worthy of the responsible post of commander of the ninth (the mill detachment). Mitka was a representative of the newest type of Gorkyites--by the age of fifteen he had acquired great practical experience, a resilient carriage, and the ability to organize, while at the same time he had caught many of the ways of the older, fighting generation. From his first day in the colony, Mitka had been a follower of Karabanov, and seemed to have inherited from Karabanov his fiery black eye and fine, energetic gestures. But the great difference between Mitka and Semyon was that Mitka was in the fifth class at the age of fifteen.

Mitka and I set off on a clear, frosty, snowless day at the end of November, and arrived at Zaporozhye in twenty-four hours. In our innocence we had imagined that the new and happy era of the Gorky Colony would begin somewhat as follows: the chairman of the Regional Executive Committee, an individual with a pleasing and revolutionary countenance, would meet us kindly, and be delighted to see us.

"The Popov estate?" we imagined him saying. "For the Gorky Colony? Of course, of course--I know all about it! With pleasure! With pleasure! Here's an order for the estate, just you go and take it!"

And we would only have to ask our way to the estate, rush back to the colony, and tell them to hurry up and pack their belongings as quick as they could.

It never occurred to us that we might not like the Popov estate. Even the austere Bregel of the People's Commissariat for Education had said, when Mitka and I went to see her in Kharkov:

"The Popov estate! Just what Makarenko needs! Popov may have been a bit of a crank, but he did do some building there! You'll see for yourselves. A fine estate, you'll like it!"

Dzhurinsloaya said much the same.

"It's lovely there, so rich and beautiful! That place was simply made for a children's colony!"

And Maria Kondratyevna said:

"It's a lovely estate!"

The very fact that everyone knew this estate seemed to be significant, and Mitka and I went there in a mood of submission to fate--the place had evidently been especially created for us Gorkyites.

But of our many expectations, only one came true--the chairman of the Regional Executive Committee really did have a pleasing revolutionary type of countenance. All the rest turned out quite different, beginning from his very first words to us.

After reading the paper from the People's Commissariat for Education, the chairman said:

"But there's a peasant commune there. And what is this Gorky Colony?"

He stared frankly at Mitka and me, but evidently found Mitka more to his taste, for he asked, smiling at his wary black eyes:

"Will lads like this be at the head of things there?"

Mitka flushed, and started bluffing.

"And what's wrong with our chaps? I don't suppose they'd manage things any worse than your muzhiks!"

With these words, Mitka flushed still redder, while the chairman's smile grew broader.

"Is that what you call our peasants--muzhiks?" he said, and proceeded to admit confidentially: "They do manage things badly, it's true. But there are fifteen hundred hectares there, the matter is beyond the competence of the Regional Executive Committee, you must have it out with

the People's Commissariat for Agriculture."

Mitka screwed up his eyes distrustfully at the chairman.

"Beyond your... what d'you call it--competence, you say? What does that mean?"

"You see, I understand your language better than you understand mine! Never mind, your director will explain to you what competence means. Now, what can I do for you? I'll give you a car, and you can go and look round. And you can speak to the commune on the spot, perhaps you'll be able to come to some sort of an agreement. But the matter will be decided in Kharkov, in the People's Commissariat for Agriculture."

Smiling, the chairman shook hands with Mitka.

"If all your chaps are like that, I'll support you."

Mitka and I saw the Popov estate, and were intoxicated by its beauty.

At the edge of the famous Great Meadow, on the very place, it seemed to us, where the hut of Taras Bulba had stood, in an angle of the Dnieper and the Kara-Chekrak, a long range of slopes rose abruptly out of the steppe. From their midst rushed the Kara-Chekrak, straight as on arrow, more like a canal than a river, to join the Dnieper, and on its steep bank was--a miracle. Behind high, battlemented walls rose palaces whose peaked roofs and cupolas mingled in fantastic confusion. Some of the towers still retained their weathercocks, but the dark, embrasured windows had a hard, blank stare, contrasting painfully with the graceful intricacy of Moorish, or perhaps it was Arabic, creative fantasy.

By a gate beneath an airy turret with two tiers of windows, we entered a vast courtyard, paved with square tiles, between which the stalks of coarse frostbitten Ukrainian grass had pushed their way with morose insolence, and over which cows, pigs and goats had left obvious traces of their wanderings. We went into the first palace. There was nothing left in it but draughts and malodorous lime, and a pilaster Venus of Milo, lacking legs as well as arms, lay on the floor in the hall. The other castles, equally lofty and elegant, also smelled strongly of devastation. Casting over all the eye of an expert, I calculated what the necessary repairs would come to. As a matter of fact, there was nothing to be afraid of--doors and windows were needed, the parquet flooring would have to be mended, stuccoing done everywhere. The Venus of Milo need not be repaired, and stairs, ceilings and stoves were in order.

Mitka was not so prosaic as I was. No amount of devastation could quench his aesthetic enthusiasm. He wandered about the halls, towers and entrances, the yards, big and little, exclaiming in ecstasy:

"Oh my! Just look! It's fine, upon my word it is! What a place, Anton Semyonovich! Won't the fellows be pleased! It's fine, my word it is! How many chaps could live here, d'you think? A thousand?"

According to my calculations eight hundred chaps could be housed.

"And could we manage them? Eight hundred! They'd be mostly from the streets, I suppose. And all our commanders are at the Rabfak."

There was no time to wonder whether we would have been able to manage them or not, and we went on. In the backyard the commune was in charge and had made a sad mess of things. The vast stable was full of dung heaps, and, standing about among the dung heaps, without bedding and neglected, were a few sorry nags, with protruding ribs and soiled rumps, many of them showing bald patches. The enormous hoghouse was riddled with holes, here were very few pigs in it, and those but poor specimens. On the frozen mounds of the yard, neglected carts, seed drills, wheels and spare parts were lying about in utter confusion, and over all there seemed to be a layer of savage, stupefying solitude. Only in the hog-house did we meet a single soul--a gnarled old man, with a pointed beard, who said:

"If you're looking for the office, it's in that hut over there."

"Where d'you keep your pigs?" Mitka asked.

"What's that? Ah ... pigs!"

The old man shifted his feet, touched his moustache with transparent fingers, and cast a glance towards the stalls. It was clear that Mitka's question had nonplussed him. But he waved his hand gallantly.

"Oh ... they've eaten them, the scoundrels, eaten them, the bastards...."

"Who?"

"Who? Our own people...this here commune. ..."

"And aren't you in the commune, Grandpa?"

"Hee-hee, son, I am like a calf among sheep in the commune. The ones who can shout the loudest are the elders now. And they didn't give an old man any post, they didn't give him any, the bastards!! And who may you be?"

"We've come on business."

"Aha! On business! Oh, well, since you're here on business, you go in, they're holding a meeting there ...a meeting, you see ... they're always holding meetings, the sons-of-bitches.... And here... ."

The old man was now, it appeared, ready to be extremely frank, but we had no time.

In the cramped office, sitting on the rapidly-disintegrating chairs of the late landowner, they were holding a meeting, just as the old man had said. It was hard to make out through the smoke of plug tobacco how many persons were present, but there was enough din for a score or so. Unfortunately we never did discover what was on the agenda, for the moment we entered a curly-haired man, with a black beard, and round, girlish-sentimental eyes, asked us who we were.

A conversation began which was in turns official and hostile, passionately inimical, and at last, after nearly two hours, simply businesslike. I had been wrong, it appeared. The commune was desperately sick, but by no means ready to give up the ghost, and, recognizing in ourselves uninvited gravediggers, it became highly indignant, and gathering up its failing strength, displayed a remarkable thirst for life.

One thing was clear: fifteen hundred hectares was too much for the commune. One of the causes of its poverty lay in this superfluous wealth. We had no difficulty in coming to an agreement as to the possibility of dividing up the land. The commune was still readier to give up to us the palaces, the battlemented walls and turrets, with the Venus of Milo thrown in. But when it came to the matter of the farmyard, feeling waxed high between the members of the commune and ourselves. Mitka could not even stick to the line of argument, and became personal.

"Why is your beet still lying in the fields?"

And the chairman replied:

"Is a kid like you to question me about my beet?"

We only came to an agreement about the farmyard late in the evening.

"What are we arguing for, like jackasses?" said Mitka. "The farmyard can be divided by a wall."

We left it at that.

I don't remember what form of transport conveyed us back to the Gorky Colony, but it seems to have been something like wings. Our narrative at the general meeting was received with an unprecedented ovation. Mitka and I were tossed into the air, my spectacles were almost broken, and Mitka had either his nose or his forehead bruised.

A truly happy period began for the colony. The colonists lived on plans for three months Bregel, who came again to the colony, reproached me.

"What sort of people are you bringing up, Makarenko--dreamers?"

What if they were dreamers? I'm not very fond of the word "dream" myself. It smacks of girlish vapours, and maybe something even worse. But there are dreams and dreams, and it is one thing to dream of a knight on a white steed, and quite another to dream of eight hundred boys and girls in a children's colony. While living in cramped barracks, did we not dream of high, light room? Winding rags around our feet, we had dreamed of real footwear. We had dreamed of the Rabfak, the Komsomol organization, we had dreamed of the stallion Molodets, and of a herd of Simmenthal cows. When I brought two piglings of English breed in a sack, one such dreamer, tousle-headed Vanva Shelaputin, seated on his own hands, on a high bench, his legs dangling, had glanced up at the ceiling, and said:

"Now we have only two piglings. But soon there'll be a lot more. And those will have still more, and in five years, we shall have a hundred hogs. Ho, ho! Ha, ha! D'you hear that, Toska--a hundred hogs!"

And both the dreamer and Toska had broken out into unaccustomed laughter, drowning the business talk going on in my office. And now we had over three hundred hogs, and no one remembered Shelaputin's dreams.

Perhaps the main distinction between our educational system and the bourgeois one lies precisely in the fact that with us a children's collective is bound to develop and prosper, to visualize a better morrow, and to aspire to it in joyful, common efforts, in gay, steadfast visions. Perhaps therein lies the true pedagogical dialectics.

I made no attempt therefore to apply a brake to the dreams of the colonists, but, together with them, soared, and even, perhaps, a little too high. But these were very happy days in the colony, and all my friends still remember them joyfully.

Alexei Maximovich himself, whom we wrote to in detail about our affairs, dreamed along with us.

There were only a few people in the colony who were not glad, and who did not dream, and Kalina Ivanovich was one of them. His soul was young, but apparently soul alone is not enough for dreaming. Kalina Ivanovich said of himself:

"Have you seen how a good horse will shy at an automobile? That's because it wants to live, the parasite. While some sorry nag has no fear, not only of an automobile, but of the devil himself, because it doesn't care whether it gets corn or meal, as the Russians say."

I tried to persuade Kalina Ivanovich to go with us, and the boys did, too, but he stood firm.

"I'm not afraid of anything any more, but you don't need a parasite like me. I've gone some of the way with you, and now it's enough. I'll settle down on a pension. The Soviet government is good to us old gaffers."

The Osipovs, too, vowed they would not leave with the colony, adding that they had had enough violent experiences.

"We're humble folk," said Natalya Markovna, we can't understand what you want with eight hundred people. Really, Anton Semyonovich, you'll get your fingers burnt in this business."

In reply to this declaration, I chanted:

"We sing the madness of the brave!"

The boys, recognizing the quotation from Gorky, applauded and laughed, but the Osipovs were not so easily put out of countenance.

Silanti, however, consoled me:

"Let them stay behind! You like to harness everyone to racing chariots, as they say, Anton Semyonovich, but a cow won't do for that, and you keep harnessing it. That's how it is."

"But you will, Silanti?"

"Me? What?"

"You'll go in the racing chariot?"

"You can drive me where you like, you can even saddle me, and put me under Budyonny. You see, those swine used me as a beast of burden, as they say. They couldn't see, the swine, that I was a regular charger."

Silanti flung back his head, stamped, and added somewhat tardily:

"That's how it is, you see!"

It was the fact that almost all the teachers, as well as Silanti, Kozyr, Elissov, Godanovich the blacksmith, all the laundresses, cooks, and even mill workers, had decided to go with us, which made this move seem so specially secure and homely.

But in the meantime things were going badly in Kharkov. I was often there. The People's Commissariat for Education supported us to a man. Even Bregel was drawn into our dreams, although at the time she persisted in calling me Don Quixote of the Zaporozhye.

And at last even the People's Commissariat for Agriculture, though they pursed their lips, and pretended scornfully to forget our name, calling us now the Gorky, now the Korolenko, and now the Shevchenko Colony, gave in, with a "take eight hundred desyatins and the Popov estate, if you like,--only leave us in peace."

It soon appeared, however, that our foes were not in the fighting line, but lying in ambush. And I had gone for them baldheaded, fancying that this was the final, victorious blow, after which we could sound our bugles in triumph. But when a little fellow in a short jacket came out from

behind the bushes to meet my attack and uttered a few words, I was crushed, and retreated, throwing down my weapons, abandoning my banners, and hurling back the victoriously advancing ranks of the colonists.

"The People's Commissariat for Finance cannot sanction such a gamble by assigning you thirty thousand rubles for repairing a palace which nobody wants. Why, your own children's homes are in ruins!"

"But it isn't just for repairs. These estimates include inventory and the expenses of moving."

"We know all about that! Eight hundred desvatins, eight hundred waifs, eight hundred cows. The time for such gambles has passed. We've forked out millions to the People's Commissariat for Education, and nothing ever came of it. They stole everything, broke up everything, and then ran away."

And the little man trampled on our beautiful living dream, so unexpectedly dashed to the ground. Neither tears, nor assurances that it had been Gorky's dream, too, were of any avail. The dream died.

And on the way home I remembered, shuddering, that our scholastic course included the theme: "Our farm in the Zaporozhye Region." Sherre had twice visited the Popov estate. He had drawn up an agricultural plan which he communicated to the colonists--a plan studded with diamonds, emeralds and rubies, in which fleets of tractors, herds of cows, flocks of sheep, poultry to the tune of hundreds of thousands, the export of butter and eggs to England, incubators, separators, and orchards, gleamed, sparkled, and shed dazzling rays.

Only a week before I had been met on the way from Kharkov by the excited juniors, who had dragged me out of the carriage with shouts of:

"Anton Semyonovich! Anton Semyonovich! Dawn has foaled. Come and see! Come and see! Come now!"

They had borne me off to the stables and stood around the still moist, trembling, golden foal. They had smiled in silence, a single voice murmuring with feeling:

"We've called it Zaporozhets."

My dear little chaps! Not yours to follow the plough over the Great Meadow, to live in the airy palace, to blow your bugles from the height of the Moorish towers! All for nothing have you christened the little golden steed Zaporozhets!

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

17

A LESSON IN RECKONING

The blow dealt by the man from the People's Commissariat for Finance was a crushing one. The hearts of the colonists ached, our foes sneered and guffawed, and I myself was seriously perturbed. But none of us considered any more the idea of staying on the Kolomak. Even the People's Commissariat for Education meekly realized our stubborn determination, and considered the matter from one point of view only—where were we to go?

Everything was very complicated during the February and March of 1926. The Zaporozhye fiasco had extinguished the last sparks of triumphant optimism, but the collective still clung stubbornly to some remnants of hope. Not a week passed without some proposal or other being discussed at the general meeting of the colonists. There were still many places in the spacious Ukraine steppe, where either no one was farming the land, or the farming was being badly done. They were suggested to us one after the other by our friends in the People's Commissariat for Education, Komsomol organizations, by the oldest inhabitants in the neighbourhood, and by distant acquaintances in the agricultural line. During this period Sherre, the boys, and I traversed many roads and highroads in trains, in automobiles, or in carriages drawn by Molodets, and all sorts of local hacks and nags.

But the scouts returned home with little more than fatigue; at the general meetings the colonists heard them out with cold, businesslike faces, and dispersed, everyone going to his task, having fired at the speaker the first hard question that came into their heads:

"How many could be housed there? A hundred and twenty? That's no good!"

"What town, did you say? Piryatin? Nuts!" And the speakers themselves were glad of such an outcome, for in their hearts they were more afraid of the meeting being tempted into acceptance than of anything else.

In this manner the Staritsky estate in Valky, the monastery at Piryatin, the Lubny monastery, the mansions of the Kochubei princes in Dikanka, and other utterly worthless places, passed before our eyes in rapid succession.

A still greater number of places were mentioned and brushed aside immediately as unworthy of investigation. One of these was Kuryazh, a children's colony close to Kharkov, with four hundred children, who were said to be utterly demoralized. The idea of a demoralized children's institution filled us with such horror that the thought of Kuryazh produced nothing but a few tiny, fragile bubbles, which burst almost as soon as they were formed.

Once, during one of my routine journeys to Kharkov, I came upon a meeting of the Children's Aid Committee. The situation of the Kuryazh colony, which was under the Committee's authority, was being discussed. Yuryev, an inspector from the Department of Public Education, was reporting with restrained bitterness on the situation in the colony, the very terseness and restraint of his language exposing the crazy and terrifying state of affairs. To the listeners, the Kuryazh colony with its forty pedagogues and four hundred charges seemed to be a conglomeration of doubtful anecdotes, concocted by a foul-minded pervert, a misanthrope and a cynic.

I wanted to bang my fist on the table, and shout:

"It can't be! It's sheer gossip!"

But Yuryev appeared to be quite a reliable person, and beneath the studied gravity of the speaker could be discerned the deep-seated melancholy of the pedagogue, a thing I could very well understand. My presence embarrassed Yuryev, who kept glancing at me as if he felt there was something wrong in his attire. After the meeting he came up to me and said frankly:

"Upon my word, I was ashamed to talk about all this beastliness in front of you. At your place, they say, if a colonist is five minutes late for dinner you place him under arrest on bread and water for a whole day, and he smiles and says 'very good!' "

"It's not quite like that. If I were to employ such a successful method you'd find yourself reporting on the Gorky Colony much in the style of your today's report."

Yuryev and I talked and argued. He invited me to dine with him, and said to me over the dinner table:

"D'you know what? Why shouldn't you take on Kuryazh?"

"What for? Besides it's full as it is."

"Full, is it? We could release a hundred and twenty places for you."

"I don't like the idea. Dirty work! And you wouldn't let me work."

"We would! Why are you so afraid of us? We'll give you carte blanche. Do what you like. Kuryazh is in a ghastly state. Think how awful to have such a nest of brigands just next to the capital! You heard me. Robbing people on the highway. Eighteen thousand rubles' worth of

property stolen in the colony itself in four months!"

"So the whole stair would have to be sacked!"

"Oh, no--there are some splendid people there."

"In such cases I usually recommend complete disinfection."

"All right--sack them, sack them!"

"No, no! We're not going to Kuryazh."

"But you haven't even seen it, have you?"

"No, I haven't."

"I'll tell you what! Stay till tomorrow, and we'll take Khalabuda and go and have a look at it."

I agreed. The next day we all three drove over to Kuryazh. I went there without the slightest suspicion that I was going to choose a tomb for any colony.

Sidor Karpovich Khalabuda, the chairman of the Children's Aid Committee, accompanied us. He ruled conscientiously over his department, which at that time consisted of miserable, half-ruined children's homes and colonies, food shops, cinemas, wicker furniture stores, pleasure gardens, lotteries and accountant's offices. Sidor Karpovich was swarming with vermin--merchants, agents, croupiers, charlatans, rogues, swindlers and embezzlers, and I longed with all my heart to present him with a big bottle of insecticide. He had long been deafened by all sorts of considerations, suggested to him from all sides--economic, pedagogical, psychological and others, and had lost all hope of understanding why there was poverty, wholesale flight, thieving and hooliganism in his colonies. Now he bowed to reality, profoundly convinced that the homeless child represented an accumulation of all seven deadly sins, and all that remained of his former optimism was his faith in a better future, and in the virtues of rye.

This last characteristic of his I discovered later on, but now, sitting in the automobile, I listened to his utterances without the slightest suspicion.

"People must have rye. So long as people have rye, there's nothing to be afraid of. What's the good, after all, of teaching a boy to read Gogel, if he has no bread to eat? Give him rye, and *then* put a book into his hands. Those bandits, they can steal, but they can't sow rye."

"A bad lot?"

"Who? They? You ought to see them! Always coming to me: 'Sider Karpovich, do give me five rubles--I'm longing for a smoke!' I give it him, of course, and a week later, back he comes: 'Sidor Karpovich, give me five rubles.' 'I gave you five rubles, I say. 'That was for cigarettes,' he says. 'Now give me some for vodka.' "

After flying over the monotonous, sandy road for six kilometres, we ascended a low hill, and drove through the crumbling gates of the monastery. In the middle of the circular courtyard rose the shapeless mass of an ancient, but nonetheless hideous church, behind it a three-storey building of some sort, and around it long, low annexes, held up by rotting porches. A little to the side, on the edge of a steep bluff, was a two-storey, wooden inn, in an unfinished state. In various holes and corners nestled small houses, sheds, kitchens, and all sorts of rubbishy erections, the accumulations of three hundred years, put together from nondescript materials. The first thing which struck me was the stench prevailing in the colony. It was a complex blend of privies, cabbage soup, dung, and ... incense. From the church came the sound of singing, and on its steps sat a few disagreeable, shrivelled old women, brooding, no doubt, over the happy days when there had been someone to beg alms from. But there were no colonists in sight.

The dingy, shabby director looked wistfully at our Fiat car, patted the mudguard, and led us over the colony. It was obvious that he was used not so much to showing it off as to exposing it to criticism, and his Way of Sorrows was well marked out for him.

"This is the dormitory of the first collective," he said, passing a place where once there had been a door, but where now there was a mere gap--even the jambs had gone. We crossed a second threshold with equal ease, and turned into a passage on the left, which was just as cold, despite the stuffiness, as it was out of doors. Proof of this was to be found in the snowdrifts along the walls, which had had ample leisure to be covered with dust.

"Aren't there any doors?" I asked.

The manager did his best to show that he had not quite forgotten how to smile, and went on. Yuryev said loudly:

"The doors have been burned long ago. That's nothing! They're tearing up the floors, now, and burning them, they've burned the cellar doors, and even some of the carts."

"Haven't they any wood?"

"God knows why they haven't any wood! They were given money for wood."

"Very likely they have got wood," said Khalabuda, blowing his nose. "They just don't want to saw and chop, and they haven't got the money to hire anyone. They have wood, the swine! You know these colony kids--they're bandits, that's what they are!"

At last we arrived at a real, closed door, belonging to a dormitory. Khalabuda kicked at it, when it immediately swung open on the lower (hinge, threatening to topple on to our heads. Khalabuda supported it with his hand, laughing.

"No, you don't, you old devil!" he said. "I know your little ways!"

We went into the dormitory. On dirty, broken bedsteads, on heaps of formless rags, sat waifs, real waifs, in all their glory, huddling under similar rags for warmth. By a dilapidated stove two boys were chopping up a board, evidently recently painted yellow. Filth lay about in the corners, and even in the spaces between the beds. Here were the same smells as those which prevailed in the yard, minus the incense.

We were followed by eyes, but no heads were turned. I noticed that all the waifs were over sixteen.

"Are these the seniors?" I asked.

"Yes. This is Collective Number One--the seniors," explained the manager obligingly.

From a distant corner came an exclamation in a deep voice.

"Don't you believe what they say! They're all liars!"

From another corner someone said in free accents, without the slightest emphasis:

"Show you! What's there to show here? Why don't they show you all they've stolen?"

We paid not the slightest attention to these utterances, Yuryev merely blushing and glancing furtively towards me.

We went out into the passage.

"There are six dormitories in this building," said the manager. "Shall I show you them?"

"Show me the workshops," I said.

Khalabuda came to life, and embarked upon a long narrative of the successful purchase of some lathes.

Once again we went out into the yard. A little fellow, holding his jacket tight over his chest, was jumping in our direction from mound to mound in his endeavours not to step on the strips of snow with his bare, blackened feet. I stopped him, falling back from the others.

"Where do you come from, little chap?"

He stopped and raised his face.

"I've been to find out if they're going to send us away."

"Where?"

"They say we're to be sent somewhere."

"Don't you like it here?"

"We can't go on living here," said the little fellow softly and sadly, rubbing his ear with a corner of his jacket. "We should freeze to death. Besides, they beat us."

"Who beats you?"

"Everyone."

He was a bright little chap, and apparently lacked experience of the streets. He had big blue eyes, not yet made hideous by grimaces learned in the streets. If he had been washed he would have been a nice little boy.

"What do they beat you for?"

"Anything. If you don't give them something they want. Or they take our dinner from us. Our chaps, they have been going without dinner for a long time. Sometimes, they even take the bread.... Or if you don't steal when they tell you to steal something.... Do you know whether we are to be sent away?"

"I don't know, son."

"They say it will be summer soon...."

"What d'you want the summer for?"

"I shall go away then...."

They were calling me to the workshops. It seemed to me impossible to leave the little fellow without giving him some sort of help, but he was hopping along by the mounds, making for the dormitories--apparently it was a little warmer there than out of doors.

We weren't able to look over the workshops after all--some mysterious being was supposed to have the keys, and search as he would the manager was unable to pierce the mystery. We contented ourselves with peeping through the windows. We could make out punching machines, joiners' benches and two turning lathes, twelve pieces of equipment in all. The cobblers' and tailors' shops, the traditional stand-by of pedagogics, were housed in separate buildings.

"Is today a holiday here?" I asked.

The director did not reply. Yuryev once again took upon himself the hard task of interpretation.

"I'm surprised at you, Anton Semyonovich! You ought to understand everything by now. Nobody does any work here, that's the situation. Besides, the tools have been stolen, and there's no material, no energy, no orders, no nothing! And then, none of them knows how to work."

The colony's power plant, of which Khalabuda had boasted so proudly, was not working either--something had broken down.

"Well, and the school?"

The director answered this question himself.

"There is a school," he said. "But we have other things to think about."

Khalabuda kept urging us into the fields. When we stepped out of the circle enclosed by walls several feet thick, our eyes were greeted by a depression in the ground, which must once have been a pond. On the other side fields stretched out to the forest, covered by a thin layer of patchy snow. Khalabuda extended his arm in a Napoleonic gesture, exclaiming triumphantly:

"A hundred and twenty desyatins. Wealth!"

"Have the winter crops been sown?" I asked incautiously.

"Winter crops?" cried Khalabuda delightedly. "Thirty desyatins of rye, say, a hundred poods a desyatin, three thousand poods of rye alone! They won't be left without bread. And what rye! If only people would sow rye, they wouldn't need anything else. What's wheat? Rye bread--the Germans can't eat it, you know, even the French can't--but our folk, so long as there's rye bread...."

We had got back to the car by now, and Khalabuda was still holding forth about rye. At first this irritated us but after a bit it became

interesting--hat more would he find to say about rye?

We got into the car and drove away, the lonely, melancholy manager seeing us off. Silence was maintained as far as the Kholodnaya hill. As we were crossing the market place Yuryev nodded towards a group of street boys, saying:

"Those are boys from Kuryazh. Well--will you take it on?"

"No, I won't."

"What are you afraid of? The Gorky Colony is a home for delinquents, too, isn't it? The All-Ukrainian Commission sends you all sorts of riffraff, anyhow. And we'd give you normal children here."

Even Khalabuda had to laugh, seated in the car.

"Normal--I like that!"

Yuryev pursued his line of thought.

"Let's go right away to Dzhurinskaya, and have a talk. The Children's Aid Committee would hand the colony over to the People's Commissariat for Education. Kharkov doesn't like sending you delinquents, and they haven't any colony of their own. And this would be our own, and what a colony! Four hundred children. That's something like! The workshops here aren't bad.... Sidor Karpovich, would you give the colony away?"

Khalabuda thought for a moment.

"Thirty desyatins of rye," he said. "That's two hundred and forty poods of grain. And the work? Would you pay? Why shouldn't we give up the colony? We'll give it up!"

"Let's go to Dzhurinskaya," urged Yuryev. "We'll transfer a hundred and twenty of the younger children somewhere else, and leave you two hundred and eighty. They may not be delinquents officially, but after their education in Kuryazh they're something worse than delinquents."

"Why should I go into this hole?" I asked Yuryev. "Besides, the place needs cleaning up. It would cost not less than twenty thousand rubles."

"Sidor Karpovich would give you that."

Khalabuda seemed to wake up.

"Twenty thousand rubles? What for?"

"Repairs, doors, tools, bedding, clothing, everything."

Khalabuda pouted.

"Twenty thousand!" he exclaimed. "We could do everything ourselves for twenty thousand."

At Dzhurinskara's, Yuryev continued his propaganda. Lyubov Savelyevna listened to him with a smile on her face, glancing at me now and then with curiosity.

"That would be too costly an experiment," she said. "We can't expose the Gorky Colony to such a risk. We must simply close Kurvazh, and distribute the children among other colonies. Besides, Comrade Makarenko wouldn't go to Kryazh."

"No, I wouldn't," said.

"Is that final?" asked Yuryev.

"I'll have a talk with my colonists, but I'm sure they'll refuse."

Khalabuda blinked.

"Who'll refuse?"

"The colonists."

"D'you mean--your charges?"

"Why, yes!"

"What do they know about it?"

Dzhurinskaya put her hand on Khalabuda's sleeve.

"Sidor, old dear," she said. "They know more about it than you and I do. I'd like to see their faces when they behold your Kuryazh!"

Khalabuda lost his temper.

"Why do you keep on at me about 'my Kuryazh'? Why is it mine? I gave you fifty thousand rubles. And an engine. And twelve lathes. And the teachers are yours. How can I help it if they don't know their own business?"

I left these social education workers to settle their domestic troubles and hurried to catch the train. Karabanov and Zadorov came to the station to see me off. Hearing my report of Kuryazh, they fixed their gaze on the wheels of the railway carriage, and gave themselves up to meditation. At last Karabanov said:

"It's not a very great honour for the Gorkyites to clean out privies, but who knows? It needs thinking over."

"But we should be near--we'd help," said Zadorov, showing his teeth. "D'you know what, Semyon, we'll go and have a look at it tomorrow!"

The general meeting of the colonists, like all our meetings of late, gave me a guarded and thoughtful hearing. While making my report, I listened curiously, not only to the meeting, but to my own heart. Suddenly I felt like smiling sadly. What had happened? Had I been a child, four months before, when, together with the colonists, I had bubbled over in ecstasy about the castles in the Zaporozhye we had built? Had I grown up, or had I merely become spiritless? I felt that there must be a distressing lack of confidence in my words, in the tone of my voice, in the expression of my face. For a whole year we had been straining towards wide, light-filled spaces; surely our aspirations were not to be crowned by an absurd, befouled place like Kuryazh! How had it come about that I should be discussing such an intolerable future with the colonists of my own free will? What was there to attract us in Kuryazh? For what advantages were we to abandon our flower beds, our Kolomak, our parquet floors, the estate we ourselves had restored to life?

And yet there was a poem, terse and full of rectitude, in which there was no room for a single joyous word, but in which, to my own astonishment, I could detect an austere, lofty challenge, and--somewhere far away--a timid joy seemed to be lurking.

The colonists now and again interrupted my narrative with laughter, in those very places where I had expected to move them to dismay. Stifling their laughter, they bombarded me with questions, and on receiving my replies laughed still louder. And it was not the laughter of hope or joy--it was derision.

"And what do the forty teachers do?"

"I couldn't say."

Laughter.

"Anton Semyonovich! Didn't you sock anyone in the jaw there? I couldn't have helped it, I'm sure!"

Laughter.

"Is there a dining room there?"

"There is, but the children are all barefoot, so the soup kettles are carried into the dormitories, and they eat there."

Laughter.

"Who carries them in?"

"I didn't see. The boys themselves, probably."

"In turns--or how?"

"In turns, I suppose."

"Ah! So they *do* organize!"

Laughter.

"Is there a Komsomol organization?"

Here the laughter peals out, without waiting for my reply. And yet, when I finished my report, all looked at me with grave anxiety.

"And what's your opinion?" cried somebody.

"I'll decide as you do."

Lapot looked closely at me, and apparently could make nothing of my expression.

"Come on, now--speak out! Well? Why don't you say anything? I'd like to know where your silence will lead you to?"

Denis Kudlaty raised his hand.

"Aha! Denis! I wonder what *you* have to say!" Denis started to scratch the back of his head, but remembering that this weakness of his was always made fun of by the colonists, he let his unwanted hand fall.

But the boys, who had noticed his manoeuvre, laughed.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've nothing special to say. Of course, it's nearer Kharkov, that's true. But to undertake a thing like that--who have we got? Everyone's gone to the Rabfak."

He shook his head as if he had swallowed a fly.

"As a matter of fact, it's hardly worth talking about that Kuryazh. Why should we butt in there? And then, remember--there are two hundred and eighty of them, and a hundred and twenty of us, and such a lot of ours are new, and who are the seniors? Toska's a commander now, and Natasha's a commander, and Perepelyatchenko, and Sukhoivan, and Galatenko...."

"What's this about Galatenko?" said a sleepy, disgruntled voice. "Whenever anything's wrong, it's 'Galatenko.' "

"You shut up!" said Lapot.

"Why should I shut up? Anton Semyonovich has told us what the people there are like. And me--don't I work?"

"Very well, then," continued Denis. "I apologize--but we will have our mugs beaten in, you'll see."

Mitka Zhevely raised his head.

"Gently with your 'mugs!'"

"What'll you do about it?"

"Never mind what we mean to do!"

Kudlaty resumed his seat. Ivan Ivanovich took the floor.

"Comrade Colonists, I don't mean to go anywhere, so I may be said to see things from the outside, and see them clearer. Why should you go to Kuryazh? They'll leave us three hundred of the worst boys, and Kharkov boys, at that."

"And don't they send Kharkov boys here?" asked Lapot.

"They do. But just think--three hundred! And Anton Semyonovich says the children are quite grown-up. And another thing--you'll be going to them, while they'll be at home. If they have stolen clothes alone to the value of eighteen thousand rubles, just think what they'll do with you!"

"Roast us!" shouted someone.

"They won't bother to roast us--they'll eat us raw!"

"And they'll teach a lot of our boys to steal," continued Ivan Ivanovich. "Have we got any of that sort?"

"Any amount," replied Kudlaty. "We have forty young feller-me-lads who only don't steal because they're afraid."

"You see!" said Ivan Ivanovich, delighted. "Now count! There'll be eighty of you, counting the girls and the little ones, and three hundred and twenty of them. And what is it all for? Why wreck the Gorky Colony? You're going to your ruin, Anton Semyonovich!"

Ivan Ivanovich sat down, glancing around triumphantly. The colonists murmured as if in qualified approval, but there was not much decision in the sound.

Kalina Ivanovich, in his ancient greatcoat, but shaved and well-groomed as ever, took the floor amidst general approval. Kalina Ivanovich was suffering at the thought of having to part with the colony, and I could see a great and human melancholy in his blue eyes, which shone with the uncertain light of age.

"It's like this," began Kalina Ivanovich unhurriedly. "I'm not going with you, either, so I suppose I'm an outsider, too, only I don't feel like one. Where you go, and where life takes you, are two different things. Last month you said: we'll have enough butter to send to the English. Now do tell me, an old man, how can such a thing be allowed? I saw how excited you all were--let's go, let's go! Well, what if you had gone? Of course, theoretically, it would have been the Zaporozhye, but in practice you would simply have raised cows, that's all. How much sweat would you have poured out before your butter got to the English--did you ever think of that? It would be grazing, and carting dung, and washing cow's backsides, if your butter's to be any good. You never thought of all that, you sillies! It was all: let's go! let's go! And it's a good thing you never did go. And now there's Kuryazh, and you sit and think. But what is there to think about? You're a progressive individual, and just look--three hundred of your brothers are going to the dogs, the same Maxim Gorkys as you are yourselves. Anton Semyonovich told you about them, and you guffawed, but what's so funny in it? How is the Soviet government to reconcile itself to four hundred bandits growing up in the very capital, in Kharkov, right under the nose of the head of the Ukrainian government? And now the Soviet government says to you--go ahead and work, help them to become decent people--three hundred people, just think! And you'll be watched not by some riffraff, some Luka Semyonovich, but by the whole Kharkov proletariat! And you refuse! You can't bear to have your rosebushes, and you're afraid--there are so few of us, and so many of them, the parasites. And how do you think Anton Semyonovich and I, just the two of us, started this colony? Did we call a general meeting and make speeches? Let Volokhov and Taranets and Gud tell you if we were afraid of them, the parasites! And this would be work for the State, work the Soviet government needs. And I tell you--go, and that's all about it! And Maxim Gorky would say--look at my Gorkytes, they went, the parasites! They weren't frightened off!"

The longer Kalina Ivanovich spoke, the redder grew his cheeks, and the more the eyes of the colonists glowed. Many of those seated on the floor moved nearer to us, and some placed their chins on the shoulders of their neighbours, and looked fixedly, not into the face of Kalina

Ivanovich, but somewhere far away, towards some future exploit. And when Kalina Ivanovich mentioned Maxim Gorky, the fervent eyes of the colonists seemed about to be bursting into flame, the lads shouted, yelled, milled about, broke out into cheers. But there was no time for cheering. Mitka Zhevely stood amidst those seated on the floor, and shouted to the back rows, apparently expecting to meet resistance from there.

"We'll go, fellow parasites--that we will!"

But the back rows, too, shot all sorts of flames towards Mitka, with the most resolute expressions on their faces, and then Mitka turned to Kalina Ivanovich, surrounded by a seething mass of the boys who were capable at the moment of nothing but squealing.

"Kalina Ivanovich, since that's how it is, won't you come with us, too?"

Kalina Ivanovich smiled ruefully, filling his pipe.

Lapot made a speech.

"What's written up there--read!"

All shouted in unison:

"No whining!"

"Come on, then--read it again!"

Lapot thrust his clenched fist downward, and all repeated, sternly, resoundingly:

"No whining!"

"And you whine! A fine set of mathematicians! They count eighty and three hundred and twenty. That's not the way to count! When we took in forty Kharkov kids, did we count?"

"Where are they?"

"We're here, we're here!" shouted the little chaps.

"Well, then!"

The little chaps shouted.

"Fine!"

"What the hell's the counting for, then? If I were Ivan Ivanovich I'd count this way--we have no lice, and they have ten thousand--so stay where you are!"

The hilarious meeting glanced at Ivan Ivanovich, who was red with shame.

"It amounts to this," said Lapot. "We have the Gorky Colony on our side, and who have they? Nobody!"

Lapot had finished. The colonists shouted:

"Right! We'll go, and that's that! Let Anton Semyonovich write to the People's Commissariat for Education!"

"Right you are!" said Kudlaty. "We'll go, then! But to do so, we must use our brains. Tomorrow's the first of March, there's not a moment to be lost. We mustn't write, we must telegraph. Otherwise we shan't have any truck garden. And another thing--we can't go without money, either. Twenty thousand, or whatever it may be, but money there must be."

"Shall we put it to the vote?" asked Lapot, seeking my advice.

"Let Anton Semyonovich tell us what he thinks," came shouts from the crowd.

"Can't you see?" said Lapot. "Still, for the sake of order we must do it. Anton Semyonovich takes the floor."

I rose before the meeting, and said briefly:

"Three cheers for the Gorky Colony!"

Half an hour later Mitka Bogoyavlensky, recently promoted senior groom and commander of the second detachment, set off on horseback for the town.

He took with him a telegram:

"Kharkov Commissariat for Education Dzhurinskaya earnestly request you give us Kuryazh soon as possible to be in time for sowing shall forward estimate. General meeting of colonists.

"Makarenko."

The Road to Life (Volume 2)

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RECONNAISSANCE

Dzhurinskaya summoned me by telegraph the very next day. The colonists in their simplicity attributed enormous significance to the telegram.

"You see how it works: rat-tat-tat--one telegram after another. ..."

As it turned out, things developed without any such expedition. Although it was universally admitted that Kuryazh could no longer be tolerated, if only on account of the earnest entreaties issuing from suburban homes, villages and hamlets for the liquidation of this "den of thieves," there were still some who stuck up for it. As a matter of fact nobody but Dzhurinskaya and Yuryev wanted the unconditional transfer of our colony to Kuryazh, and only Yuryev was really convinced of the expediency of the suggested operation; Dzhurinskaya agreed to it simply because of her faith in me.

"All the same, I feel very nervous, Anton Semyonovich," she said. "I can't help it--I do!"

Bregel was in favour of the transfer, but suggested conditions to which I could not possibly agree: she wanted a special committee of three to undertake the whole operation, the Gorky traditions to be gradually inculcated in the new collective, and fifty Komsomol members from Kharkov to be sent there for a month to help me.

Khalabuda, under the promptings of some of the scoundrelly personages by whom he was always surrounded, would not hear of a twenty-

thousand-ruble grant and could only repeat:

"With twenty thousand we could manage it ourselves."

Unexpected enemies attacked us from the trade union. Especially virulent was a certain Klyamer, a passionate dark-haired man, who called himself a "friend of the people." I still don't know why the Gorky Colony irritated him so, but whenever he referred to it his face would be distorted with rage, and he would spit and bang his fist on the table:

"Everywhere reformers! Who is Makarenko? Why must we break the laws and violate the interests of the working class for the sake of some Makarenko or other? And what do we know about the Gorky Colony? Who has seen it? Dzhurinskaya has--well, what of it? Does Dzhurinskaya understand everything?"

These were the demands of mine which irritated Klyamer so much:

1. The discharge of the entire staff of Kuryazh without any discussion whatsoever.
2. The number of teachers in the Gorky Colony to be fifteen (forty was considered the norm).
3. Teachers to be paid not forty, but eighty rubles a month.
4. The staff to be selected by myself, the trade union retaining its right of objection.

These modest requests made Klyamer almost weep with vexation.

"I'd like to see anyone daring to discuss this insolent ultimatum! Every word is a sneer at Soviet law. He needs fifteen teachers, so twenty-five are to be thrown overboard. He wants to make his teachers work like galley slaves, and forty will be in his way."

I did not enter into a controversy with Klyamer, not quite understanding what he was driving at.

Altogether I tried to keep out of discussions and arguments, for in my heart I was not certain of success, and did not wish to force anyone to take a risk which he thought unjustified. In truth I had only one argument--the Gorky Colony, but not many people had seen it, and it was not for me to tell them about it.

So many individuals, passions, and personal relations had become involved in the question of the transfer of the colony, that I was very soon out of my depth, and the fact that I was never in Kharkov for more than a day at a time, and never managed to attend any meetings, made things still more difficult for me. Somehow I did not believe in the sincerity of my opponents, and could not help suspecting that very

different motives underlay their ostensible arguments.

I met with real, impassioned, human conviction in only one person in the People's Commissariat for Education, and I regarded it with frank admiration. The person was a woman, judging by her attire, but seemed to be a sexless being--short of stature, with an equine countenance, a flat, puny chest and huge, clumsy legs. She was always waving her red hands about, either gesticulating, or setting to rights her coarse, straight, tow-coloured locks. Everyone called her Comrade Zoya, and she was not without a certain influence in Bregel's office.

Comrade Zoya detested me on sight, and made no secret of it, nor did she hesitate to use the most violent expressions.

"You're not a pedagogue, Makarenko, you're a martinet! I'm told you're an ex-colonel, and it looks as if it were true. I simply can't understand why people make such a fuss of you here! I wouldn't let you go near children."

I liked the crystalline sincerity and lucid passion of Comrade Zoya, and I also made no secret of my feelings in my answers to her.

"I admire you more and more, Comrade Zoya, only I never was a colonel, you know."

Comrade Zoya, who was convinced that the transfer of the colony would end in catastrophe, banged her fist on Bregel's desk, fairly howling:

"You seem to be infatuated! What spell has been cast on you all by this--" she glanced towards me.

"Colonel," I said gravely, as if prompting her.

"Yes, colonel! I'll tell you what all this will end in--in a massacre. He'll take his hundred and twenty over there, and there'll be a massacre. What have you to say to that, Comrade Makarenko?"

"Your reasoning entrances me, but I should like to know who's going to massacre whom."

Bregel tried to quell our altercations.

"Zoya! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Why should there be any massacre? And you, Anton Semyonovich, you make fun of everything."

Word of our wranglings and controversies had begun to reach the highest party circles, and I was glad of that. I was even glad to hear that Kuryazh was beginning to decompose, with a fearful stench, calling for urgent and drastic measures. Kuryazh itself clamoured for a decision, though its own teachers protested that all this talk of our colony being transferred to them was completely demoralizing the Kuryazh colonists.

These same teachers went about telling people in strict confidence that the Yuryazhites were sharpening their blades in preparation for the arrival of the Gorkyites. Comrade Zoya spluttered into my face:

"You see, you see!"

"I do," I replied. "So now we know--it's they who are to cut our throats, and not we who are to cut theirs."

"Yes, now we know.... Look out, Varvana! You will be held answerable for everything! Did you ever hear of such a thing? Inciting one group of waifs against another!"

At last I was summoned to the office of a superior organization.

A clean-shaven man raised his head from his papers, and said:

"Sit down, Comrade Makarenko." Dzhurinskaya and Klyamer were also there.

I sat down.

"Are you certain that you and your charges will be able to stop the rot in Kuryazh?" the clean-shaven man asked me quietly.

Surely I must have turned pale from the strain of looking straight into my interlocutor's eyes, and answering a question put in perfect good faith with a downright lie:

"Yes, I am."

The clean-shaven man gave me a steady glance, and went on:

"Now I have a purely technical question to ask you--a technical question, Comrade Klyamer, mind you, and not a question of principle--tell me, as briefly as you are able, why you want only fifteen teachers, and not forty, and what you have against a salary of forty rubles for them?"

After a moment's thought I replied:

"Well, then, to put it as briefly as I can--forty-ruble teachers are capable of causing the demoralization not only of a collective of homeless children, but of any collective in the world."

The clean-shaven man threw himself back in his chair, in a paroxysm of laughter, and then said, in a choking voice, pointing at Klyamer:

"Even a collective consisting of Klyamers?"

"Oh, definitely," I said gravely.

His official reserve seemed to have been blown away as by a gust of wind. He extended his arm towards Lyubov Savelyevna.

"That's just what I told you--the more there are, the less they're worth!"

Suddenly he nodded his head wearily, and returning to his brusque official manner, said to Dzhurinskaya:

"Let him take it over! And quick about it!"

"Twenty thousand," I said, getting up.

"You'll get it. Isn't it too much?"

"Not enough!"

"All right. Good-bye! You go there, but remember--the thing has got to be a complete success."

In the Gorky Colony the first stage of ardent determination had by now gradually passed into one of unhurried preparation, conducted with an almost military precision. Lapot was the real ruler of the colony, with Koval to help him at critical moments, but the task of ruling the colony was not a hard one. Never before had there been such an atmosphere of friendly solidarity, such a profound sense of collective responsibility. The slightest transgression was met with unmitigated astonishment, and a curt, expressive adjuration:

"And *you* mean to go to Kuryazh!"

No one in the colony could harbour any more doubts as to the true nature of the problem. The colonists did not so much know as feel the necessity of subordinating everything to the requirements of the collective, and that without any sense of sacrifice.

It was a joy, perhaps the deepest joy the world has to give--this feeling of interdependence, of the strength and flexibility of human relations, of the calm, vast power of the collective, vibrating in an atmosphere permeated with its own force. All this could be read in the colonists' eyes, in their movements, their expressions, their gait, their work. All eyes were turned to the north, where an ignorant horde, united by poverty, anarchy, and dull obstinacy, was waiting for us with fierce snarls behind thick walls.

I noticed that there was not the slightest boastfulness in the attitude of the colonists. Somewhere, deep down, everyone harboured a secret fear

and uncertainty, heightened by the fact that the enemy had as yet been seen by no one.

My return from town was always awaited eagerly and impatiently, colonists were picketed on the roads, on trees, a lookout was kept from the roofs. As soon as I drove into the yard, a trumpeter would sound the signal for a general meeting without asking my permission. I would go meekly to the meeting. At that time it had become a custom to greet me with applause, as if I were a People's Actor. This applause was of course meant not so much for me, as for our common cause.

At last, in the beginning of May, I came to one such meeting with a signed agreement in my hand.

Under this agreement, and by special order of the People's Commissariat for Education, the Maxim Gorky Colony was to be transferred with all its members, staff, movables, livestock and inventory, to Kuryazh. The Kuryazh Colony was declared to be closed, its two hundred and eighty colonists and all its property were put at the disposal and under the management of the Gorky Colony. The entire staff of the Kuryazh Colony, with the exception of a few employees, was declared to be discharged from the moment the director of the Gorky Colony took over the management of Kuryazh.

I was requested to take over on the fifth of May, and to have completed the move by the fifteenth of May.

After I had read them the agreement and the order, the Gorkyites did not shout "hurrah!" and did not toss anyone up. In the midst of a general silence Lapot said:

"Let's write to Gorky about it. And remember, lads: no whining!"

"Very good--no whining!" squealed a little chap.

And Kalina Ivanovich waved his hand, and said.

"Go ahead, lads, don't be afraid!"

END OF VOLUME TWO