

The City

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Man has six qualities: in three he resembles an animal and in the other three he resembles an angel. Like an animal man eats and drinks, like an animal he procreates, and like an animal he expels waste; like an angel he has reason, like an angel he walks upright, and like an angel he speaks in a blessed language.

Talmud. Avot (Aboth) tractate.
[*Hagigah* 16A, in the *Mo`ed seder*]

How can one be free, Eucrites, when one has a body?

A. France. *Thais*.

Part One

I

It seemed you couldn't go any farther. Ahead, the Dnipro appeared to stop in an unexpected cove, surrounded on the right, on the left, and straight ahead by the yellowish-green banks of approaching autumn. But the steamboat suddenly turned and the long, smooth streak of the river stretched out to the barely visible hills on the horizon.

Stepan stood by the railing on the deck, his eyes unconsciously diving into the distance as the even strokes of the paddle-wheel blades and the dull sound of the captain's voice at the megaphone sapped the strength from his thoughts. They, too, stopped in that hazy distance where the river imperceptibly disappeared, as if the horizon were the final limit of his desires. The boy slowly looked at the near banks and was somewhat confused. At the bend, on the right, appeared a village, previously hidden behind the bank. The August sun wiped the dirt from the white houses and highlighted the black paths that ran into the fields and turning blue, like the river, just disappeared. And it seemed that this disappearing blue path joined the heavens in an endless field and returned by a second branch to the village, bringing to it some of that vast expanse. A third path rolled down to the river and carried back to the village the freshness of the Dnipro. The village slept in the midday sun, and there was a secret in that sleep amidst the natural elements that nourished it with their strength. Here, near the shore, the village seemed to be the tangible creation of the expanse of space, the magic flower of earth, sky, and water.

His own village, the one Stepan had left, also stood on a bank and now he unconsciously searched for some similarity between his own village and this one that happened to appear on his great journey. Happily, he felt that this similarity was real and that here, in these houses, as in the ones he had left, he would have felt at home. Sadly he watched the village melt and fade with every stroke of the engines, until the trail of grimy smoke hid it completely. Stepan sighed. Perhaps this was the last village he would see before the city.

In his soul he felt an indistinct agitation and dizziness, as if in his own village and in all those he had seen he had left not only the past, but his faith in the future as well. Closing his eyes, he surrendered to the sadness that cradles the soul.

When he straightened up from the railing, he saw Nadika. He hadn't heard her approach. He hadn't called her, but he was happy to see her. Quietly he took her hand. Without raising her head she shuddered and stared at the fan-like wake created by the prow of the steamboat.

They lived in the same village, but before now they had barely known

each other. That is, he knew that she existed, that she studied hard, and that she did not go out. A few times he had even seen her in the Village Hall, where he was in charge of the library. But here they met as if for the first time, and the coincidence of their destinations cemented a bond between them. She was on her way to study in the big city, as he was. They both had travel papers in their pockets and before them lay a new life. Together they were crossing the frontier of the future.

Actually, her prospects were somewhat more certain. She bragged that her parents would provide her with food. He was hoping for a stipend. She would be living with some girlfriends in their apartment. He had a letter from an uncle to a merchant he knew. Even her personality was more energetic, while he seemed self-absorbed and lethargic. In the course of his twenty-five years he had been a sheep hand, then just a boy, then a rebel, and finally the administrator of the village bureau of the Robzemlis Trade Union of Agricultural and Forest Workers. He had only one advantage over her: he was bright and did not fear the entrance exam. Over the course of the day on the steamboat, he had managed to explain to her many of the more complex principles of the social sciences, and she had listened with rapture to the enchanting sound of his voice. Stepping away from him for a moment, she had experienced sudden boredom and new, still unexplained economic problems. When he began to explain them, she wanted him to speak about something else, about his expectations, about how he lived before they knew each other. But she only thanked him for the helpful pointers, adding with assurance:

“Oh, you’ll get a stipend! You’re so knowledgeable!”

He smiled. It was pleasant to hear praise and faith in his abilities from this blue-eyed girl. Indeed, Nadika seemed to him to be the prettiest woman on the steamboat. The long sleeves of her gray blouse were more appealing to him than the bare arms of others. Her collar left visible only a narrow ribbon of flesh, while others shamelessly uncovered their shoulders and the incipient curves of their breasts. Her shoes were round, with moderate heels, and her knees weren’t always jumping out from under her skirt. He was attracted by her unpretentiousness, which nicely complemented his own disdain for artificiality. His reaction to the other women was a mixture of contempt and fear. He felt that they weren’t noticing him, or perhaps they were even scorning him for his faded field jacket, reddish cap, and threadbare pants. He was a tall, tanned, and well-built young man, but the short soft hairs on his face, unshaved for a week, gave him a slovenly appearance. He had bushy eyebrows, large gray eyes, a wide forehead, and sensitive lips. His dark hair was swept back in the style worn by many villagers and now adopted by some poets.

Stepan kept his hand on Nadika’s warm fingers and gazed pensively at the river, the curving sandy banks, and the solitary trees on the shore. Suddenly Nadika straightened up and, waving her hand, pronounced:

“Kyiv isn’t far now.”

Kyiv! The big city, where he was going to study and live. It was that modernity that he must infiltrate to realize his long-cherished dream. Was Kyiv really close? Flustered, he asked:

“Where’s Levko?”

They looked around and saw a group of villagers who had spread out their lunch on the stern. On the cloak they had spread out as a tablecloth lay bread, onion, and bacon. Levko, an agronomy student from Stepan’s village, was sitting and eating with them. He was smooth and fatter than his height warranted, so in days gone by he would have made an ideal village priest—now, an exemplary agronomist. A villager himself from many generations back, he would be perfect at helping the villagers with a sermon or some scientific advice. He studied very diligently, always wore an overcoat, and, above all, liked to hunt. After two years of hunger and want in the city he had formulated and developed a basic law of human existence. From the slogan popular during the revolution, “whoever doesn’t work, doesn’t eat,” he developed the corollary, “whoever doesn’t eat doesn’t work,” and he applied this thesis at all times and in all circumstances. The villagers on the steamboat eagerly shared their simple meal with him, and in return he told them some interesting things about Mars, about farming in America, and about radios. They were amazed, and cautiously, with some derision and secretly disbelieving what he had told them, they asked him questions about these wonders and about God.

Levko came up to his young colleagues, smiling and swaying on his short legs. Smiling and being in good humor were his essential qualities, the measure of his attitude toward the world. Neither poverty nor education had managed to kill off the good nature that he had developed under the quiet willows of his village.

Stepan and Nadika were already tying up their things. Just one more turn of the rudder, and at the end of the sandy hills on the left side of the river lay the gray outline of the city. Before the extended pontoon bridge the steamboat let out a long cry and this piercing noise echoed painfully in Stepan’s heart. For a moment he forgot the desires he was fulfilling and stared longingly at the stream of white steam above the whistle, which signaled the end of his past. And when the whistle suddenly stopped, his soul became quiet and lifeless. Somewhere deep inside he felt the foolish pressure of tears, totally inappropriate to his age and station, and he wondered that this moisture had not dried up during hard times and hard work, but instead had hidden and now stirred, unexpectedly and pointlessly. He reddened from embarrassment and turned away. But Levko noticed his distress. He put his arm on Stepan’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry, my boy,” he said.

“It’s nothing,” answered Stepan, embarrassed.

Nadika was showering Levko with questions—he had to identify every

hill, every church, just about every building. But Levko proved to know little about the area. True, he could name the Lavra Monastery and the statue of Volodymyr, but he could not say for sure whether the hill on which the statue stood was called Volodymyr's. In Kyiv he circulated in a limited and well-defined circle bounded by Lenin Street, where he lived, and the Institute. He almost never deviated from this path, except that three times each winter he would go to State Cinema No. 5 to see some American films, and every once in a while he would go hunting along the Kyiv–Teteriv line. Therefore he was incapable of satisfying Nadika's curiosity, which festered unchecked. The jumble of buildings, so brittle and comic from afar, charmed her, and her smile betrayed joy at the prospect of living in them.

But her attention was soon torn away from the city. She was watching the motorboats that thumped briskly along the river, and the rowboats, in which half-naked, tanned athletes exercised their muscles, smiled, and swayed on the waves of the steamboat's wake. Daring swimmers dove almost under the paddle-wheel itself, yelling merrily. Suddenly, like a white illusion, a three-masted schooner passed by the steamboat.

"Look, look!" yelled the girl, captivated by the unusual triangular sails. On the deck of the sailboat were three boys and a girl in a veil. She seemed a water nymph from old fables. She was beyond envy.

Closer to Kyiv, traffic on the river increased. Ahead was a beach, a sandy island in the middle of the Dnipro, where three motorboats ceaselessly ferried bathers from the harbor. The city flowed down from the hills to this shore. From Revolution Street down the wide stairs to the Dnipro rolled a colorful wave of boys, girls, women, men—a white and pink stream of moving bodies anticipating the sweet comfort of sunshine and water. There were no sad faces in this crowd. Here, at the edge of the city, began a new land, the land of primordial happiness. The water and sun welcomed everyone who had just abandoned pens and balance scales—every young lad as if he were Kyi, every young lass as if she were Lybid. Their pale bodies, oppressed by clothing for so many months, were now released from prison and blossomed into bronze languor on the hot sand, like savages lost on the banks of the Nile. Here for a moment they were resurrected into primal nakedness, and only their flimsy bathing suits marked the passage of a few millennia.

The contrast between the dour buildings on the shore and this untroubled bathing seemed to Nadika both shocking and enchanting. In these opposites she recognized the breadth of urban life and its possibilities. The girl did not hide her excitement. She was blinded by the multicolored costumes, the range of body colors, from pale pink, only just exposed to the sun for the first time, to dark brown, well baked by the intense summer sun. She repeated avidly:

"Oh how pretty! Oh how pretty!"

Stepan did not share her excitement at all. For him, the spectacle of a

naked, thoughtless mob was deeply displeasing. The fact that Nadika, too, was willing to join this silly, mindless herd affected him negatively. He said, gruffly:

“It’s all just lard.”

Levko looked at the people with more compassion:

“They sit in their cubbyholes all day and go nuts.”

Having climbed down to the shore in a crowd, Stepan and his friends stepped aside to let the other passengers go ahead. Nadika’s excitement had withered. The city, which had looked sun-bleached and airy from afar, now hung over them, dark and heavy. They glanced around timidly. She was deafened by the cries of the huckstresses, whistles, buses clanging on their way to Darnytsia, and the rhythmic gasp of a steam engine at a nearby mill.

Stepan rolled a cigarette with his cheap tobacco and smoked it. He had a habit of spitting after lighting up, but here he swallowed the bitter tobacco and dust-flavored saliva. Everything around him was strange and alien. He saw the shooting gallery, where air guns were being fired, stalls with ice cream, beer, and kvas, huckstresses with rolls and seeds, boys with irises, girls with baskets of apricots and morellos. Hundreds of faces floated past him, some happy, some serious, some troubled. Somewhere a woman was yelling because she had been robbed. Children at play were making a racket. This was how it usually was here, and how it was when his feet were still treading the soft dust of the village, and how it would continue to be. And to all of this he was a stranger.

All the passengers had dispersed. Freight was being unloaded from the steamboat. Half-naked stevedores were climbing the long ramps with crates, bags, and fruits. Then they carried carcasses of beef and rolled smelly, tarred barrels off the boat.

Levko led them, showing them the way. At Revolution Street their paths diverged: Stepan was headed down into the Podil, the other two into the Old City.

“You can move in with me, if there’s any problem,” said Levko. “Did you write down the address?”

Stepan quickly bid them farewell and turned right, occasionally asking passers-by for directions. At a bookstore he stopped in front of the display window and began to examine the books. They had been dear to him from an early age. Even before he learned to read, still just a child, he would page through the only book that graced his uncle’s study—an ancient journal of some kind, with endless portraits of the tsar, archbishops, and generals. Yet it wasn’t the pictures but the rows of evenly spaced black marks that had caught his eye. He didn’t even remember how he learned to read—accidentally, it seemed. Then he would pronounce the words with delight, although he still didn’t understand what they meant.

He stood for a long time by the window, reading the titles of the books one by one, the names of their publishers, and their dates. Some, he thought,

would be useful to him at the Institute. But the mass of volumes, among which he recognized only one that he had read, made a strange impression on him. They seemed to embody everything that was strange, everything that frightened him, all the dangers that he had to overcome in the city. Contrary to reason, and to all his earlier calculations, desperate thoughts—at first formulated as questions—began to assault him. Why did he have to come here? How was he going to live? He would wither here. He would return home a beggar. Why didn't he sign up for the education courses in the provincial town near his village? What was the point of these childish dreams of Kyiv and the Institute? The boy stood before the modest Podil bookstore, which to him appeared so brilliant, and seemed to be wavering whether he should return to the dock.

"I'm just tired after the long trip," he surmised.

This fatigue also accounted, he thought, for the weariness of his muscles and the unwillingness to move that overcame him here. But he considered himself a messenger charged with an unusually important but alien assignment. His old desires suddenly felt like someone else's commands, to which he was surrendering but not without a quiet resentment. He went on under the power of his momentarily faded but still tenacious dreams.

He found number 37 on Nyzhnyi Val Street, opened the gate, crossed the yard, stepped up to the veranda, and knocked on the worm-eaten door. After a moment, the door was opened by a man in a waistcoat with a short beard and graying hair. This was the fish merchant Luka Demydovych Hnidy, who in the early years after the revolution, when the cities were poor and hungry, set up the base of his commercial enterprise in Stepan's native village, Tereveni, where he invariably stayed at the home of Stepan's uncle. Now the fish merchant was to repay these past favors, although times had changed and the past was not so pleasant that anyone willingly recalled it. He glanced at Stepan apprehensively over the top of his glasses, nervously tore open the envelope, glanced at the letter and silently walked into the house, reading it.

Stepan was left alone in front of the open door. His bundle was eating into his shoulder, and he put it down. He waited a few moments and then sat down on the porch himself. The street before him was empty. In the time since he arrived, no pedestrians had appeared on the street, only a wagon had rolled by with the driver barely holding the reins. The boy started to roll a cigarette, focusing all his attention on it, like a person who wishes to fight off insistent but irrelevant thoughts. Slowly he licked the edge of the cheap, thick cigarette paper, carefully sealed his creation, and then admired his work. The cigarette came out surprisingly straight, with a sharp point at the end to make it easier to light. He put it in his mouth and, pushing aside the tail of his jacket, he reached into the deep but only pocket of his pants—on the other side, the tailor had not wasted extra material, assuming quite correctly that there were people for whom one pocket was sufficient. Following this tailor's

example, nature could save an eye or an ear on many a person, as the myths about Cyclopes suggest. Rummaging through the treasures in his pocket—a knife, an old coin purse, an unexpected button, and a handkerchief—he pulled out a box of matches, but it was completely empty. He had used the last match on the dock. Stepan threw down the box and crushed it with his boot.

Because he couldn't smoke, the boy wanted to smoke all the more. He got up and went over to the gate, looking around for a passing smoker. But this Podil street was, as before, deserted. A row of low, old-fashioned buildings stretched to the riverbank, where it ended in dilapidated, long unpainted shacks. A solitary poplar, denuded by age, reached up awkwardly in front of a window.

Suddenly someone on the porch called him by name, and the boy shuddered as if caught committing a crime. It was Hnidy calling him.

"I shall live here," thought Stepan, and this thought seemed as strange to him as the poplar he had just seen.

Yet Hnidy did not lead him into the house, but deep into the yard, to a shed. Stepan walked behind him and stared at his back. The shopkeeper was somewhat hunchbacked and had thin legs. He was not tall, but his skinny legs seemed long and stiff. And a thought occurred to Stepan: How easy it would be to break such legs!

At the shed Hnidy turned the lock, opened the door, and said:

"You'll stay here."

Stepan glanced over Hnidy's shoulder into the tiny nook. It was a small carpentry shop. By the wall was a workbench; on the shelves above lay various tools. On another wall a flimsy window cast its shadow into the room. There was a scent of sawdust and fresh wood. The boy was so surprised by his new quarters that he even asked:

"Is this it?"

With keys jingling, Hnidy turned his glasses toward him:

"You won't need it for long, will you?"

His face was all wrinkled. There was something of a victim in his eyes.

Stepan timidly entered and put his things in the corner. Bending down, he caught a glimpse of his neighbors through the cracks between the boards of the partition—a pair of cows calmly chewing their cud by a manger. A barn! That's where he was supposed to live! Like an animal! Like cattle! He felt his chest tightening and blood rushing to his face. He straightened up, red-faced and insulted. Stepan looked at Hnidy's pale face, behind which there seemed to be neither desire nor idea, and, with a sense of his own superiority, said:

"Give me a match—I need a light."

Hnidy shook his head.

"I don't smoke.... And you be careful, too—there's wood here."

Hnidy closed the door and for a while the jingle of his keys was audible

in the distance. Stepan paced about his nook in long strides. Each step was a threat. He had not expected this kind of humiliation. He was prepared for hunger and poverty—but not livestock. True, he had tended cows once. But now, after the revolution, after all the uprisings, some shopkeeper—this stick-legged nothing—has the right to shoo him off into a barn?

The little window in the shed grew darker with the sudden nightfall of this still summery evening. Stepan stopped and looked out. Above a row of identical roofs, a factory smokestack stretched into the sky. Black plumes of smoke blended imperceptibly into the gray-blue dusk, as if penetrating the sky to reach into the depths of the universe.

His cigarette had already torn open between his fingers and the tobacco was spilling onto the floor. He rolled another and stepped out into the yard. So he'll go into the house, find the kitchen, and get himself a light. What's there to be ashamed of? After all, they're people too! But there was a youth sitting on the veranda, and when Stepan bent over to get a light from his cigarette, the youth said:

“Have one of mine.”

Stepan was surprised, but he took the cigarette. Inhaling the smoke, he took a closer look at the youth, who was carelessly exhaling rings of smoke. When Stepan thanked him, the fellow nodded as if he were deep in thought and would be sitting here until morning.

Stepan lay down on the workbench in his room and enjoyed the fragrant smoke of the cigarette, which was intoxicating him. He closed his eyes and dreamily concluded that everything was fine. The fact that he was in a barn now seemed merely comical. He knocked twice on the wall to the cows, laughed, and opened his eyes. Above the smokestack in the window hung a bright new moon.

II

Outside the sun had risen when Stepan awoke and got up on the workbench. His body was numb from lying on the bare wood, but he paid no attention to this languor and rubbed his eyes with apprehension. Today was the day of the entrance exam. Had he overslept? Remembering that the exam was scheduled for one o'clock, he felt calmer and stretched. His neck ached and he rubbed it with his hand.

A quiet, monotonous gurgling came from beyond the partition that separated his quarters from the stables. The cows were being milked. This calmed him completely—it was still early. He sat on the workbench, his hands on his knees, and his uncombed head bowed down in recollection. Yesterday's details stretched before him in a bright thread. Perhaps it was back in his days as a stableboy, lying in the field and weaving whips or baskets, that he had developed this habit of self-reflection. Now, remembering the previous day, he was disappointed with himself. He noted a certain inner hesitation, a small, albeit fleeting, uncertainty—in short, what is known as inconstancy. But in his own mind he had no right to that feeling. He was part of that new force called from the villages for creative work. He must courageously take his place among those who would replace the rancid past and courageously build the future. He was even ashamed of that delicious cigarette—charity from a young gentleman.

Stepan tossed back the hair falling on his forehead and quickly began to dress. He shook out his field jacket, rubbed his pants with his elbow to knock off some of the dust, and untied his packages. They held some food, a military overcoat in the old tsarist style, and a change of underwear. Having emptied one sack onto the floor, the boy used it to wipe his shoes; then he spit on them, and buffed them again. Now he was thoroughly prepared.

Rather than wash now—which was, in any case, impossible—he decided to bathe in the Dnipro after taking the exam and turned his thoughts to breakfast. His supplies included three pancakes, almost twenty pounds of wheat flour, maybe four pounds of bacon, a dozen cooked eggs, and a bag of buckwheat. Unexpectedly, a couple of potatoes rolled out of his sack, and the boy laughed aloud at this find. He laid out all his edibles on the table and, for the sake of order, untied his field kettle from the sack and set that beside them. He was about to cut some bread when he remembered morning exercise. He definitely wanted to start his day normally, the urban way, as if he were already completely at home in his new surroundings. It was important to give yourself a routine straight off. Discipline and order were the best guarantors of achievement!

Stepan got up and looked around for an appropriate object for his exercise. He picked up the bench and lifted it a few times, admiring his agility and muscle tone. Putting it down, he was still not satisfied. Feeling his biceps

lovingly, he jumped up and, taking hold of a low joist, began doing pull-ups with ever-increasing speed and enthusiasm. When he finally jumped back down to the floor, crimson with effort and satisfaction, he turned toward the door and saw a woman with a milking pail in her hands. She was staring at him with a frightened, troubled expression.

“I slept here,” he muttered. “I have their permission.”

She was silent. Stepan felt unsure of himself—not because he didn’t have his jacket on or because during his exercise his shirt had come out of his belt like a little child’s. No, for him clothing was only a safeguard against the cold. But he understood that in this instance, the exercise had exceeded proper limits and turned into a silly game unbecoming of his dignity or position. And then this milkmaid will likely wag her tongue and say that he was trying to climb into the loft in order to steal something. He tossed back his hair and, considering the conversation closed, wanted to get on with his breakfast, but she entered his room, looked at his things, and put the milk pail on the ground.

“Was it very uncomfortable sleeping here?” she asked in a sad, listless voice, running her hand over the workbench.

“N-Yeah,” grumbled Stepan unhappily.

But she wasn’t leaving. What does she want, exactly? What is this—some kind of inspection? He took on an unmistakably dour appearance.

“I’m the lady of the house,” the woman explained, finally. “Would you like some milk?”

The mistress! And she milks the cows herself? Sure, now it’s not so easy to boss around the organized proletariat! Of course, from a milkmaid—one of his own—Stepan would have accepted the offer of milk, but if it’s an act of charity from the mistress—no thank you!

“I don’t want milk,” he answered.

But the mistress, without waiting for his answer, was already pouring him some.

“You can wash in the yard, there’s a faucet there,” she added, taking up the milk pail.

Stepan looked after her. She had a thick, round back—abundance was evident in her shape. He angrily put on his jacket and buttoned it. He sliced off some bacon and started his breakfast, his thoughts turning to his exam. He had nothing to be afraid of. Math—he had an excellent command of it. To test himself, he recited the formula for the area of all geometric figures, binomial expressions, and the relations of trigonometric functions. And although he was unwittingly remembering precisely what he knew best, he was nevertheless pleased with the clarity of his knowledge. About the social sciences there was no concern at all. He had listened to so many lectures back in the village, and he had read the newspaper every day. And all this was in addition to his social background, his revolutionary credentials, and his professional work. All in all, he was well-armed on the educational front.

A look through his documents also left him content. In this pile of papers lay his entire life over the last five years—a rebel under the hetman, fighting the White bands, cultural and professional work. He even read some of it with interest. What couldn't you find here! There was his capture, imprisonment, and escape from execution. There were demonstrations, agitation, resolutions, the battle with ignorance and with homebrew. And how pleasant it was to see all this documented with seals, stamps, the straight lines of a typewriter and the clumsy squiggles of semi-literate hands.

Stepan got up energetically, put his documents in his pocket, sharpened a pencil with his pen-knife, and prepared some paper. It was time to go. Covering his food with a sack, he stopped by the milk. He was, in fact, very thirsty. Bacon and bread really need something liquid. And the milk would go rancid in this heat, anyway. He grabbed the cup, emptied it with one gulp, and threw it contemptuously on the workbench. Even a scrawny lamb will yield some sheepskin.

He stepped out into the yard, latched the hook on the door, and set off down the street. Before going to the Institute, he wanted to stop in at the trade union offices to see about possible jobs. Today, for some reason, it was easy for him to find his way around the city and he gave it little mind. Troubled with the important matters of settling down in a new place, he observed himself more than his surroundings.

Among the hundreds of offices at the Palace of Labor Stepan barely managed to find the division he was looking for—Agricultural and Forest Workers. Considering his business sufficiently urgent, he decided to go straight to the director of the division. It turned out he must wait, but this didn't trouble him excessively: first, it was only ten o'clock, and second, he was sitting on a bench waiting along with other visitors, an equal among equals. Borrowing his neighbor's newspaper and wasting no time, he became familiar with the most recent developments in the international situation, and, judging them to be propitious for the Union of Republics, went on to the "Village Affairs" pages. Here he found captivating reading. Learning that in the village of Hlukhari, at the request of the village council, an unreliable agronomist was fired from his job, Stepan sorrowfully reflected:

"That's what we needed in our village! But our people just sit like bumps on a log."

He diligently read about pilfering at the village cooperative in Kindrativka, about the battle against homebrew in the Kaharlytsky region, and about the exemplary breeding station in the town of Radomyshl. Each fact and figure he compared to his own village, and in the end concluded that its situation was, by and large, no worse than anywhere else.

"We need cultural cadres, that's what we need," Stepan reasoned. He was glad that he had abandoned the thatched roofs only temporarily, for three years. After that, he would return well-armed to do battle with homebrew, pilfering, and the inertia of the local administration.

At last it was his turn to speak to the director of the division. Stepan crossed the threshold anxious that the face he would encounter in the chair behind the desk might be too unfamiliar, along with soft furniture and a carpeted floor. After all, this was Kyiv! But his first glimpse set his mind at ease. The office furnishings were not much different from those of the regional committee, which served simultaneously as an office for all the regional administrators. Except maybe the sofa against the wall: such a luxury would have been unthinkable out there, but even if there had been a sofa, there likely wouldn't have been a free spot to sit down on it.

The director of the division was a straightforward man—but after hearing out Stepan, he was very surprised. Didn't Stepan, an experienced employee of the Agricultural and Forest Workers' Trade Union at the regional level, know where such matters were handled? First, he must register with the local office as a transient member, and then take his place with the others in the job lottery. There was a well-established and well-known procedure for matters of this sort, and you couldn't just go about wasting your time and the valuable time of busy administrators on things like this.

Stepan left his office somewhat perplexed. The director hadn't told him anything he didn't already know. But—that was the “usual” procedure. The boy had secretly hoped that in his case an exception would be made—at least on account of his active participation in the revolution and his exemplary service in the trade union. Besides, he had been sent off to obtain a higher education and deserved consideration ahead of the others. Yet the director hadn't even asked to see his documents. That was unfortunate. But after all, you had to admit that this way was even-handed and fair. No one should receive special favors.

Stepan found the job lottery desk and discovered that it only operated on Wednesdays and Fridays. This happened to be Monday. Such was the procedure, and no changes could be made, even for the newly arrived. A bulletin had been sent to all the regional centers, the clerk told him. What's more, she pointed out to him the list of documents necessary to register for the lottery, and Stepan realized, to his horror, that he was missing some of them and could not immediately produce them.

As hopeful as he had been entering the Palace of Labor, he was equally gloomy leaving. It immediately became evident to him that he would find no job here. He was only one among hundreds. While he collected the necessary documents, others would get all the jobs. And then, was there really any sense in entering the lottery? They'd tell him that he was here to study, not to work. He should have government support. He should be looking into stipends. That, indeed, was how it should be. He did not blame anyone.

Out on the street he suddenly had an idea. What if he just walked into some larger institution? Perhaps they just happened, by sheer coincidence, to be looking for a young, savvy accountant or registrar? Just walk in and ask—it's not a crime. At worst they'll say no and he'll leave. And what if it

works? This idea excited him. In his heart he had a strong sense of his destiny—it's natural for everyone to consider himself the only creature under the sun and moon. He turned in the direction of a large veranda over which hung a large banner, "State Publishing House of Ukraine," and quickly made his way to the second floor. In the first room a few young men were engaged in conversation on the sofa, a typewriter was clattering in the corner, tall bookcases lined the walls. Stepan stopped for a moment and then went on, assuming a carefree manner to avoid being stopped too soon. His eyes searched for a sign that said "supervisor," which he didn't find until he reached the third room. He was ready to grasp the doorknob when the man sitting nearby examining a pile of manuscripts suddenly said:

"The supervisor is not in—what's your business, comrade?"

Taken aback, Stepan mumbled, "I've come on business," and retreated with equal carelessness. Near the exit he heard words that were obviously said about him:

"Probably brought a bag full of poems."

And then there was laughter. At the door Stepan turned and saw the person who had spoken, one of the young men sitting on the sofa, a dark fellow in a gray shirt with narrow stripes. Going down the stairs, he mulled over these puzzling words.

"What poems? What do poems have to do with anything?"

But his enthusiasm did not abandon him. And although in the second institution he was again unable to get through to the supervisor, and in the third he was shown a list of dismissed employees in the very first room, he nonetheless entered a fourth. The director was in his office and received Stepan.

There was soft furniture and a huge, massive clock on the wall, but the director was young and not an ogre. Destiny was smiling on the boy. The director invited him to sit down and listened him out to the end. Then, he lit a cigarette, and said:

"I've learned this on my own skin. I'm a Red director, after all. Promoting employment for the worker and peasant youth is our most important task. That's the only way to cure the ills of our society. We know that it's only the young who will have the strength to build socialism. Come back in two or three months—"

Leaving this commercial institution, Stepan could hardly hold back the insult he felt. The director's gracious welcome exasperated him to the core. He sensed that all doors would close before him like that—some with no hope and others with saccharine politeness. Two or three months! With one chervinets and three pancakes! In a pigsty at the mercy of a merchant! Shoving his hands into the pockets of his jacket, the boy pushed his way through the crowd of pedestrians, avoiding any eye contact. It seemed everyone was ready to pronounce a harsh judgment of him—a failure.

The clock on the building of the district executive committee stopped

the bustle of his unhappy thoughts. It was a quarter to twelve and the exam began at one o'clock. Hurriedly asking for directions to the Institute as he went, Stepan forged ahead. The clarity of his immediate goal—the exam—quickly settled him down. If he failed the exam, what need would he have of any job? But in his heart, he was powerfully sure of passing the exam and imagining the other possible outcome gave him a sweet sensation, like a pleasant joke. In rhythm with his confident steps, the boy easily quieted his agitated thoughts. It was silly to imagine that he need only show up and everyone should be bowing to serve him. He must understand that he has entered into a pattern of life that has been unrolling for hundreds of years. There are no more good fairies and magicians, and there never were any. Only endurance and hard work can accomplish anything. And the dream of gaining a place in the city machinery by a single assault now seemed childish to him. He explained to himself that first, he must write the exam, earn a stipend, and study, and the rest would follow. There are student organizations, guilds, cafeterias. For this, one must be a student. And, you must remember—there are thousands like you!

In the corridors of the Institute there was such a mob that Stepan was swept up in spite of himself. Falling into the mighty stream of humanity, he could only let himself be taken he knew not where or why. Only when the stream dispersed at an auditorium was he able to ask where the exams would be taking place. It turned out that they were to take place exactly here, and that they were about to begin. But Stepan was no sooner calmed by this news than his neighbor asked him:

“And you, my friend, have you gone through the screening committee?”

Screening committee? No, Stepan had heard nothing of it. Is it required? Where is it? Third floor?

Forcing his way through the crowd with all his might, the boy reached the stairs and ran up to the third floor. And what if he's too late and the committee has closed down? Searching for employment, indeed! Red with shame and agitation, he entered the screening committee room—no, they were still in session. He was written down as number one hundred twenty-three.

Four hours later Stepan had cleared the screening committee and was assigned an examination session the day after tomorrow. Hungry and disenchanted, he headed home sluggishly. He understood perfectly that a screening committee was an absolute necessity and that you could not possibly examine in one day all of the five hundred candidates sent off to the Institute. But logical explanations did not stir his sympathies. He began to understand that order is pleasant only when you willingly apply it to yourself, but altogether unpleasant when it is applied to you by someone else. He was tired out. The empty day tomorrow frightened him.

Descending down to the Podil, he turned to the Dnipro to have a bath, as he had planned in the morning. Along the way he bought a box of matches,

and although he wanted to smoke very much, he was afraid that it would make him nauseous. First he would bathe, then have a bite to eat, and only then would he indulge in a cigarette. But he had no luck with bathing. This could only be done on the beach, which is to say he would have had to take the ferry over to the island. That cost five kopecks by rowboat, ten by motorboat. Two kopecks for the matches plus five—that would make seven kopecks! Such expenses were beyond his means, since, besides his expectations—which, after all, might come to nothing—he had only one chervinets, that is, ten karbovanets to protect him from the misery and misfortune that might beset him in the city. Perhaps he would have to return home to the village—he would need money for the ticket. He doggedly persuaded himself that such things had to be kept in mind.

At first he had the idea of following the shoreline far out of town, where he could bathe in a deserted spot before returning to his nook. But his body was exhausted: hunger was spreading a terrible languor through his muscles, and he decided just to wash up. Stepan took off his cap, unbuttoned his collar, and, looking around sheepishly, dipped his hands into the water. His body shook. The water felt so slimy and unpleasant. But he forced himself to wash, dried himself with an oily handkerchief and slowly went back to his Nyzhnyi Val Street.

In his nook, everything was as he had left it. The boy forced himself to swallow a couple of eggs and greedily rolled a cigarette. But he couldn't even smoke—the dryness in his throat and awful spasms forced him to throw away the cigarette and crush it under his boot. Utterly worn out, he took off his field jacket, spread it on the workbench and stretched his entire length on the boards, with his legs dangling off the end. Without any effort to focus his thoughts, he stared dumbly at the dusk in the window. The same chimney was spreading a blanket of smoke across the gray sky.

III

After lunch the next day Stepan set out for Levko's. Only yesterday he would have found it unpleasant to encounter an acquaintance, but today he wanted to see someone, to have a conversation. In the morning he took some bread, bacon, a few potatoes, and some buckwheat and wandered off along the riverbank a long way out of the city. He had gone quite a distance, maybe three kilometers from the harbor, searching for a spot where there weren't any people. A few times he was ready to make his camp but then suddenly he would come upon a fisherman or a huckstress waiting for the ferryman. It was hard to avoid your fellow man here, but Stepan patiently walked on, leaving even his view of the city far behind the bend in the river.

Finally he reached a small cove between steep banks where it was peaceful and deserted. Here he took off his shoes and field jacket, cut down two thick branches, and set up his pot. He gathered some dry grass, started the fire beneath his pot, rinsed the buckwheat, peeled the potatoes, and diced the bacon. The gruel was cooking. Stepan put a few more sticks on the fire, undressed, and lay down on the bank in the warm morning sun. From afar, the monastery chimes rang out every quarter hour, and this ringing along with the gentle lapping of the water brought the boy peace and sadness.

Then, abruptly, he got up and jumped into the water. He swam, rolled, dove, and yelled for joy. Afterwards, wild with hunger, without even getting dressed, he sat down to his gruel. It had thickened and was slowly bubbling. With a sharpened stick he impulsively hunted the potatoes and pieces of bacon and swallowed them without chewing. Then, having no spoon, he greedily dipped pieces of bread into the thick mass of buckwheat and shoveled them into his mouth. In a moment the pot was empty and its sides were polished clean, down to the last grain. And the diner himself lay nearby on his jacket, covered with his shirt. The heat was weighing down his eyelashes. He fell asleep before he could even have a smoke.

He awoke just as easily. Over his head the color of the sky was slowly changing, and a shiver that seemed to come out of the river ran across his body. He was now lying in the shadow of a hill behind which the sun had passed. The chill had awakened him. He got up, rubbed his eyes, and mechanically began to dress. This pointless sleeping had left behind a muddiness in the mind and a weariness of the muscles.

Later the boy sat down on the riverbank in the sun, which had long passed noon. Here, in the clear silence of the last days of summer, he was overcome with a painful feeling of solitude. He did not know its source or exact name, but every one of his thoughts dragged behind it a sticky weight and eventually broke off, empty and defeated. This was his first experience of such inescapable helplessness, and it breathed into his soul a dark premonition of death. His eyes stretched across the water to that place where

he had grown, struggled, and desired. The wind-swept, deserted, sandy riverbanks that stretched before him reminded him of the peacefulness of the village and added to his sorrow. On the other side of the hill he could sense the city and himself as one of the countless unnoticed bodies amidst the stone and the orderliness. On the doorstep of what he desired, he saw himself as an outcast who had abandoned the springtime and fields of blooming flowers of his native land.

Immediately he thought of Nadika. The memory of her that was hiding within him seemed to suddenly blossom in the passionate longings of his loneliness. She had been hiding from him, coquettishly, but now she emerged from that concealment, fragrant and cheerful. The erstwhile touch of her hand sent a living fire through his veins. He recalled their meeting on the steamboat, and the words she had spoken, seeking in them the assurance he yearned for. Her every glance and smile was now illuminating his soul, clearing there the twisted paths of love.

“Oh, you’ll get a stipend. You’re so knowledgeable!”

Yes, indeed! He was gifted and strong. He knew how to persevere. Where obstacles could not be pushed aside with a good push of the shoulders, he would wear them away with patience. Days, months, even years! Let her but lean toward him—together they would enter the gates of the city as conquerors!

“Nadika,” he whispered.

Her name itself meant hope, and he repeated it as a symbol of his impending victory.

The boy returned home quickly, captivated by a single thought—his sudden girlfriend. She had erased all of his troubles, like a true enchantress, by becoming herself the most important objective that had to be attained. The desire to meet with her was so compelling that he determined to visit her right away.

At home, while he was straightening his field jacket and polishing his shoes with the spit-softened sack, hesitation began to engulf him. It was true that Nadika had been very sweet to him on the steamboat and had invited him to come visit. But she had also been very happy—didn’t that mean she already had a boyfriend? But he quickly corrected this frightening thought. After all, Nadika was in this city, as he was, for the first time. Maybe she had met someone and fallen in love in the two days since they had arrived? That love could spring up suddenly he knew from his own experience. Perhaps she had even seen something in him, but now what could he, a homeless wretch, use to strengthen her feelings for him? So he’ll go visit her as a pitiful villager in the midst of the boisterous city. And what will he say? What can he bring? He wants to lean on her but women themselves seek someone to lean on.

Stepan weighed his options at length, sitting on a bench, and decided to visit her only after he had passed the exam. He would come to his beloved as a student, not as a village bumpkin. He would say, “Here’s what I have

accomplished and what I am worth.” This settled him down, but he could no longer sit at home, so he decided to visit Levko.

Fortunately, he found Levko at home. The first thing that struck Stepan was the absolute orderliness in the student’s humble quarters. The furnishings were far from ostentatious: a small painted chest, a simple table, a folding bed, two chairs, and homemade shelves on the wall. But the table was covered with clean gray paper, the books on it were arranged in neat piles, the trunk was topped with a red-and-black checked tablecloth, the window was adorned with an embroidered curtain, and the bedding was neatly folded away. Up above hung the largest and most important decoration and the inhabitant’s prize possession—a shotgun and leather cartridge case. The evenly hung line of portraits on the wall—Shevchenko, Franko, Lenin—each draped with an embroidered cloth, projected an atmosphere of quiet, deliberate contemplation. Envy and consternation overcame the boy as he entered this tidy apartment.

The inhabitant himself was in an undershirt, working over a book at the table, but he welcomed his guest sincerely, sat him down on one of the chairs and began to inquire how he had managed to set up his own affairs. Stepan could not subdue his shame. He replied, briefly, that he had set himself up well, that he was living in a room that was free during the summer, where the family expected to settle a distant relative in the fall. He had nothing to complain about, for the moment. He expected to earn a fellowship soon and would move into an apartment, likely in the building of the Committee for the Improvement of Student Housing (KUBUch), as soon as he was registered as a student. The entrance exam was tomorrow, and he wasn’t at all worried about it. Besides, he could count on some recognition for his participation in revolutionary activity.

“And what about you? You have a nice place?” asked Stepan hesitantly, full of respect for Levko.

Levko smiled. This apartment was paid for in suffering. When he was assigned to these quarters a year and a half ago, the owners had greeted him as if he were a wild animal. They refused to give him water, and they locked the washroom. They were an elderly couple, both former teachers. The husband used to teach Latin in high school, but since Latin was now cut from the curriculum he worked in the archives for three chervinets. Later, they had slowly got to know each other. Now they were friends. They drank tea together, and if he really needed to cook something, they let him. They were nice people, but very old-fashioned.

“You’ll see for yourself in a minute,” he said. “We’ll all have tea together.”

Stepan started excusing himself—he wasn’t hungry! But the student didn’t listen to him, slowly put on his shirt and, without even tying his belt, sailed out of the room.

“Well, here’s the tea! Let’s go,” he announced, happily.

He dragged the embarrassed Stepan by the hand, with the latter only pretending to resist, since he truly wanted to meet people from the city and to get acquainted with them. Levko could not substitute for the real thing, since he too, like Stepan, would return to the village eventually after spending some time in the city, perhaps not accidentally but still only temporarily. Flustered, but with a firm resolve to observe and listen more than to speak, the boy entered the room of a real urban person—and a former high school teacher at that!

The room presented a strange collection of the most diverse things, which seemed to have come from various other rooms, huddled here in terror, and become petrified. Since there was absolutely not enough room for all of them, they stood in an odd crowd along the walls or simply in the middle of the floor. The edge of a wide double bed peeked out from under a short screen. Its head abutted a bookcase, in which faded brown cardboard covered the panels where glass had once been. A large wooden sideboard with high relief carving stood next to the bookcase and prevented its doors from opening properly. The top of the sideboard leaned against the wall, without which it would lose its balance. Farther along the wall, under the window, were shelves full of sheet music, although there was no piano in the house. At an angle to the window, which was partially obscured by its edge, stood a tall, mirrored wardrobe—the only thing that retained its original, clean appearance. Symmetrically across from the bed stood a tall, worn Turkish divan. On its wide back, topped with a long wooden surface, a gramophone, surrounded on both sides by even piles of records, raised its lonely horn toward the ceiling.

In a corner just by the door stood a small black stove, a “bourgeois,” whose function was to heat the room in the winter while in the summer it was only used to cook meals. A wide chimney-pipe, attached to the ceiling, stretched directly from the stove to the middle of the room, then turned and wound its way to the wall, where it disappeared above the bookcase. The room was big, but diminished by all the objects it contained, leaving hardly any space in the middle for a small card table, which served as the dining table and seemed lilliputian next to its colossal neighbors. The tea was laid out on it in a sooty blue teapot, with four cups, a bowl of sugar, and a few slices of bread on a plate.

Levko introduced the owners. Andriy Venedovych was a lively old man whose face was overgrown with gray hair. His hands and gracious bow betrayed a certain pomp and self-respect. His wife, however, was missing a few teeth, so Stepan could not make out her words of welcome. This hunchbacked woman with a dry-skinned face and trembling hands invited everyone to sit down in her incomprehensible gurgle and began carefully to serve the tea.

Andriy Venedovych praised Stepan for his intention to study, but criticized the current educational programs and the fact that the old,

experienced teachers had been dismissed. Suddenly he asked the boy:

“Do you know Latin?”

Stepan felt uncomfortable as the object of the owner’s undivided attention and blushed. He honestly admitted that he knew a Latin language had once existed but had never studied it, since it was no longer needed. These last words jarred Andriy Venedovych. Latin not needed?! Well, this young student had better know that only the classics will rescue the world from its current obscurantism, as they had earlier rescued it from religious blinkers. Only by returning to the classics could humanity revive its clear perception, full nature, and creative drive.

The former teacher’s voice rose and resounded with passion. With ever greater enthusiasm Andriy Venedovych inundated Stepan with names and aphorisms whose meaning and importance were completely lost on the boy. He spoke of the Golden Age of Augustus, the genius of Rome that had conquered the world and still shone in today’s darkness with a bright beacon of salvation. He spoke of Christianity, which had betrayed and devoured Rome but was in turn conquered by it during the Renaissance. And he spoke about his beloved Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Nero’s tutor, the incomparable philosopher hounded by challenges and intrigues, who, when sentenced to die, met death by his own hand, cutting his veins, as befit a sage. He spoke about Seneca’s tragedies, the only Roman tragedies that have survived; of his Dialogues, among which he could recite *De providentia* by heart. And they dare to ascribe to this Seneca, who combined stoicism and Epicureanism in a higher synthesis, to this genius of Roman genius, a relationship with the apostle Paul, a shallow follower of that religion of the prisons that toppled Rome!

It was getting dark in the room, and in the dusk the Latin instructor’s voice resounded like a prophet’s. He addressed Stepan time and again, and the boy was taken aback despite himself. But noticing that Levko was peacefully sipping his tea, he found the courage to drink his own cup in spite of the owner’s prophetic voice. The lady of the house sat unnoticed, her narrow shoulders nearly disappearing behind the stout teapot.

“I may be old but I’m energetic,” announced the old man. “I’m not scared of death. Because my spirit has classical clarity and tranquility.”

Back in Levko’s room, Stepan said:

“The old man is overwhelming.”

“He’s a bit psychotic, with his Latin language,” answered Levko, “but he’s a good-hearted person. And he’s helpful. He’s smart. He knows everything.”

On his way out, Stepan asked:

“And what about this Latin? Is it really useless?”

“Completely,” laughed Levko. “Why do you think it’s called a dead language?”

He led his visitor out to the stairs and encouraged him to stop by again, even just to say hello.

IV

Walking down Lenin Street to Khreshchatyk, Stepan had much on his mind. The visit to Levko's had strengthened him. He told himself that Levko's path was his path too, and involuntarily he felt a touch of jealousy regarding his friend. He couldn't imagine anything better than such a handsome little room. Levko will work quietly and steadily there. He'll pass all the necessary exams, earn his certificate, and return to the village a new and cultured person, and with his return he would bring new life to his village. Stepan, too, must follow this course. He now clearly felt the weight of his responsibility, a feeling he had lost for a moment when he first set foot on this foreign, urban soil. The memory of the send-off he was given back in the district wafted over him like a warm breeze. How could he even for a moment have forgotten his friends, left behind with no hope of escaping the backwoods? He smiled by way of sending them a greeting.

His first acquaintance with city folk was also pleasant. First there was the skinny shopkeeper, whom he could crush with two fingers; second, the half-crazy teacher dismissed from his teaching, with his Latin and his peccadilloes. About the first Stepan did not trouble himself to think much—a simple NEP-man whose wife milks the cow in the morning and in the evening puts on her silk gown and sips tea with her friends. The shopkeeper—he's just a coward who trembles like jello over the fate of his house and store in which he has invested all his life and dreams. Stepan happily discovered for himself the cultural emptiness of the owner of the barn where he was now forced to take residence, rather than in the apartment that so far inhabited his consciousness only as a disembodied idea. What could there be in this shopkeeper's soul, besides kopecks and marinated herring? What feelings could he possess? He existed only so long as he was permitted to exist. A freak—nothing but weeds or trash that disappears without a trace or afterthought.

The teacher was more interesting. He thought about things and had a purpose in life. But that room—Stepan had to laugh remembering it. He could imagine the destiny that awaited this gentleman. No doubt the teacher had at one time been the owner of a large and comfortable apartment, but the revolution had, in one housing requisition after another, cut off room after room, chasing him and his unrequisitioned and unsold property into this cramped little corner that resembled an island after an earthquake. The revolution had also destroyed the high school where he had taught children of the bourgeoisie how to exploit the common folk and it had thrown him like a rat into the archive, where he could burrow among the old papers. He was still alive, he was still ranting, but his future is extinction. In fact, he was already dead anyway—as dead as that useless Latin language.

So there they are, these city folk! They're nothing but the dust of the past that needs to be swept out. And that was to be his goal.

With these cheerful thoughts Stepan reached Khreshchatyk and found himself in a crowd of people. He looked around and saw the city at night for the first time. He even stopped. The shining flames, the rattle and chimes of the streetcars that converged here and then ran off again, the hoarse howl of the buses whose large carcasses rolled so easily along the streets, the piercing cries of the individual automobiles and the shouts of the carriage drivers along with the dull clamor of the wave of humanity—all this suddenly shattered his concentration. On this wide street he encountered the city face-to-face. Leaning against the wall, hemmed in by the shameless surges of the crowd, the boy stood and watched, letting his eyes wander along the seemingly endless street.

He was shoved by girls in light blouses, whose thin cloth blended into the bare skin of hands and shoulders; by women in hats and veils, men in jackets; hatless boys in shirts with sleeves rolled up to their elbows; soldiers in heavy, stifling uniforms; chambermaids holding hands; sailors from the Dnipro fleet; teenagers; the raised caps of engineers, the light overcoats of dandies, and the grimy jackets of vagabonds. His eyes rested on hands that in the twilight seemed to him to be touching women's breasts, on interwoven elbows, on thighs squeezed against each other. His gaze rested on heads with hair neatly trimmed or braided in ponytails; necks straight and upright or sensuously bent down to shoulders. Before him passed couples captivated by each other; careless singles—sidewalk Hamlets; groups of boys chasing girls and throwing them the first flat words of friendship, which unexpectedly acquired provocative sharpness; businessmen returning late from the office, in no hurry to arrive at their boring homes; elegant ladies casting superior glances at the men and shrinking from an unexpected touch. His ears heard the indistinct clamor of interwoven conversations, sudden exclamations, occasional curses, and that sharp laughter that starts in one place and then rolls, it seems, from lips to lips, igniting them in sequence like signal flares. His entire soul was consumed with unbounded enmity toward this mindless, laughing stream. What else were all these heads capable of, except laughter and courting? Could there be a spark of an idea in their hearts? Could their thin blood sustain passion? Could there be a sense of purpose and duty in their consciousness?

Here they are—these urbanites! Shopkeepers, brainless teachers, ignorantly carefree dolls in fancy costumes. They should be swept away! They should be crushed, these worms, to make room for others.

In the twilight on the street, he sensed a trap. The pale glow of the streetlights, the string of shining display windows, the glare of the cinema—these were all will-o'-the-wisp in the urban swamp. They are a fatal attraction. Their illumination is blinding. Above, on the hills where the rows of buildings meet the rushing cobblestone street, in the darkness that

dissolves the sky and stone, were enormous reservoirs of poison and colonies of snails that poured out at night into this ancient Khreshchatyk valley. And if only he had the power, he would, like a sorcerer from a fairy tale, call forth thunder against this gray, heavy mud.

Stepan began to force his way disdainfully through the crowd, pushing every which way, without regard for any protests, blunted and desensitized like a believer in the midst of a witches' sabbath. Beside every cinema he was spun about in a whirlwind. Hundreds of feet were shuffling here, hundreds of torsos were bumping together, hundreds of eyes were staring. From wide vestibules decorated with bright posters and giant signs row after row poured forth, spreading out or bunching up depending on the force of the opposing streams. The shows were ending and within these establishments an exchange of substances was taking place. Paddling his way out of these treacherous streams, Stepan thought gloomily:

“Watching pretty pictures!”

He passed without stopping the sumptuous displays in the store windows, where waves of silk and muslin changed color under the lights and fell in soft waves from display stands onto the windowsill, where on glass shelves lay gold and shimmering stones, mounds of aromatic soaps amid vials of mysterious perfumes, countless packages of cigarettes with colorful labels, Turkish tobacco, and amber pipe stems. Walking past, he threw contemptuous glances—fire and ice—at these objects. The electric store stopped him, however. Behind its reflecting glass colored bulbs were flashing on and off, creating strange, lifeless flowers in the crystal of the mirrors of the display. And Stepan thought bitterly: why not take these lamps to the village, where they would bring real benefits, rather than mere amusement. Oh, the insatiable city!

He didn't recognize the bookstore at all. Could these really be those same familiar books, so dear to him, lying in this window, stretching endlessly beyond its edges in the reflecting mirrors at either end? Why were they too being paraded before the scornful gaze of the witless mob? Were theirs the eyes that would delve into the depths of these books, these repositories of important ideas, destined to set the world in motion? They had no right! This was mockery! He felt pity for these dishonored treasures, demeaned by the stares of the ignorant—a bountiful harvest trampled by a lust for amusement.

“Anything to make a sale,” he thought.

He was so deep in thought that when he set off again the clamor of the street seemed even wilder. In this noise he heard both laughter and a threat to all those who would rise up against the shops and the lights. Tomorrow this street would spill out into the offices of businesses and institutions, it would flow into all the workplaces, filling all the jobs large and small so that wherever he might come knocking, the doors would be closed.

“Damned NEP-men,” he thought.

On the corner of Sverdlov Street he was momentarily stopped by a crowd. He glanced up the incline where the streetcar was rising. There was an unexpected calm here, a sudden haven from the storm, where the crowd turned, died out, and evaporated, dispersing into individual figures. He watched the streetcar disappear into the distant gloom as it crested the hill, and in this bluish band of dusk beneath the streetlights, between the vague rows of motionless buildings, he felt the strange beauty of the city. The bold lines of the street, its crafted symmetry, the heavy perpendicularity on either side, the majestic slope of the cobblestone pavement throwing sparks from beneath falling horseshoes, revealed to him a stern and unfamiliar harmony. Still, he hated the city.

Past the greedy doors of beer-cellars, from which drunken music blared onto the street, past the archway that enticed people to the loto-hall and the crocodile head over the entrance to the casino, he walked by the Regional Executive Committee building and slowed down. In the evening, the section of Khreshchatyk between Komintern Square and Revolution Street was a desert, where only lonely prostitutes could be seen passing the time beneath the dark verandas. Behind him the valley of Khreshchatyk was abuzz. On the right came music from the Proletarian Garden. On the left, human shadows were rustling on Volodymyr Hill. Even the streetcars here seemed less intrusive.

For the first time this evening, Stepan tore his eyes away from the earth and raised them to the heavens. A curious trembling overcame him when he saw the crescent of the moon overhead amid the stars, the same moon that shone for him in the village. The tranquil moon, a rural wanderer like himself, companion of his youth, confidant of his adolescent dreams, subdued in him the anger that had been provoked by the street. The city must be conquered, not despised! A moment earlier he had been crushed, but now he was envisioning endless possibilities. Thousands like him came to the city, huddled somewhere in cellars, barns, and dormitories, and went hungry, but worked and studied, imperceptibly undermining its corrupt foundations and replacing them with unshakeable new ones. Thousands of Levkos, Stepan, and Vasyls were laying siege to these nests of NEP-men, squeezing them, and tearing them down. Fresh village blood was pouring into the city to change its substance and appearance. And he was one among these thousands, whose destiny was to conquer the city. The city-orchards and village-cities that were promised by the revolution, these wonders of the future about which books had given him only a dull impression, were for him at that moment very close and comprehensible. They were the challenge of the future, the noble goal of his education, the result of all that he had seen, done, and would accomplish. The life-giving power of the soil that coursed in his veins and his mind, the powerful winds of the steppe that had given him birth added passionate clarity to his fantasy about earth's shining future. He dissolved in this boundless dream, which captivated him immediately and completely. This

dream was his fiery sword, with which he conquered everything around him. Descending down Revolution Street to the grime of Nyzhnyi Val Street, he was ascending ever higher, to the passionate twinkling of the stars.

V

The city is a wonder. On the outside it's all hustle and bustle—life in the city, it seems, bursts forth like a mountain spring, with the energy of lightning. But inside, in the dim offices of various institutions, it drags along like an old wagon, entangled in thousands of rules and regulations. Stepan felt the blows of this urban formalism at every step, and no matter how he tried to excuse them with objective reasons, they did not become any less irritating for his efforts. Having learned from his previous experience, Stepan arrived on the appointed day for his exam two hours early, to allow time for waiting in line. Today, he was convinced, the formality of his attendance at the Institute would be settled, and he would have full rights to visit Nadika with the distinguished, although invisible, badge of a student. True, the impressions of the previous evening had, for a time, replaced the image of this beloved figure. Returning home, he had sat up for a long time, smoking and thinking about the city, its destiny and true purpose. But in the morning he awoke as always, eager and full of youthful energy, which, like a life preserver, kept him from drowning in the uncertainties that had unexpectedly engulfed him. Somewhat accustomed to his new lodgings, he boldly asked the lady of the house for a bucket and washed himself thoroughly. And then again the recollection of Nadika flooded his soul with its warm turbulence.

“The examination,” he thought happily. “That’s the primary thing!”

Having an uncontrollable inclination to analyze his own thoughts and actions, he scolded himself amicably for yesterday’s anger and vague apprehension. Dreaming was a waste of time, he lectured himself: actions were needed—ceaseless activity to overcome all obstacles, with all one’s energy focused on the next hurdle. The first of these hurdles was the Institute. He must gain admittance to the Institute and not fool around with all kinds of dreams, no matter how noble. Indeed, the examination seemed to him to be a hurdle that, once cleared, would gain him a queen and a kingdom. He prepared for it as if he were a famous warrior setting out on a campaign that would earn the victor the keys to the magic cave of treasures. And because he was inclined to conquer his enemies with one great effort, once and for all, he was unpleasantly struck by the fact that the examination would last two days—a written exam today, an oral one tomorrow. The announcement that contained all this information in a few short lines of text was entirely unconcerned with his idealistic enthusiasm, his youthful passion to solve all problems immediately. And he had to surrender to these meager lines.

Stepan sat down on a window ledge and prepared a cigarette—tobacco was a true friend and a comfort in all of his difficulties. But even this small pleasure was denied him by another small announcement on the opposite wall. He spent two hours in boredom, carelessly observing the mob of his future colleagues and thinking about himself. He sensed, although

indistinctly, a change within himself. He could not but observe a new fire starting to burn inside him, but one that was fitful, that trembled with every breath of an external wind. In the morning he had been happy, but now he was overcome with a sadness that was impossible to contain. Yet he was surely not worn out by any work, nor had any accident befallen him. And was it not but a few hours ago that he had told himself to be steadfast? These unfamiliar vacillations in his mood worried him. He was beginning to understand that the unsophisticated village existence that he had known heretofore, where all problems had been simple and overly practical, was something entirely different now that he had begun to live in the city.

Among the possible essay topics on the exam he immediately chose “The coupling of the city and the village.” After preparing a mental outline of his essay he wrote quickly and easily. He elaborated his principal arguments extensively, examining both the economic and the cultural needs of this partnership, and illuminating its goals and desirable consequences. The village cultural activist, with a firm Marxist understanding of the importance of economic pre-conditions, was reawakened in him. The assignment captivated him completely—reading over his own sentences, he forgot that he was writing an examination. “The coupling of the city and the village is a bold step toward the construction of our future orchard-cities,” he concluded, and turned in his finished exam a full hour before the scheduled deadline. Evening was falling. After wandering aimlessly along Shevchenko Boulevard, the boy decided that he should indeed visit Nadika, who was staying with some friends near the covered market.

The house she lived in was one of those ancient little homes that can be found unexpectedly on Kyiv’s side streets right next to six-story buildings. The rusty green roof, the wooden window-shutters, the old-fashioned fenced-in yard in front of the windows, and the rickety stairs to the uneven porch were evidence of a greater antiquity than that allowed by the law on stolen and lost property. But Stepan was happy to see this shack, next to which his own shed seemed less miserable—a girl who lived here could, quite properly, be his.

Nadika lived with two girlfriends from her village who had set out into the wide world a year earlier and had rented so-called “quarters” in this old-fashioned home. One of them, Hanna, or Hanusia, was enrolled in sewing courses, preparing to replenish the ranks of the army of seamstresses whose profession had fallen into such disfavor during the years of war communism and barter economy, when everybody washed and cooked for themselves and sewed nothing at all, but now, in the NEP years, needed rapid replenishment, in accordance with the growth in demand and fashion. She was a quiet girl, driven out of the village by the hardships of a large extended family—driven out forever, with no hope of returning under the tattered, thatched roof of her parents. She was sincere and defenseless, somewhat romantic and forbearing, like all poor girls who harbor within them neither real passion nor reliable

strength. Her companion, a successful farmer's young daughter, was completing, in accord with her plans, a typing course and had been searching a half year now, with no success, for a suitable position and an appropriate partner, one with some accomplishments. She dressed with pretension and extended her little finger when raising a teacup. Her name was Nusia, which is to say, Hanna as well, but to a higher degree. Of the two beds, neither of which could be called a double bed, one belonged to Nusia, who was unwilling to compromise her possession in any respect, so that Nadika always had to double up with Hanusia, who was always agreeable to everything. These two beds and a table, typewriter, sewing machine, and haggard chair were the only markers of material possessions in the girls' apartment; the other decorations had more of a spiritual character: portraits and pictures that Hanusia had naively plastered on the walls, straining to add some domesticity to the empty rooms. She had adorned the portrait of Lenin that hung in the center with a big sign in uneven letters: "You have died, but your spirit lives on." In the corner she had hung an icon of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker that was hardly noticeable at first sight. Of all the pictures, only one belonged to Nusia: a naked Galatea raising her arms and breasts to the heavens. It hung over Nusia's bed and disturbed Hanusia with its indecency.

Outside the door Stepan could already hear male voices, and his heart sank. He was not in the mood for happy people, and he wanted to speak to Nadika alone. But there was no other option, so he opened the door. The situation looked worse than he had imagined: there was a bottle on the table and the beds were pulled up around it to seat the three girls and three boys. Stepan's interest cooled, but then he noticed Levko and understood the situation. Those two were the boyfriends of Hanusia and Nusia, but Levko was just here for the company, and so Nadika was free, free for him, since she was the first to get up from the table and welcome him. He was introduced to the two friends and sat down with them. Although he had eaten nothing all day and was hungry, he categorically refused to eat or drink. To eat at the expense of these two strangers—this party was surely their treat—was something his honor did not permit. Levko was a different matter: he sat in the corner, like a father at a wedding, and wasted few words, since his mouth was busy the whole time. He just smiled and gazed at the company. The life of the party were the two other fellows, who were displaying all their wisdom and wit for their ladies.

Hanusia's suitor was one of those village fellows who appear in the city like a wandering meteor—visiting the theaters, obtaining free passes everywhere thanks to the "coupling the village and city" campaign, attending all the public debates and soirees and, applauding endlessly there, annoying girls on the street, sneering at everyone, cursing everything; and then after a year returning to the village, taking up farming and growing wild again in one month. They turn out to be family despots and political conservatives. The

trump cards of this fellow's behavior were his salacious anecdotes and suggestions, which disorganized Hanusia's dreamy soul and broke down her already weak resistance. Compared to this wit, the other fellow was the model of probity. He, too, paid little heed to education, his chief goal being to latch on to a secure job; if that could be done without a diploma, then higher education should be cut off as a useless appendage, much like the worm-like protrusion of the appendix. Nostalgic for the beautiful turbulent years when it was so easy to get ahead, he knocked on all doors with a villager's steely determination and took advantage of every fortuitous acquaintance, until at last he landed himself a position as an instructor of club work, to which he clung with hands, teeth, and both his feet. But, examining his life through the prism of the ancient village stereotype, which puts certain very specific expectations before a young man setting out on an independent path, the brave young instructor was intent on adding Miss Nusia as a partner in his future official successes.

The conversation had stopped momentarily on account of the appearance of a new personage and now resumed its course. The topic was ukrainization.

"Now take, for example," remarked the instructor, "club work. It's a serious business. The workers are already fidgety, they complain about the drought of interesting leisure activities. And then there's this language. And a drama group. And maybe a choir. And then it's, ... oh heck, a distancing from the masses. It's tough for the party with this ukrainization policy."

He put particular emphasis on "party," a word, he felt, that had a magic influence on any sentence in which it appeared.

"Will the villagers be ukrainized too?" asked Hanusia, hesitantly.

The instructor smiled politely.

"It turns out they'll need it, too. After all, what kind of a Ukrainian can a bumpkin be?"

Stepan could not endure this any more. He burst into the conversation energetically.

"You are mistaken, comrade," he said to the instructor. "Ukrainization is meant to strengthen the coupling of the village and the city. The proletariat must be ..."

But Yasha, the young villager who was on tour in the city, laughed suddenly and threw a jeering glance at Stepan and Nadika. It was his habit to delight in his own witticisms even before he uttered them.

"He-he! So you two are coupling too?"

Nadika turned red, while Stepan, offended on both his own account and on hers, turned sullenly silent. What could he say to this insolent fellow, who considered himself the master of the situation, waving his arms about, pinching his Hanusia, and winking all around? He couldn't fight him here! Hunger and antipathy to this company were leading to nausea. So this was the vanguard of village society, erstwhile conquerors of the cities? And why was

Levko so calm, as always? Was he like them too? Was it the eternal fate of the village to be the dull, hopeless slave that sells himself for employment and food, at the expense not only of his goals but of his dignity, as well? Perhaps this was the path that awaited him too, this swamp that would suck him in and digest him, transforming him into a servile supplement to the rusty system of life's usual course? He sensed that life's terrible steel springs, which had loosened on the ruts of the revolution, would now be straightened again. Perhaps life was nothing more than this unstoppable train. Could no engineer alter its course along the rails on which it was destined to travel between the familiar, gray stations? One thing was certain—hop on, no matter what or where it was going. Weren't they symbolic, those famous freight cars of the recent though half-forgotten days, where hucksters fought for room, kicking and cursing each other, climbing onto the roofs, hanging off fenders and bumpers with their treasure sacks full of crumbs, living in filth and misery but with an unquenchable desire for life, with dreams of girlfriends, pies, and moonshine? And if there was such a mass of those mongers then, what of today, when there were no longer any food blockades, tribunals, or requisitions—when they were free to make use of entire caravans for their goods and the soft upholstery of train coupes for themselves?

Plunging into these unhappy thoughts as if peering into a bottomless pit, Stepan mechanically picked up the heel of a loaf of bread and began to chew it. The village was receding from him. He was beginning to see it in a distant perspective which left only the schematic outline of a living organism. He felt afraid, like a person beneath whom the ground has just shaken.

Meanwhile, the conversation, having wandered over various topics, turned to the ones that inevitably result from the very slightest infusion of alcohol even among the most virtuous people. Women's committees, marriage, love, and alimony appeared on the lips of the guests and the room filled with Yasha's laughing:

“But I tell you, the woman will always be on the bottom!”

“Oh my God, what is he saying?” cried Hanusia, for whom Yasha's comment had the greatest relevance.

Stepan felt Nadika's worried gaze and, raising his head, looked into her eyes. She smiled at him, but in this smile was the longing that comes to a girl in love, clouding her eyes and weighing down her hands with an insuperable weariness. Her heart had already opened like a seed in loose soil, sending out its first pale shoots to the surface under the influence of the eternal sun, which melts the snow and wakens thousands of seeds from the depths, without any responsibility for the winds they may encounter in its kingdom.

Levko was dozing, bent over the table. He wasn't hungry, today he had written the next portion of the entrance exam, and he had every right to be happy. Nusia was leaning her elbow on the knee of the instructor, who had lit his pipe and was contentedly blowing smoke in front of himself. Yasha had his arm around Hanusia, who had acquiesced after a few feeble protests.

“How ‘bout a song?” he suggested. “Hanusia, you begin.”

Hanusia raised her head and started singing, dragging out the words for a more sorrowful effect:

“To Ukraine the wind will blow,
Where my sweetheart I left low ...”

In a moment the song brought everyone together. Yasha, becoming serious, offered support in a lyrical tenor that, incomprehensibly, lived in his prosaic throat.

Nature had not endowed Stepan with the musical gifts of his nation, and once again he felt himself a stranger in this company. He felt the senselessness of his position here, where he was a silent dolt who had opened his mouth only once during the whole evening, and even then unsuccessfully. But he couldn’t go, either. He wanted to say something to Nadika. She was sitting next to him, and the passionate but unfulfillable desire to touch her hand—to hear from her lips words addressed only to him—gnawed at him. She was waiting for him, he could see this in her every glance. And he was waiting for her. Nevertheless, other thoughts were continually obscuring her image, pushing her away from his dreams, although he was unaware of these involuntary betrayals.

As he left, he said to her:

“I’ll come tomorrow.”

“Do come!” she answered, and her easy familiarity filled him with a magical warmth.

“Nadika, I’ll come tomorrow,” he whispered. “Expect me, Nadika.”

He went home quickly, consumed by a feeling in which he expected to find comfort and confidence.

VI

“Good! Very good!” said the professor.

Stepan came out from the exam. A crowd of curious students waiting for their own turn surrounded him. “How was it?” “What questions did they ask?” “Is it brutal?”

He had passed the exam. Tomorrow his name, too, would appear beneath the glass where the names of the accepted were posted. For three years these walls would be his shelter. He must see about the scholarship. He must write and tell the friends back home in the village about this success. The exam had been conducted in groups of five, and Stepan had listened in amazement to the answers of the four before him. Would they really admit them to the Institute? In any case, he was head and shoulders above them. His knowledge was firm and broad, without gaps or thin ice. He proved to himself the value of his three years of tireless work in the village, without rest or vacation, when the urge to study had overcome him. The last ounces of the milled grain he had earned and all the coins he had saved had been turned over to the teacher, or for books and paper. He had forsaken everything, had become an oddball and a recluse, spending his nights by a lantern dreaming of formulae and logarithms, while his friends laughed at him behind his back. Only someone strong in spirit could have managed the work he had undertaken, and he had accomplished it because he had a clear notion of what he wanted. He wanted to pursue higher education. Fearfully and devoutly he had dreamed of the day this would happen. And now the day had come! The only thing missing was the joy that should have accompanied such a momentous event.

He cheered himself with words of all sorts, turning his mind to his serious and worthwhile goals, but he could not drown out the misgivings in his soul or fill the void that had arisen there once the exam was off the agenda. The fact that he had passed the exam with great distinction had somehow disenchanted him, instead of bringing him satisfaction. The immediate goal was attained, and beyond that there appeared before him an endless road without any milestones. Preparation for the Institute had taken three years. Now it would be three more in the Institute itself. And what then? The prosperity of the village and the happiness of the people were, after all, far too distant goals to serve as the primary aim of his energies. He was strong, but he needed a fulcrum to move the world.

Stepan exited the large building, whose exterior was being painted in bland gray and white tones more suitable for one of the former institutes for the education of aristocratic young ladies than for an institution of the economic superstructure. Looking up at the high scaffolding and the painters dangling from the roof on cables and smoking cigarettes, the young man was taken aback by the soft colors that were replacing the harsh revolutionary

paint on buildings, posters, and magazine covers. And that gray-haired professor at the exam had used the term “comrade” so freely, as if it had never been for him a symbol of violence and looting. He had digested it, pared down its rough edges, and pronounced it now without any apparent discomfort.

The young man went to Nadika’s, struggling to understand his disappointment and low spirits, although such searching seldom points to the true source of ideas and feelings. People deceive themselves more often than they tell themselves the truth owing to tiny and imperceptible—even to the person most interested—factors that cause enormously important changes in the soul, just as invisible bacteria influence the physical condition of the body.

“I’m sad,” he thought, “because I want to see Nadika. I’m suffering because I’ve fallen in love with her.”

Once again her name, which he whispered to himself, resounded as a happy echo along the dark corridors of his thoughts. She was a sun for him, its rays suddenly emerging from a gap in the clouds. Again and again he would lose her, then find her anew.

He didn’t want to come in, even though Hanusia was the only other person there, her sewing machine clattering away. So Nadika tied on a kerchief and they walked out into the gray shadows of the early evening. The girl had also passed her exam to the vocational college and cheerfully told Stepan how she had almost flunked the political fundamentals part of the exam:

“...and then he asks me—this curly-haired guy—what is the RadNarKom? Well, I know the RadNarKom and the VUTsVYK inside out, so I say it’s the Rada Narodnykh Komisariv, the Council of People’s Ministers. And who is the head of the RadNarKom, he goes on to ask me. I’m as confident as ever and shoot back immediately: Chubby! And they start falling all over themselves in laughter. Not Chubby, miss. It’s Chubar!”

Stepan chuckled.

“Nadika, isn’t it wonderful to be together!” he said.

She threw him a fiery look, one of the kind whose attraction and promise are greatest when they themselves are most innocent. Every note of her excited laughter reverberated with love. Her courses would begin in a week, and she had to travel home to get the rest of her things and some food. On hearing that he, too, had a free week, she suggested secretly:

“We’ll go together, won’t we? I’ll come out to meet you by the willows, the ones near our garden.”

“I can’t go, Nadika,” he answered gloomily. “I need to settle the details of the scholarship.”

All the joy left her voice.

“I won’t see you all that time?”

“You’ll come back, Nadika.”

He had fallen in love with her name and repeated it often. It was already dark as they, along with other couples, climbed Volodymyr hill, where in a quiet corner the statue still held its cross, now blessing the Kyivans bathing on the beach. During the day, this was where children played with balls and hoops, tired office workers relaxed, and students read their wise books in the shade. At night, this was the promised land of love for chambermaids, soldiers, youths, and all those who did not yet comprehend the benefits and comforts of love-making within four walls. Love abhors witnesses, but in a city they're everywhere, even under tree branches in a park.

They wandered up and down the winding paths in the dense twilight. The accidental touch of their bodies through thick clothing provoked shivers, and their hands eventually intertwined in a tight clasp. Their love was blooming like a late flower in the intoxicating breaths of near autumn. Somewhere nature's white gown was already being woven and the icy nails of its coffin were being forged, but here the last gust of warmth, tinged with the thick scent of decay, was melting and soldering their hearts together into one heart, throttled by the flow of a new, combined blood. Words evaporated on their lips unsaid and the wind from beyond the Dnipro touched their bodies with a passionate tickling.

They stopped by the barrier above the cliff and watched fireflies on the hillside street crawling toward each other, up and down the incline, until they unexpectedly passed each other at the point where they would have collided. Below them the great river was a dark ribbon in the valley, its outline marked with streetlights and the fires on Trukhaniv Island. Below, on the left, through a shimmering haze, flickered a carpet of lights in the Podil.

"Do you love me, Stepan?" she asked abruptly.

"Nadika, my dear," he whispered listlessly. "My dearest Nadika, I love you."

He wrapped his arm around her waist and she put her head on his shoulder, trembling from the distant moisture of the water and the warm moisture on her eyes. He softly stroked her hair, subdued by a feeling that leaves emptiness in its wake.

In the morning Stepan came out to the port and waved his cap for a long time in response to her kerchief. She took with her his greetings to the village, a few delegated tasks, and a letter to one of his friends at work. It was a long letter, with more questions than information. About himself he said only that he had written the test, was hoping for a scholarship, and was temporarily living with friends. But under the influence of the recollections that overcame him, he was acutely interested in the conditions at the Village Hall, about the series of lectures that he had arranged before his departure, about attendance at the film series, and any new performances. He completely forgot that it was only a week since he had left the village. In particular, he asked about the work of his successor. The library, his own child, so to speak, which he had built from the remains of the collections of a number of rich landowners,

consisted of 2,178 volumes that he had personally cataloged, numbered, and shelved according to their subject. It was the largest rural library in the district, and every single volume carried the stamp of his diligent work.

“Remind them to make sure they pick up the Lenin display from the district office,” he wrote. “I paid 7 karbovanets, we owe 2 and a half more. The emblems and banners that the girls embroidered are stored in the big wardrobe—I left the keys with Petro. Ask the girls to weave red and black ribbons together as a decoration—at the Institute here the portrait is draped with ribbons like that, and it looks very nice. I haven’t made any friends here yet. I met two fellows from some village—they’re so distracted and apathetic, it makes you sad. It will be tough to get enough to eat, but I’ll manage somehow. Write to me about everything. I might be able to come for Christmas. Stepan.”

When the steamboat disappeared from view, the boy sat down on a bench and rolled a cigarette. The dock had emptied of all visitors. The boys who sold sunflower seeds and seltzer were arguing among themselves for no reason. One of them asked him for a light and said:

“Your damsel has left. It’s tough without a damsel.”

Stepan smiled at the words and serious expression of this expert. He too could leave tomorrow, if he wished. It would even be the wise thing to do, instead of loitering half-starved on the streets of the city. Classes probably wouldn’t start for at least a week, anyway. But something was holding him back, some kind of anticipation and a hidden unwillingness to go back home, even for just a few days. His letter was sincere only in appearance. It seemed to him that a whole eternity had passed from the time he had left the village. His expression of such detailed interest in matters over there in his letter was merely an attempt at deluding himself—convincing himself that the past still held significance for him, that he was living in it and for it.

At one o’clock he found his name, as expected, in the list of those who were accepted. He submitted a scholarship application to the SocZabez Student Support committee and stopped by Levko’s place to borrow some books, because there was a whole week of free time ahead. But Levko’s library was too limited and eclectic: aside from some agricultural textbooks he had all the issues of *Literaturno-Naukovyi Visnyk* for 1907, Ivan Nechui-Levytsky’s *Khmary*, and the Collected Works of Fonvizin. Stepan tied all of these together with some string, adding a textbook on agricultural economics that just might prove useful at the Institute. In addition, Levko advised him to do what he himself had never gotten around to: see the city. Pulling an old map of Kyiv from a drawer, he passed it on to the boy as a guiding star.

This advice intrigued the boy. After some bread and bacon for breakfast, he would grab an issue of the *Visnyk* and set out for the whole day, systematically visiting all the places that were marked with symbols and accompanying explanations on the map. In the space of three days, he visited

the Lavra, descending into both the far and the near caves, where in the narrow and very low-ceilinged stone passageways there was a string of glass-enclosed coffins of the saints, and where the pilgrim's candles flickered and smoldered in the heavy dense air; he stopped by at Askold's grave, now a neglected cemetery where he read on the markers the names of people who had once lived but had left behind nothing of themselves except these names on a plaque; he wandered the winding alleys of the former Tsar's Garden and sat with a book above the cliff overlooking the Dnipro; he stopped by the Sophia and Volodymyr Cathedrals, centers of church activity imperceptibly churning beneath the lofty domes; he viewed the Golden Gates, the former entrance into great Kyiv. He took in all the large bazaars—the Zhytnyi, Ievreiskyi, and Basarabka. He meandered near the train station; he traveled the Brest-Litovsk highway to the Polytechnic Institute. He wandered through Demiyivka into the Holosiyiv Forest, rested at the Botanical Gardens, and spent thirty kopecks (not without some hesitation) to enter the Historical Museum and the Khanenko Museum, where he was enthralled by the historical weapons, ancient furniture, decorative panels, and colored china, which most attracted his eye. The shiny colors and fine designs enchanted him and attracted his hands. He stood in front of the display for a long time, noting every small detail, firmly inscribing each one in his memory. Everything new that he saw fit easily into his mind in ordered layers, tied by thousands of threads to what he had read and to what he could surmise. And everything new elicited a new desire. Of the monuments he had circled on the old map, for the most part only the pedestals remained. Actually, he had seen the figures of Iskra and Kochubei—they lay with broken limbs along the riverbank, beside a forge. Only Bohdan, untouched, sitting on his proudly prancing horse, pointed his mace northward, either as a threat or with the intention of lowering it.

Stepan gave his most diligent attention to the Podil, the area of the city where he himself lived. His own eyes confirmed that it wasn't only people whose passing is marked with stone markers: entire eras of history pass almost without a trace, leaving here and there only indistinct suggestions of their former glory. The shining hub of the middle ages, with the Academy and famous monasteries, was now transformed into a small market square, the haunt of tradesmen and foul-mouthed huckstresses, the center of domestic manufacture for soap, cartridges, leather, vinegar, and shoe black.

In the evening, returning from his excursions, Stepan would descend directly to the Dnipro in a remote spot, bathe and then wearily make his way home. After his evening ration of bacon, which had become his only sustenance, he would sit outside by the shed and have a smoke. The Hnidy home seemed dead. If there were any life in it, it was imperceptible from outside. Not a sound emanated from it and its door opened most unwillingly. At night the lights inside would silently turn on. In all this time Stepan had only once caught a glimpse of the owner coming home from his shop. His

wife still milked the cows twice a day but no longer offered any milk to Stepan. But every evening the same solitary young man who had offered him a cigarette on the first day came out on the porch for a smoke. He sat and smoked, then disappeared into the house again. Stepan felt a reflexive sympathy for him, since the young man seemed just as lonely as he himself was. But he didn't find the courage to walk up and speak to him. Stepan went to sleep early, since he didn't have any light, and slept late, compensating for his meager diet with rest. He put off any thoughts of searching for new quarters for the winter until his scholarship came through. But the question came up abruptly and unexpectedly on its own.

One evening, the skinny-legged shopkeeper himself walked over and greeted Stepan, sitting down beside him on a stump of firewood. Looking sideways through his glasses he asked the boy:

“Did you find yourself a place?”

Stepan had fully anticipated this unpleasant conversation and had a ready answer—he would move out in a week. He'd get his scholarship (that was certain!) and then he'd move out. The shopkeeper grunted. He had a proposal: Stepan could stay with them. He could sleep in the kitchen (there's a bed there) and get breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In exchange he would look after the cows, bring in the water (the faucet was outside), and in the winter he would be responsible for the firewood. Nothing more! On these terms, the shopkeeper was willing officially to declare Stepan his nephew at the housing registry. When it was Stepan's turn to answer, he thought for a minute, mostly out of self-respect: what was there to think about? He immediately calculated that he would have food and a warm room, while the scholarship would be left over for clothing and textbooks. The work wasn't hard—something better was hard to imagine. The boy answered slowly and seriously:

“Well then, I'll stay.”

Hnidy got up. “Well, you may as well move in,” he said.

Within a half hour Stepan had abandoned his shed and settled into the kitchen, where a small bed stood next to the stove, a cheap wooden clock clattering above it. The shopkeeper's wife, Tamara Vasylivna, handed him a gas lantern, a glass of milk, some bread, and a piece of roast meat, with which he celebrated his new quarters. After the workbench in the shed, the mattress felt like the tsar's own featherbed. The next morning he began his service as dairyman, water-carrier, and wood-chopper.

VII

On Sunday, when Nadika was due to return, Stepan made a general appraisal of his clothes. He sewed on a few uncertain buttons, using the needle he had made a habit of carrying around during his years of living alone; he shook out his field jacket, and polished his boots with a sack. He had been wearing his suit for three years now and the fabric had discolored in the sun; but this was sturdy stuff meant for an officer and would not wear through for at least three more years. Then he shaved very conscientiously before a small fuzzy mirror that hung in the kitchen—in the previous week he had developed quite a beard. Feeling fresh, youthful, and handsome after these preparations, the boy left the house with a spring in his step, heading in the direction of the covered market.

Two days in his new quarters had calmed and strengthened him. Like a treasure trove discovered after bland and crusty fasting, the warm meals freshened his insides and his thinking. Yesterday, taking advantage of some hot water left in the pot, he had done his laundry, dried it in the sun, and ironed it. He knew how to do laundry, how to iron, cook, and even mend boots. Reassured by the security of his new position, he took two of his now superfluous dry pancakes to the bazaar in the morning and sold them for 10 kopecks. He didn't like to let anything useful go to waste. He could not be accused in any manner of disorder or dissipation, and the hryvnia he spent to buy twenty cigarettes was an indulgence that even the poorest of beggars would have allowed himself on the day that his much anticipated and much desired sweetheart was due to return.

By Stepan's calculation, the work around Mr. Hnidy's home amounted to no more than an hour and a half or two hours per day. There was plenty of time left for the Institute and for studying. Add the scholarship, and for now he had a solid foundation for further endeavors. He accepted this change for the better in his circumstances as something appropriate: he had been expecting it without knowing where it would come from, since, despite his doubts and hesitation, he was confident of his good fortune. Like a young hunter in the forest, trembling before the wild beast but confident of his steady hand, he was ready to meet the success that fate held out for him, even if occasionally that fate stuck out its tongue.

Nadika had indeed returned, but the girls' apartment had the usual guests—the instructor and young Yasha—so there was no opportunity to speak with her, if he did not want to betray his feelings in front of these sneering skeptics. Stepan dejectedly lit a cigarette, but in giving him a letter of reply from his village friend, Nadika gave Stepan such a heartfelt look that he immediately cheered up and drifted into a soft warm languor. Putting the letter in his pocket, he thought:

“Dear Nadika! My beloved, my only Nadia!”

Yasha, who kept up on all the announcements and posters, suggested they go to a literary performance that was taking place that day in the auditorium of the National Library and was sponsored by the Cultural Committee of the local chapter of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Yasha didn't remember which literary organization would be appearing, but assured everyone that admission was free and that there would be plenty of opportunity for cheers and good laughs.

"They're pretty nutty," he said, "some of them even have some hair on their upper lip already."

Nadika tried to claim fatigue in order to stay behind with Stepan, but Yasha cut her short:

"Kissing gets boring faster than you think."

Everyone set off for the literary performance.

They arrived an hour later than the announced starting time, but they still had to wait for a half hour. The delay was not an expression of the public's distaste for literature, but rather of the general state of affairs, one of the consequences of a deep distrust of civic life. Scattered and hounded into his burrow, the inhabitant is quite unwilling to crawl out, so when he is told to come at one, he comes at two, having licked his paws for another hour.

The wretched Yasha planted his own person directly between Stepan and Nadika, cutting off their path for interaction and leaving the boy no option but to look around at the audience and the auditorium. The seats in the National Library auditorium were divided into two categories according to the class principle: in front were the seats for the selected few, in back were benches for the common folk, mostly students. Behind the benches there was enough empty floor space to allow standing room for those who could not find room even on the benches. The feeble voices of authors, who, for the most part, have no skills in reading or speaking in public, reach the ears of listeners back here as completely indistinct mumbling, and the standing audience must find its amusement in the mere appearance of the literary performance, the figure of the author who is reading, and his friends, who sit at the table on the dais smoking, writing notes to one another, yawning, and making inspired facial expressions. This back gallery gives the greatest applause not to those prose writers who spread out their manuscripts on the lectern and read at great length, but offers it instead to the poets who walk out onto the center of the dais and recite from memory with great feeling and gestures, because these are more dramatic and they change frequently. The first two rows of seats were reserved for the most select: the critics and authors, the literary leaders and pleaders, who come with their wives and friends and cannot sit farther than the second row to avoid disgracing the dignity of literature itself, because an idea can only be honored in the person who represents it. And some of them actually sat in the front rows because they were these representatives, while others considered themselves to be such representatives because they were sitting in the front rows.

Among this literary beau-monde Stepan noticed the young fellow who had mentioned a bag full of poems when Stepan had visited the State Publishing House of Ukraine. Although this recollection was indeed quite painful, he asked Yasha who the young man was.

“Oh, that’s Vyhorsky,” he answered. “A poet, of sorts. He writes poems.”

This was the first literary performance of the current season, so there were many spectators and admission to the auditorium was not nearly as free as the poster had indicated. The tradition of public literary readings had developed in those years when there wasn’t even enough paper for cigarettes and writers were given the task of “going out into the streets.” Literature had been forced to become a spectacle and the writer a public performer, but this tradition is now dying out and we can breathe a fond “Amen” over its casket. Literature, after all, is a book, not a recitation, and performing it in public is as strange as reading musical works without a piano.

When the authors had taken their appropriate seats around the table on the dais, the head of the Cultural Committee of the local chapter of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences opened (or unveiled) the performance with a few moving words about literature and its current goals, expressing an appropriately hopeful sentiment. But Stepan didn’t hear what was being spoken. Unrelated thoughts were increasingly occupying him, replacing the works and the audience in his perception. He was thinking about the authors themselves, about their walking out in front of other people, who listened to them. They had pushed themselves out of the crowd, taken their appropriate place, and everyone knew them by name. They write books, these books are printed, sold, and cataloged in libraries. Back in his distant Village Hall he himself had marked with the library stamp a book by this Vyhorsky whom he saw here. Here was the author himself. Stepan was jealous of these authors and he did not hide this from himself, because he too wanted to push himself forward and become one of the selected. He was almost insulted by the laughter and applause given to these happy few, and each new author that appeared by the lectern posed the same painful question for him: Why wasn’t this him? He wanted to be each of them, whether novelist or poet.

The presentation of works at a literary performance is only a warm-up for the main event—the discussion and evaluation. The audience likes these discussions, but not because they participate. The discussion is a bigger spectacle than the reading, with a larger body of participants and more spice. But, as a general rule, no one wants to speak at first. Of course, the last speaker has the pleasant opportunity to belittle all his predecessors and thus seem the wisest. Specialists in literary criticism, who maintain their reputation by never being satisfied with anything, proudly refuse to proclaim their esteemed opinion and must be asked over and over, like dignitaries at a public dinner. All in all, everyone prefers to laugh at everyone else rather than offer others grounds for laughter, but once someone has spoken, the stream of

speakers grows like an avalanche. Wisdom is contagious.

At the first performance, quite naturally, everyone wanted to make himself known, and so the innocent lectern became a scene of fierce verbal warfare, where all possible tools for convincing one's opponent were manifested: mockery, wit, torment, inventories of an author's ancestors with the aim of revealing among them a kulak or a bourgeois, citations from the author's previous works where a contradictory idea was expressed, and so on—matters interesting to the spectators but sad for literature. All the speakers, regardless of their convictions, adopted these beautiful and chaste methods, each justifying himself by observing that his opponents forced them to do so. After a half hour, a veritable knightly joust began on the dais, where Don Quixotes in armor forged of quotations or with bare hands battled against immortal windmills to the howls and applause of the satisfied spectators, while Sancho Panzas displayed their intellectual prowess, cultivating dreams of becoming governors of literary islands. These contests always ended in a draw, which allowed everyone to consider himself the lone victor.

At the beginning of the discussion, Stepan, wilting from internal trepidation, contemplated what *he* could write, *what* he could write about, and *how* he could write it. He examined all the events of his life that might be of interest to others, and joyfully latched onto some while hopelessly abandoning others, sensing their banality. But he had taken the first step and had immediately shown the essential skill of a writer: the ability to separate oneself into layers, to examine oneself through a microscope, categorize oneself according to possible themes, to treat one's own "I" as material. But the boy was hopelessly confused by his own self, at times feeling his own emptiness, and at other times, an excess of sensations that he could not bring under control.

Anguished, he raised his head and glanced at the current speaker, whom the audience was giving more attention than previous speakers, and he too began to listen. This one was speaking melodiously and with wit, placing emphasis on appropriate words, underlining sentences as if he were mounting them in shining frames. To the extent that he was able, he threw out a pithy word to the audience, evoked laughter, adjusted his pince-nez, and set off on a new inspiration. From his lips poured quotations in all languages, literary facts, demi-facts, and anecdotes. His facial expression evoked the anger of an insulted deity, the misery of a scorned dwarf, his torso curved and straightened in harmony with his authorial gestures. His words formed into lumps of malicious dough, which he rolled into leaf-shaped dumplings, sprinkled with baker's sugar and glazing, embellished with marmalade roses, and then he paused for a moment to admire his own creation before serving up these delicacies for consumption.

"Who's that," Stepan asked Yasha, impressed with the confectionary art.

Yasha was amazed at the limitless depth of Stepan's ignorance. This was Mykhailo Svitozarov, the most renowned of critics. For the first time that evening, Stepan joined the rest of the audience in a storm of applause that drowned out the words of the eminent critic.

At twelve midnight, the head of the Cultural Committee of the local chapter of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences closed (and covered up) the performance, saying a few moving words to the effect that somehow things would work themselves out, that there wasn't really any fatal crisis, and three cheers for literature. The performance ended and the field of battle was cleared without the help of first-aid battalions, since literary corpses do not lose their peripatetic functions.

"They sure did go at each other," exclaimed Yasha on the street. "I love to watch. This one gives the other one a whack and that one gives the first a double whack."

"Their writing is inferior, that's the issue," said the instructor solemnly. "I'm reading Zagoskin at the moment. Now there's a writer!"

"And I like Benois," said Nusia.

Hanusia was silent. Literature had robbed her of four hours, and tomorrow morning she must rise at dawn to complete an order.

Nadika walked behind with Stepan, telling him the news from the village. He was sullenly silent. By the porch she whispered to him, "Come tomorrow."

Stepan walked home enraptured by a single thought, having surrendered to it completely, down to the very last cell of his brain. The desire that had arisen and had now taken hold of him dominated him completely, consumed all his energies for its own purpose, blocked out the rest of the world, making him like the woodcock that hears only its own song. The youthful spring of his consciousness, which heretofore had fluttered only weakly, acquired tension and began to expand, giving motion to hundreds of gears and levers. Yes, Stepan must become a writer! He saw nothing frightening or unusual in this intention. Within a couple of hours it was completely familiar, as if he had nurtured it for years, and in his nervous apprehension he saw a sign of his talent, a display of his inspiration for creative work.

He had already chosen a topic: he would write a story about his old jagged razor that nicked him mercilessly every time he shaved. Here was its extraordinary story.

Back in 1919 he had hidden in the forests with a rifle during the uprising against the Denikin forces. They were a small platoon, maybe twenty men, making their way to the main rebel camp near Cherkasy. That night they had been surrounded, but unsuccessfully—the entire platoon had managed to slip out, escaping one by one to nearby villages, to wait for a more opportune time. Having hidden his rifle in a recognizable haystack on a field, Stepan had wandered the road a free citizen, but he was captured and delivered for interrogation. He insisted so patiently and naively to the gentleman officer

that he was just an innocent young man from that village over there that the officer let doubt creep in and gave orders to a Circassian to escort Stepan to the village. There he was to determine whether Stepan really lived in the village and why he was wandering in the field—and should the story prove false, to execute him before the assembled villagers to spread fear and serve as a lesson for all.

Yelling frightening threats, the scruffy, black-haired soldier in a fur hat mounted his horse, lassoed Stepan for security and led him in front, promising to shoot him like a rabid dog at the first attempt to escape. After a mile Stepan, swearing by his parents and all that is sacred that he was a peaceful villager, as a sign of his good character offered his captor the razor that he always carried in his boot leg. The severe Circassian became persuaded of Stepan's innocence, whipped him across the back and told him to run off as fast and as far as his feet could carry him. But Stepan knew their merry tricks too well and stood in place until the Caucasian had ridden off so far that he could no longer put a bullet in Stepan's back. The strangest thing, however, came a week later, when the rebels finally regrouped and successfully gave battle to the Denikinites. Stepan noticed the Circassian's corpse on the battlefield and pulled his own razor from the dead man's pocket. This adventure was intriguing in its own right, but Stepan deepened it and gave it a nearly symbolic significance.

In his story, the razor first belonged to a front-line officer, the embodiment of the Tsarist regime, but that officer was killed at the beginning of the revolution and the razor passed on to the victor, a supporter of the Provisional Government. From him it went to a Petliurite, who soon lost it to a red partisan, who momentarily gave it up to a Denikinite but quickly got it back, this time permanently, as its lawful owner. The fate of his razor was being elevated to the level of a History of the Civil War. It would be a symbol of the battle for authority. But this canvas needed to be embroidered with shiny threads and decorated with substance and action, so that the idea would truly come to life. Along the way home he considered various episodes and details, basing them on his military experience.

The wooden clock in the kitchen showed 12:15 when Stepan entered the house, quietly lit a lamp, grabbed some paper, and sat down at the table to write, drowning in a torrent of images and words. At 2:30 he finished, put the manuscript away without reading it, lay down, and after a few more minutes of vivid recollections sank into sleep like a stone.

VIII

After cleaning up around the cows and completing all his domestic obligations according to a definite, pre-conceived plan, Stepan read over his story and was left wholly satisfied. A wonderful story! Thoughtful and wise. And he had written it! The boy lovingly turned the pages—material evidence of his talent and a guarantee of future fame. After correcting a few blemishes, and writing out a clean copy, he considered the story's further fortune. First of all, he must sign it, attach it to himself with a unique name. He knew that some writers choose a different name, a so-called pseudonym or pseudo-name, like the monks who withdraw from the world and from themselves and all the associated particularities. This is what Oleksander Oles had done, for example, but Stepan found this path unappealing. In the first place, his surname was not one that would bring any shame—it was even very contemporary, if you like—and in the second place, what was the point of hiding? Let everyone know that Stepan Radchenko writes stories, that he is a writer, that he reads his works at the Academy and is greeted with applause. Let there be a copy of his book in the Village Hall library and may the friends he left behind there marvel and envy his achievement!

But as he was about to put down his signature, he hesitated. While his surname raised no objections, his name itself—Stepan—was troubling. It was not only too plain, but somehow tarnished and coarse. The boy thought for a long time, torn between preserving himself entirely in his signature and making it more sonorous and sparkling. He went through a whole stack of names looking for a worthy successor, then suddenly he lit upon a wonderful idea: to simply make a slight alteration in his own name, to give it the required dignity while changing only a single letter and the stress. He made his choice and signed the story, becoming not Stepan, but Stefan, thus giving himself a new christening.

The fate of every literary work is, if possible, to be published, to find its way to its reader, and to captivate him. Stefan Radchenko, the writer, held out great hopes for himself and trusted even more in his own abilities to achieve them. In his own mind, his story would surely find a place on the pages of some journal, and it would happen soon. From his experience in the Village Hall library, he knew only of the journal *Chervony shliakh*, published in Kharkiv. That's where he should send his story. But his desire to hear someone else's opinion of his story without delay convinced him that he must give it to a qualified reader this very day. But to whom? Why, Mykhailo Svitozarov, of course—the critic who had spoken so beautifully yesterday from the lectern, captivating everyone and garnering such applause. He was the one, the only one! He was very knowledgeable about literature, surely he was very sensitive to all the latest developments, particularly the ones with fresh new ideas. Surely he would want to offer his support, advice, and

guidance to a beginning writer! After all, this was his obligation and duty. For the young writer, the figure of this critic became a divinity who would most graciously accept the proffered literary offering.

Stepan resolved to visit the critic. True, he did not know his address, but his creative instinct promptly suggested that he might discover it at the address bureau. How convenient to live in a city! All the various conveniences! Having asked Tamara Vasylivna where that bureau was located, Stepan set off for it before lunch, and for one hryvnia discovered his own path to the literary heights.

After lunch, he stepped out of the gate with the sure stride of a person who has found his own place in the great jungle of the modern world. He passed one city block after another, carelessly stopping in front of store windows and posters, to show himself that he was not in a hurry. On Volodymyr Street, across from the Khmelnytsky monument, he entered a park and sat down on a bench among the children playing there, who were jumping, running, and throwing a ball. Their joy infected him. Catching the ball that happened to roll up to his feet, Stepan threw it so high—as high as the buildings themselves—that the kids yelled and cheered, all except its owner, who worried that her toy would never return from the great womb of the heavens. But the ball did fall, like a bomb from under the clouds, eliciting a new explosion of wild joy. Everyone jostled to give Stepan their own ball to see it fly into the sky. Taking three into his hands he began to toss them all together, like a circus juggler, completely enchanting his young admirers.

In their company he enjoyed a sweet moment without dark-tinged thoughts about the future or memories of the past. He felt the strange flood of existence that gives satisfaction all on its own, without recourse to hopes or plans. He felt like a bird resting in flight on outspread wings, capturing with its small eye the lush earth, a flower opening its petals in the morning, spilling its sweet scent to greet the sun.

Having said goodbye to the kids, who yelled after him as he left, he went on. Everything around him pleased his eye: the old bell tower of St. Sophia, the streetcar, and the uneven street lined with chestnut trees. By the opera he stopped to listen to some Ukrainian songs performed by two women and a blind old man, representatives of those artists who were “going out into the streets.” From there he turned onto Nestor Street, guided by his desires and the directions he was given at the address bureau. The closer he came to the precious building, the more he felt—not anxiety, but the feelings of a woman who must undress before her doctor. Hastily he prepared the words he would say:

“Excuse me, I have written a story, and I’ve come to you so that you could listen to it.”

No, better this:

“Excuse me for bothering you, but I would like to have your opinion on a story I have written.”

The building where the great critic lived was itself great, with two separate wings surrounding a courtyard. Guided by his intuition, Stepan climbed up to the fifth floor in the first building, but the last apartment there had the number fifteen, instead of the required eighteen. After making inquiries in the courtyard, Stepan entered the second building with growing anxiety. Knocking on the door with his fist, he waited, his heart pounding louder than his knock. He knocked again, frightened by his own compulsion.

“Who do you want?” asked a woman who opened the door.

“Excuse me for bothering you,” Stepan began, not recognizing his own voice. “I would like to see...” he stopped, forgetting the name. “I would like to see ... the critic.”

“The critic?” asked the surprised woman, holding her capricious housecoat across her breast with her hand.

“That is, he writes essays,” the boy explained, weakening under the burden of the cross. “Mykhailo ...”

“Do you mean Mykhailo Demydovych Svitozarov? The professor?” the woman said, relieved, and let him enter. “Yes, yes. This way, please.”

She led the boy along a dark corridor while he trembled like a young thief breaking into a home for the very first time.

“Misha, someone’s here to see you.”

The boy entered the room where the great critic sat at a table by the window, writing. The critic did not raise his head. Stepan stopped at the edge of the rug that lay on the floor and timidly cast his eyes along the large bookcases lining the wall. A pious shiver chilled his heart in this holy of holies, and he was ready to stand there for an hour, or two, even forever, absorbing the feeling of greatness and languor.

Finally, the great critic finished pouring his thoughts onto the paper and cast an inquiring glance at the boy, who felt the gaze like a frighteningly sharp point pricking his skin.

“Excuse me,” he said, bowing. “Are you comrade Svitozarov?”

Conscious of the pointlessness of such a question, he tried, to the degree it was possible, to swallow the inappropriate word ‘comrade.’

“I’m Svitozarov. How can I help you?”

“I’ve written a story here ...” the boy began, but stopped when he saw an unpleasant grimace on the critic’s face.

“I have no time,” the critic answered. “I’m very busy.” This disparaging answer stopped Stepan dead in his tracks. In the despondent chill that enveloped him, he understood only one thing: there was no desire to listen to him.

Since Stepan didn’t move, the critic deemed it necessary to repeat himself, emphasizing every syllable: “I–am–ve-ry–bu-sy!”

“Goodbye,” Stepan muttered glumly.

Walking out of the courtyard, he wandered about on unfamiliar streets, carrying in his heart the unbearable weight of helpless anger. He had never

felt so demeaned and destroyed. The proud words of that bookworm fell on him like shameful spittle. So he doesn't have time—well, let him set a time for an appointment. Even if he refuses to help, he could at least suggest where to turn for advice. And what right does he have to speak *like that*? Oh yes, he felt cut to the quick by that pompous manner, that aristocratic manner of a literary gentleman.

Walking with his head bent low, he fancied indefinite thoughts of revenge. He could crush that snail and break his ostentatious pince-nez, and drag him around on the floor, since the superiority of his own muscles was beyond doubt. And because this was the only kind of revenge he could think of, the realization of his powerlessness depressed him even more. Once again he could sense awakening within himself the peasant from the village, with a dull antipathy to everything that was above him.

Finding himself near a park, he went in and sat down on an isolated bench. After a while, he looked around and recognized his surroundings—it was Golden Gates Square, with a fence around the two piles of crumbling stone from which it took its name. Overcome by a rising flame of all-consuming hatred, he muttered gruffly and with a wry smile: “Golden Gates, indeed!”

The unexpected wound clouded all of the young man's thoughts. He could not escape the sense that he had left his home as an August Stefan but was now returning a mere bumpkin Stepan. He looked glumly at the silhouettes of passing figures and saw in each of them a secret potential enemy.

The green leaves on the trees were darkening, the splash of the fountain was growing stronger in the twilight, and a thick evening was descending from above the foliage. Suddenly, the lights turned on. In his corner the boy was long since all alone. The daytime visitors—fathers with newspapers and mothers and nannies with strollers—had melted away along with the last rays of sunlight. In their place came nocturnal moths, and those who chased them.

Stepan stood up, took up his story, and tore it to shreds.

“May you be damned,” he said.

He set off toward Nadika's, although it was all the same to him whether he saw her or not. He would have gone to her after a victory, so he decided to go after a defeat as well. She met him happily in her kerchief on the corner of her street, where she had been strolling, hoping to see him.

When she saw him she raised her head and laughed eagerly, but he greeted her coolly.

“Hello, Nadika.”

They walked over to the Tsar's Garden, and the girl laughed and cheerily described the first day of classes at the vocational college. He clenched his teeth. Classes had probably begun at his Institute as well. Well, let them begin! He immediately closed up within himself and looked out onto the world through self-imposed grates. Nadika's laugh was unbearable to

him, her cheerfulness offended him. Suddenly he felt an antipathy to the girl arising within him and the sensation was pleasant.

“And what does Semen write,” asked Nadika, not yet sensing his mood.

“He doesn’t write anything at all,” he answered. And truly he did not know, because he had not yet read the letter from his friend in the village.

Nadika looked at him, perplexed.

“Stepan, dear, you’re strange today,” she said cautiously.

He didn’t answer, and they reached the edge of the Tsar’s Garden in silence. This silence offended the girl and she stopped, holding back tears.

“If you don’t love me, I’ll go home.”

Stepan yanked her by the arm.

“I love you. Let’s go.”

He felt his power over her and wanted her to submit. All his animosity was focused on her and had she resisted he might have hit her. But she went along meekly.

When they reached the top of the hill, a blue rocket flew up from below and went out with a quiet crackle. It was a fireworks display. Pink, blue, red, and green flames whistled and streaked into the sky, describing bright arcs against the dark background, exploding and then falling back down to earth in a shower of sparks.

Stepan got out the last of his cigarettes and lit it.

“They’re all pigs,” he grumbled and spat.

Nadika was enchanted by the new experience, the play of colors and fire, and she had forgotten for a moment about her cheerless boyfriend.

“Who?” she asked in confusion.

“All of them watching over there.”

“We’re watching too,” she cautiously observed, frightened by his voice.

“You think they’re doing this for you?” Stepan asked harshly.

She sighed. He turned his back to the fireworks and walked away. Nadika silently caught up with him and glanced at his face. It was disinterested and cold in the intermittent glow of the cigarette.

In a short time they were in the thicket where the alley ended and the path along the cliffside began. The dark clusters of bushes breathed a moist gloomy calm, like that of a cellar. Stopping beside the ravine, made deeper by the darkness, they looked across to the other side where tall clusters of trees were frozen in a fearful silence. The silence everywhere concealed anticipation and desire, as before a storm, and the noise of the city below echoed like distant thunder.

The boy’s cigarette went out, and he threw it impatiently into the ravine. Then he turned to the girl, who met his gaze with joyful expectation.

“Dear Stepan,” she asked, leaning over toward him, “why are you so ... angry?”

Suddenly he took her in his arms and squeezed her breasts into his own chest with a passion sharpened by anger and humiliation. For this forceful

embrace she was willing to forgive him all his previous inattention. She took his head in her hands and wanted to pull it closer and kiss him, but he continued his motionless squeezing, weakening her with his embrace. The girl pressed her arms against his shoulders, pushing him away, but she had to pull them back, groaning in pain and constraint, suddenly realizing that he was bending her over and forcing her down, that her knees were giving out and the dark clouds of the sky were floating before her eyes. She fell outstretched to the ground, chilled by the tingling touch of air and grass on her uncovered thighs, squeezed by the dumb weight of his body, as it jerked and divided and penetrated her.

Afterward, they sat on a bench above the river, which ran silently below, a play of lights reflecting on its waves. Cutting through the clouds and leaves the white moon rose in the west, casting cold tinsel onto the waters.

The urge to smoke tormented Stepan as his fingers shredded an empty package of cigarettes.

“Why are you silent,” he asked Nadika, tossing the shredded package into the ravine.

She embraced him longingly and hid her face in his knees.

“You do love me?” she whispered.

He raised her up and pushed her off.

“I love you. Why ask?”

She then began to cry—loudly, gulping and choking as if the flood of tears she had held back had burst out in a ruinous torrent. Stepan looked around.

“Don’t cry,” he said harshly. She wailed and cried on, losing her presence and her will in the flood of tears.

“I’m telling you—stop it!” he said again, jerking her by the arm.

She stopped, but a muffled cry again burst out, enraging him.

“In that case, I’m leaving,” he said, rising. “It’s your fault,” he yelled. “You—you’re to blame!” And he left, full of longing and anger.

IX

Life is frightening in its unrelenting continuity, its unstoppable drive. It doesn't adjust for a person's greatest suffering. It ignores a person's greatest pain. A person can struggle among life's thorns, but life will continue. It will pass right by, along with its acolytes who yell for all to hear, in fear or in awe, that there can be no roses without thorns. Life is that ubiquitous scoundrel who answers the tattered beggar's pleas with a shove, a slap, or a stick and then moves on, smoking his cigarette without even turning his gold monocle in the victim's direction. On the ruins of an earthquake are barracks full of the survivors who ceremoniously threw the crushed victims into the earth, but soon the graves are overgrown with grass and the veils of sorrow fall from the faces of those who have been longing to enjoy a good laugh.

At 37 Nyzhnyi Val Street there was no sign of the glacier that had crushed the spirit of one of its inhabitants. The cows were cleaned and fed, sufficient quantities of water had been brought indoors for everyone's needs and wishes. Every indication pointed to good order, nothing signaled any changes, and a lost coin would have been more noticeable here than a boy's lost peace of mind.

The prudent shopkeeper had already begun to put in a supply of wood for the winter. For a moment, the sleepy yard of the Hnidy home awoke to the sounds of cursing delivery men and squeaking logs. Indistinct gray workers appeared, of the kind that hang around the bazaars and on corners with saws and axes, waiting for clients who will purchase their labor. A team of workers typically consists of two adults and a youth who only carries the split lumber, in keeping with the child labor protection rules. Stepan joined in helping them, assured that this would not influence their negotiated wage. All day he eagerly cut and split the logs, swinging an axe with great anger, as if the logs were his mortal enemies. He handled the logs as if they were the branches of a vine, he talked with the villagers about their work and their lives, about their needs, the level of cultural activity in their village. But when they left, he felt guilty about his hollow words and insincere interest. It wasn't the first time he had observed a change in himself, but previously he had turned his thoughts away from this change. Now he had to admit to himself honestly that he was estranged from the village. It had faded in his recollections like a lantern fades in the light of day, but it hung over him, as a rebuke, as a source of concern.

In the evening, lying on his bed, exhausted by the logs and by his thoughts, he suddenly remembered the letter from his friend in the village—he still hadn't read it. The boy retrieved it from his pocket, where it had aged like an old document. There, after commenting on the state of affairs in the village, his friend continued: "... it always seems that you've only left for a short time and that you'll return in a few days. We got used to

having you here. Work continues, more or less, but you know our guys—as long as you keep your hands on the reins, it’s all right. And now Oleksa Petrovych is being transferred to the district center. It’s strange—whatever is good around here runs away from us. I guess it makes sense, it’s only hopelessness that keeps people here. We’re tied to this place like a curse. And when someone leaves, believe me, it makes you so feel so sad, you feel like crying. Sometimes you start thinking, maybe it’s time to get married already? But that’s just another pipe dream. You say you’ll come home for Christmas. We’ll have a talk. But I think you’ll probably not come. There’s nothing here for you, no wife, no kids. Out there, at first it’s lonely, but there’s plenty of work, interesting work, and you’ll soon forget us and develop new friends. But do try to write....”

Every word of this letter hurt him by its simple, glaring truth. He could not contradict a single word. Holding the letter in his hands, he closed his eyes and whispered: “I won’t come. I’ll never come.”

He called himself a traitor. This was the behavior of a renegade who had robbed his own parents, and he expected them to curse him. But as soon as he began to berate himself, he lost sight of the object of his disgust. It disappeared under the force of an unknown power, which methodically transformed his reproaches into pointless outbursts. Why, after all, did he consider himself a traitor? Plenty of people leave the village! Cities grow at the expense of villages—that’s normal, completely normal. Furthermore, his higher education would be in economics. Once he finished that, he would obviously not be returning to a village. Living in the city was his destiny. And what had really changed in him? He was the same person he had been before. Everything was fine. He had food and shelter, in a day or two he’d get his scholarship. Where was the problem?

And then, like an indistinct pain, like nausea, like a terrible nightmare, a memory emerged—one he had passionately tried to destroy, to eradicate, and whose traces he had attempted to remove from his consciousness until it grew over in a barely noticeable scab, bleeding only occasionally—the memory of Nadika. This girl, who had only recently been so attractive to him was now a nightmare. His love had turned into a counterfeit banknote, received amid confusion and bustle and then thrown away as trash, with anger at being so deceived. She was from the village, which had now faded for him. She was a brief episode in the transition that had overtaken him, although a painful episode, a difficult one, with little justification. What about her? He gritted his teeth and whispered insolently: “If not me, then some other guy.”

He was ready to yell this from rooftops to rid himself of the gnawing pangs that would not yield to his willful commands. But he had to cross her out of his life, to crush her image within himself, to remove this constraint that bound him like a chain on a prisoner’s leg. He had glimpsed freedom through the grates on the window, and he now felt a secret hostility to anyone who was a witness to his past. In changing his plans, he was burdened by the

power his old friends held over him. He could not force himself to return the books he had borrowed from Levko, even though he had read or at least skimmed them. It would be agonizing to meet a person whom he had earlier considered an ideal worthy of emulation but had then suddenly been revealed in his emptiness. In his eyes Levko had shamefully become together with Yasha and the instructor, an essential member of the threesome that now symbolized the dullness of the village, its dumb backwardness, its vile inferiority. It sees no possibilities, or doesn't look for them, or doesn't need them. And Levko's neatly arranged room, the object of his jealousy, now seemed like a blind mole's burrow.

After a few days of solitary despair, he forced himself to visit the Institute. Yes, he had been awarded the scholarship. Instead of being happy, he felt offended. Only eighteen karbovanets! They said it would be twenty-five. He had secretly hoped for even more: there are, after all, scholarships for fifty, even for the full one hundred! Classes had started already, but he had forgotten to bring pencil and paper, so he figured it was pointless to attend on today. And he wasn't really inclined to go to class right now.

Back on the street he was overcome with an unusual concern. He made frequent stops at advertising kiosks, announcements, film posters, and shop windows, scrutinizing them with the same attention that he had once given objects at the museum, and with a certain piety and excitement. He was particularly attracted by the illustrations. A giant poster for the circus in three vivid colors—red, green, and light-blue—announced that a well-known and unusually dextrous clown and acrobat would soon be appearing, and as incontrovertible evidence of this, there was an image of him along with the circus troupe, and another separately, on the ground, and yet another high up, in the unreachable expanse of a high dome.

"This is very interesting," thought Stepan.

From an adjacent advertisement he learned that the Taras Shevchenko Theater was offering a concert series by a world-famous violinist, who gazed down at the boy with a friendly smile from the gray poster.

"Excellent!" Stepan said approvingly.

And at the State Cinema No. 1 a beautiful film with a big-name actor was playing. Examining the mysterious eastern costumes worn by actors in the still photos from the movie, he had an acute sense of just how unfashionable his own field jacket, yuft boots, and crumpled cap were. The famous actor was generously displayed in tails with a turban, in tails without a turban, in the cloak of a raj, on foot and on horseback, alone and in a duet with his sweetheart, and in a chorus of his admirers. Silently but sullenly, Stepan moved away from these photographs.

Next he stopped by a bakery window, where, in a poetic arrangement on white doilies, in delicately painted boxes, on china plates and vases, were displayed sweet and unspeakably delicious treats. His sad eyes devoured this heap of wafer and almond tortes, rum babas, glazed nuts, mounds of

chocolate, layers of colorful candies, and pastries of various form and content without knowing their names but understanding full well that they were not donuts, muffins, or cupcakes. He fingered the twenty kopecks in his only pocket but did not dare enter the store. Instead he bought himself a couple of pastries on the street from a lovely girl who had the honor to sell them but never to eat them. Taking these slippery products of the sugar industry in his hands, he impetuously gulped them down, telling himself sternly:

“Quiet! I, too, want to indulge.”

To him it was like a First Communion, which leaves in the faithful a sadness for the blood consumed and a hope for eternal life.

Before a ready-made clothing store Stepan examined the suits with an expression as if it were merely a matter of choosing which one would look best on him—in a fine material and well-tailored, of course. The price tags did not bother the handsome boy at all. They were far too distant from his financial potential—he might just as well choose the most expensive one, since he couldn’t afford even the least expensive one. He was free to imagine himself the undisputed owner of these treasures, which would make him handsomer than the movie star, more talented than the violinist, and more dextrous than the circus acrobat. He could change suits as he wished at any moment, trying on top hats and ties, with matching handkerchiefs and socks, because there is no law that prohibits making use of someone else’s property in your own imagination. And in that moment the boy understood the magical power of clothing, which had long since stopped being a means of covering the body and had acquired a wider and more noble function—to adorn and enhance it. Perhaps he would create something of genius if he were dressed right now in a high-collared English shirt, short narrow slacks, and pointed shoes. But in fact he did not create anything, because he could not rid himself for one moment of the awful realization that none of the items in the window belonged to him nor ever could. He sighed but kept standing there, submerging his gaze into the fabrics and the silks, like a diver trying to find pearls but coming up only with algae.

He was getting tired of the fruitless gawking when a woman in a batiste blouse which betrayed the edge of her camisole walked up to the window. Leaning her bare arms against the railing, she carelessly surveyed the color wheel of ties, perhaps even choosing one to make her lover an elegant, pleasing, and not overly expensive present, one that would satisfy both the heart and the wallet, since the latter expands and contracts, just like the former. This lady was perfumed with a strong Parisian fragrance, and its scent wafted around her like an illusion. It engulfed Stepan in a sweet fog, exciting him, and his nose widened, greedily inhaling the unfamiliar, fine scent, which poured through his veins like an intoxicating smoke. He smelled this woman as one smells flowers, breathed her as one breathes in the freshness of spring, the tar of a pine forest, the morning mist rising from the earth. Only the first wave was somewhat disagreeable to him, like the

unaccustomed smoke of a cigarette that soon becomes a craving. Alongside this woman he experienced the swooning dizziness that people experience at great elevations, recoiling from danger but also captivated by it. And when she had gone, he gazed after her with a brazen and reverent eye. Shuddering, he thought that this skirt could also rise, no matter how white, that he might also take possession of this fragrant body, as of all others, and immediately the thought struck him as savage and frightening. But this Kyiv woman, daubed with Paris, smoothed out the scab in him that belonged to Nadika, rendering it a pale and inconspicuous bruise.

At home he wandered in the yard, suffocating in the crazy dreams that beset him. They weren't even dreams but senseless, ridiculous hallucinations. Jumping from one in mid-stream, he latched on to another, sucked it, tasted it, and then cast it off too, with countless other and better ones to choose from. Here he was a people's commissar, driven around in an automobile, making public speeches, which thrilled him to the very marrow. He welcomed foreign delegations, conducted negotiations, introduced strange laws that changed the face of the earth, and after his death modestly unveiled a monument to himself. Then, elsewhere, he became a great writer whose every line tolled around the world like a prophetic bell, agitating people's hearts, and especially his own. Or abandoning great deeds, he would endow his face with captivating beauty, dress in the choicest suits, and conquer women's hearts in droves, breaking up marriages and running away with his lovers across every conceivable frontier, except the one of his imagination. Or he would saddle a rebel horse, break out the hidden, sawed-off rifles, and lead a band of mindless men in a siege of the city, where he would shoot his way into these shops, pile his wagons high with these suits, these delicacies and these pastries, and force a perfumed woman beneath him, like a captive. This was the image that captivated him most. Clenching his powerless fists, he whispered in anger and desire: "I would loot and pillage, and pillage some more!"

His fantasies were inexhaustible, his imagination untiring, his vanity unconquerable. He held in his hands a magic stone that trembled and burned, revealing all of the world's wonders. And that stone was he himself.

And when reason, that wearisome preacher, that desiccated sage who cannot understand desire, would fearfully begin its miserable sermon, he resembled a toy ship on the waves of a real ocean, and all of his wailing sounded like the complaints of a homeowner, trying to mend a broken water pipe by asking it to stop leaking.

That night he had a dream. He was walking through a lush garden along a straight alley, shaded by trees on whose branches elongated fruits, like bananas, hid among the leaves. Looking to one side, he saw a gazebo that he hadn't noticed before and walked into the shade of the grapevines growing around its walls. The unfamiliar woman who sat there did not even raise her head. Hesitating, he stopped at the threshold and then noticed that she was

beckoning him with her finger. Looking closer with ever greater amazement, he observed that she was wearing nothing but a nightshirt, and beneath her feet was a pond in which she would be bathing. Suddenly she fell back, face up, and a breeze lifted the rest of her covering. Savagely he threw himself on her, but no sooner had he touched her than he fell into a thick dense puddle and awoke from the pounding of his heart.

For a long time he stared into the darkness before him. According to folk wisdom, a naked woman in a dream foretells unavoidable shame.

X

The only relief Stepan had these days from his difficult trials was his contact with the Hnidys' son, Maksym—the same fellow who had treated him to a cigarette back in the penniless days of his first acquaintance with life in the city. This young man, barely older than Stepan, was easygoing by nature, dreamy and restrained, with a soft voice and a really deep and sincere smile. His expressions and manner evidenced the mature equilibrium of a person who was satisfied with his life and easily carried his destiny on his shoulders. It was precisely this tranquility that attracted Stepan to the landlord's son, whom he had at first disparagingly labeled a gentleman. In his own confusion he instinctively gravitated toward anything self-assured, and he secretly envied Maksym's good fortune.

For his part, Maksym was well disposed and attentive to the village boy. Two years earlier, he himself had finished the Institute where Stepan was just beginning. While his own recollections of his studies bordered on the painful, he endured conversations about specific programs, professors, and the various incidents of student life.

"Where do you work?" asked Stepan one day.

"At the Leatherworkers' Collective," answered Maksym. "I'm a pretty decent accountant. And that takes some inborn talent, to be sure."

"What kind of talent?"

"Attention to detail, most of all. And a kind of self-sacrifice, if you will. It's a peculiar world. That's why there are so few real accountants."

Stepan nodded. Since he had an active imagination and the skill to grasp everything immediately, as well as a propensity to take an interest in everything, he suddenly understood that noiseless world of invoices and vouchers, where life's variability fits into monotonous formulas, developed in advance, where numbers replace events and people. He sighed, unconsciously longing for the carefree tranquility of documents.

"Does it pay well?" asked the boy, after one of the frequent pauses in their conversations.

"It's in pay scale 16, with 25% benefits. It amounts to about 140 karbovanets."

Stepan could hardly hold back his amazement. For him, one hundred karbovanets seemed an amount beyond his most fervent desires, but a hundred plus forty more was a true marvel of immeasurable wealth. He asked naively: "So why aren't you getting married?"

This question made Maksym visibly uncomfortable. Hesitating a moment, he answered indistinctly: "You see, that's a complicated thing. And not at all a necessary one. You see, a fellow grows up and naturally starts thinking that it's necessary to get married. It's a tradition of sorts."

Suddenly he laughed and added: "And if you want, I can give you the

textbooks. I kept them all after I finished the Institute. Though since then they've published new ones."

But the boy was in no hurry to take advantage of this gracious offer, since he was not very interested in any books at the moment, not even the most erudite ones, except the open book of his own life, whose most recent pages he skimmed incessantly every day. Unable to find what might be called happiness, particularly one that was his alone, finding there nothing but monotonous days—whether because there really were no brighter memories, or because such memories are the unique privilege of old age, where they replace hope, or maybe because he was deliberately blurring them to crave the future all the more—he understood the past as a dull and difficult path along the ridge toward a precipice, which had brought him to the edge of a cliff in the mountains, to an abyss that he must either jump across, risking a swift fall to its base, or else return to the unhappy valley from which he had begun. Standing at the edge of the abyss, he felt the terrible determinacy of life, which leaves a person so little choice. It began to seem to him that his own path, in keeping with the general rule, had been ordained far in advance, and that the wide avenues that he seemingly chose for himself were actually narrow alleys, along which he was wandering blindly. The children's game of blind man's bluff, where a group of pranksters tease and poke an individual who is blindfolded while avoiding being caught by him, now became for him a symbol full of the deepest meaning, a representation of the essential condition of man in the world. Experience told him that he who snatches for the least and prepares for the grab with a patient, siege-like strategy will capture the most. Having fallen through thin ice on a number of occasions and gotten cold and wet in these unhappy immersions, he wanted to be careful, and so he temporarily came to a complete halt, viewing any movement as potentially dangerous.

The next evening Maksym called the boy into his room in the house and insisted on giving him the old textbooks. The homeowner's son was in an unusually excited mood, talking a great deal and laughing frequently. Giving Stepan the books along with some advice, he cheerfully added:

"See, you were surprised that I make what seems to be so much money but am not getting married. No doubt you think I'm lonely and don't know what to do with my money. But look here," he pointed at his library. "I have lots of books. I like to buy them, and read them, too. And you know, there are those who buy books but don't read them! Buy them and put them on a shelf. That's silly, don't you think? Plenty of things are silly. You're still young—I don't mean you're foolish. Not at all. But someday you'll see that reading books is far more interesting than doing the things that are described in them yourself."

He sat Stepan down in a chair by the writing table, lit a lamp that stood on it, and extinguished the electric light on the ceiling. Shadows stretched into the corners of the room. Stepan's gaze swept from the illuminated circle

on the table to the gloom beyond, which seemed to give objects and words greater significance. Maksym sat down across from him.

“Afterward,” he continued, “it never turns out the way it does in a book. You laugh, but it’s true. This, too, you’ll understand some day. I’m not saying ‘such things never happen,’ only that ‘it doesn’t happen that way.’ In a book everything is gathered together, polished, ordered, and made prettier. In the real world, things are the way they are, but in a book it’s the way it should be. And tell me, what’s more interesting? Let’s say you go to a photographer and say, ‘Take a picture of me that makes me look handsome.’ You send the picture to some friends who have not seen you in a long time and maybe never will. Now tell me, do you think it’s better if they see you in person? I’m not saying you’re some kind of ogre—it’s just an example. Would you like a cigarette?”

He held out a leather cigarette case to the boy.

“And this, too, is where the money goes: I like good tobacco. You know, in the years of war communism, everyone smoked that cheap tobacco. Not me! You won’t find cigarettes like these anywhere. Nothing but the finest tobacco, scented with opium.”

“But it’s bad for your health,” objected Stepan, lighting a cigarette.

“Everything is bad for your health! Breathing is bad for your health, because it burns up your blood. So don’t breathe, perhaps you’ll live longer. You probably think that if you avoid doing harmful things you’ll live longer. But think this way: ‘I’ll do the harmful things and maybe life will be more satisfying.’”

“Life is interesting even without opium,” said Stepan. “Here, in the city, I tell you, what’s important is having money, a job. Oh, to have some money! But opium, that’s for those who don’t have a reason to live—the empty ones, the sick.”

“Splendid! What an analytical mind you have!” Maksym replied. “Do you think a person’s strength can be measured in foot-pounds? Can you measure the fullness of life in kilograms? That’s naive! When you first mentioned marriage, that’s what I thought—you’re naive.”

“So you think everyone who gets married is naive?”

“It’s not those who are married that are naive, but those who think they need to get married. No—those who get married are not naive at all. They’re unfortunate, if you really want to know. Have you ever in your entire life seen a single happy marriage? Be honest! No? I haven’t either. What do you think of such a state of affairs? You want me to show you something?” he asked conspiratorially. “But it’s a secret.”

He retrieved a small box from the drawer and opened it. On a velvet background lay a flat golden pin with small jewels around a large ruby.

“Do you like it?” he asked, excited. “You know whom I’ll give it to? My mother. Today is her birthday. Don’t imagine we’ll have company. We don’t celebrate birthdays in our family. We live so quietly, no one ever comes

over—did you notice?”

Stepan timidly took the jewelry in his hands and examined it, holding it in his palm. The jewels sparkled, throwing sparks into the ruby, which it swallowed in a dull, bloody glow.

“It’s very nice,” he said, carefully putting the pin back into its box.

“You’d probably like to give something like that to your mother, wouldn’t you?” Maksym continued. “Well, I know you’re an orphan. If you want, I’ll tell you something more. The only reason we took you in is because you’re an orphan. We don’t like strangers, we’re used to being on our own. We wouldn’t have taken you in for anything. But when I read in that letter that you had no parents, I spoke up right away and said we should take you in. Anyone who doesn’t have a mother deserves help.”

“Thank you,” mumbled the boy, experiencing warmth, shame, and a bitter pain at the revelation of this charity.

“Now I’m offended. I’m sorry I told you about this. But I really was thinking about you. And I suggested turning over the household chores to you. Surely that’s better than hanging around a dormitory, and Mother also benefits from the help. But don’t go expressing your gratitude. Just forget about it—forget all about it.”

Then Maksym showed him a few of the treasures of his book collection: wonderful editions from the Petrine era, Ukrainian publications with engravings from the first half of the nineteenth century, and an enormous collection of postage stamps in five thick albums—the result of tireless collecting that had begun in his childhood. He told the boy about the World Association of Philatelists, which he had been a member of for many years and through which he now conducted an intensive correspondence with fellow collectors in all corners of the world, supplying them with valuable stamps from the time of the revolution.

“You know,” he said, “I would have a place to stay all over the world—Australia, Africa, the Malay Islands, if ever I traveled there. The rules of our Association require hosting any fellow-members. But I’ve never been outside of Kyiv,” he added.

From Maksym Stepan brought back to the kitchen a whole pile of textbooks on statistics, economic geography, and commercial accounting, and put them all aside for future reference. Whenever he made a new acquaintance, he promptly noted that person’s inevitable ludicrous qualities and thus lost some of his respect for him. So it was with the generous Maksym, whom he designated a strange fellow, perceiving in him a similarity to the crazy teacher he had met at Levko’s a few weeks earlier.

“People are strange!” he thought. “And what do they need? To live a simple life, but no—they’re always seeking a convolution.”

This was what he thought, despite the convolutions he himself was hopelessly seeking, since a person is absolutely incapable of living a simple life.

But what struck Stepan most was the mention of his own orphanhood, which had unexpectedly brought him such a benefit. Indeed, his mother had died, as people told him, when he was only two years old, and there were no recollections of her were saved in his memory. Thus, going through the pain and suffering of childhood, he had sought solace in dreams, gliding across steppes and forests, reaching out into the boundless distance. Later he even lost the perception that his mother had ever existed in the same way that other women exist and give birth. Now the strange, filial tenderness that resonated in Maksym's voice awoke in the boy an aching longing for the woman who would have been dearest and closest to him. If only he had a mother he would not be so lonely. With grief he recalled the fate of mothers in the village who cowered in the corners of their son's homes as mere extra mouths to feed, disdained by their grandchildren and daughters-in-law, and he imagined all the more clearly how he would have loved and honored his own. But she was lost to him forever, without a trace, and the sudden realization of this loss underscored his alienation in the world, where he lacked the most basic, first relationship, as well as the most basic hope for the future. Lying down to sleep, he somehow grew smaller, curled up like a child under the influence of his feelings. The unquenchable thirst for a mother awakened in him the sensation of her former caresses and singing over his cradle. He passionately recreated his imaginary mother, whose beautiful features suddenly transformed into the harrowing face of death.

In the morning, mostly because of the books he had brought yesterday, which admonished him by their presence, he decided it was time to stop playing the fool. Grabbing a pencil and some paper, he finally set off for the Institute. But the sights and sounds of the streets and people, particularly the loud ringing of church bells, objectively convinced him that today was Sunday. He had completely lost count of the days and the situation amused him immensely.

"What a knucklehead," he thought about himself. "Well, tomorrow I start studying."

But he miscalculated by one day, discovering through his own experience that Monday is an unusually difficult day and not a good one to begin important matters. On Sunday night an unexpected incident occurred, of the kind that leave an indelible imprint on the character of an individual; an ember that continues to glow, despite multiple layers of subsequent ash, like the flame of a lantern, marking the dramatic turning points of a person's development.

That evening Stepan resolutely sat down to read attentively the introduction to statistics, an astoundingly insightful science that unerringly calculates the likelihood of any person falling under the wheels of a streetcar, dying of cholera, or becoming a genius. But Stepan did not quite get to those instructive chapters, and when the wooden clock, the chief decoration of his quarters, indicated that the time was ten o'clock, he felt it was his right to

sleep and thus resolve all outstanding questions from the previous day.

He fell asleep, and awoke at a quiet rustling by the bed. He instantly opened his eyes and in the gray shadows of the room's only window saw a white figure, enormous in the haze of his somnolent eyes. He sat up and asked in confusion: "Who's there?"

A thief? An illusion? A nightmare?

But the figure was coming closer, and the boy didn't so much recognize as instantly guess that it was the landlady. What had happened? A fire? A sudden death? But before he could formulate a question, he felt the touch of a sizzling hand on his face, his neck, his chest. And then two hands. The halting, irregular breathing was getting closer, leaning over, and stopped on his own lips in a dry, ravenous imprint. The woman's hands slid around his waist and on his chest he could feel the touch of soft, warm, and trembling flesh. Seized with incomprehensible fear, Stepan jerked away and pressed against the wall, eager to melt into it and disappear altogether.

"What are you doing? What's with you?" he muttered, gasping. His entire body stiffened in terror. His arms froze in ossified fear. He was breathing heavily and loudly, gasping for the cool, sharp air.

She went away quietly, and Stepan, as in a dream, heard the door gently close. Life was slowly returning to his limbs, his heart was steady. He tried to move and cautiously stretched out, face up, on the bed. His legs were still trembling and blood throbbed in his temples. Slowly, as his terror subsided, he was realizing what had happened.

"What? How can this be?" the boy blathered, flexing his hands.

Along with his presence of mind came the recollection of the kiss that he had broken off, of the contact with his chest and the embrace of her naked arms. Naked! Now, belatedly, he understood! Her entire body, her excited, submissive body, was separated from his by no more than a nightshirt. And he had pushed it away, like a coward, instead of diving into it, discovering in its depths a hidden, energy-sapping warmth. What had stopped him? Sin? A sense of wrongdoing, or injustice to someone? Conscience? What did he care for this clingy rubbish, these sharp needles scattered along life's roadways, the stupid morality of superstitions? No, it was only childish fear—there was no other explanation that he could fathom.

His blood, having cooled somewhat, was now again inflamed and pulsed through his veins. His young heart was beating at a full, youthful throttle. His inventive fantasy was creating images in his imagination that would seem distasteful only to others but in the flame of one's own imagination were not subject to review by conscience. Overcome with a flaming desire for satisfaction, he carefully got up, trembling at the touch of the cold floor. On tiptoe he approached the door that led to the Hnidys' bedrooms. Quietly he tried to open it, but it barely moved, only as far as the hook inside would allow. Thoughtlessly, Stepan was about to knock on the door, but his upraised hand fell limp. After all, it was his own fault.

The room was suffocating him. He stepped out onto the veranda in his underwear and sat down with his elbows on his knees. The cold air did not diminish his agitation. Fear and tension left a dull pain in his heart. Remorse for his sin—for the failure to commit the sin—gnawed at the boy, persistently, dreadfully. He called himself a dope, an idiot, a coward, and a loser. And not only because his unsatiated body had filled with bitterness, but also from the unexpressed deduction that possession of this lush woman, who was above his reach and more mature than he, could strengthen his spirit and temper his will, as sometimes happens after a victory that shows the hero himself what he is worth.

In the morning Stepan, nervous and fidgety from a sleepless night, glumly hung about the yard, smoking cigarette after cigarette, depleting his supply of cheap tobacco. Although it was now a weekday and the Institute was open to accommodate his desire to study, the mere thought of school evoked a terrible disgust. Who cares about the Institute? Compared to last night's incident, that would be simple and easily achieved. But the desire for this woman, about whom he wouldn't have dared to even dream yesterday, had been transformed into an aching thirst with an exotic, irresistible flavor, and had become, in the end, a burning issue of personal selfishness. The instant he imagined that this woman might not be his, anger welled up in him and brought to his lips the most insulting words. Adulteress. Debauchee. Even whore.

He was, however, quite capable of falling on his knees to beg her to smile at him at least once, to give him the smallest sign. But on meeting him in the kitchen, she was no different than she had been yesterday, the day before yesterday, a week or two weeks before. She did not betray last night's visit by the slightest of gestures. This seemed to him the very nadir of hypocrisy, the deep depravity of an overly self-indulgent female. She had come to him. That was indisputable. So why this proud dissimulation? That was unclear. Would she come again? The boy understood perfectly that he had offended her by his behavior, that he should do or say something—but what? but how? He didn't know and he didn't dare, fearful of spoiling his chances by a word or gesture that ruins everything instead of fixing it.

Quietly, without being heard, he entered the kitchen where Tamara Vasylivna was cooking lunch. She stood with her back to the door, and the boy entered unnoticed. Hobbled by the consciousness of his own mortification but simultaneously overwhelmed by an aching, almost beggarly desire, his eyes, alternating between pleading and voracious appetite, devoured the lines of her back and legs. And when she turned around and saw him, he observed on her face her suffering and enmity, which, appearing for a moment, hid behind an expression of immutable tranquility. But for him that was enough to catch a brief glimpse into her soul.

"Come tonight, come," he whispered, even too quietly, although there was no one who could have heard his words, since everyone else was always

out of the house in the morning. Not a muscle moved on her face under his careful scrutiny. She turned around and Stepan bolted out of the house, angrily slamming the door.

He did not come home for lunch, not without hope of thus signaling his despair. He returned home late at night, having spent the whole day wandering by the Dnipro, and he lay down to sleep immediately, again hinting at his readiness. The hours dragged on in endless eternities, the ceiling and indeed the entire house of the peaceful merchant were in imminent danger of collapse from the explosion of his impatience, and when she at last did come, the boy welcomed her with all the fire of youthful passion and that enormous store of energy that he had brought with him to the city.

XI

The last days of summer were exploiting their remaining privileges. At the end of September mornings turned cloudy, while in the afternoon the sun came out, filling the air with spring mirages and holding back for a while the falling leaves. But at night the winds tore them off and blew them around the streets, adding more work for the streetsweepers. Across these yellowish doormats, the city stepped out into a period of activity, awakening from its summer doldrums. The edu-cultural, cabaret, and theatrical seasons opened in a feverish frenzy. Various learned and semi-learned societies came to life, as their members returned from holidays and vacation homes. The bookstores and libraries, lethargic in the summer season when the mind is enfeebled, filled with customers and patrons, exhibits were opened, and lectures were read on the most serious topics of economy and morality. The proper life of the city was beginning, the springtime of its creativity, generally enclosed by walls and yet without limits.

With great enthusiasm Stepan, too, partook of this impulse. Actually, he had hardly missed anything by skipping the first weeks of classes at the Institute. Only now had all the professors returned and the printed schedule became an actual one, particularly in the work of groups and committees that begins with an unavoidable period of organizational activity. On the whole, he walked into class to find everything ready and he could immediately roll out his studies at full speed on the tracks that had been properly aligned to meet the academic plans. He signed up for practical sessions in statistics and historical materialism, and he attended lectures regularly—indeed, he was so absorbed in his studies that he barely got to know his classmates. They were of interest to him only as co-workers. But for them within a half-month he had become a reference book on Institute events, changes, and programs, because no one was better informed than he about all these matters. His notebooks with lecture notes were in such demand that they were typed up in multiple copies. Particularly in the fields of the theory of probability and higher mathematics, he immediately rose to the level of a recognized master, one of the select few who could see through the maze of formulas and propositions to the essential ideas that become the unfailing signposts in the labyrinth of external complexity.

In the evenings, having quickly run home for dinner, Stepan sat for two hours in the statistics laboratory, calculating endless rows of crop yields and death rates to establish the coefficient of correlation between them, and then spent two more hours in the library preparing for his presentation on Greek Atomism. Every spare moment at home he devoted to studying languages—English and French, of which up to now he knew only the alphabet used in mathematics. This was the largest gap in his knowledge, and liquidating this deficit was an overriding imperative for him. Stubbornness

and persistence were reborn in him, and these qualities were strengthened rather than depleted by greater application. Each day that passed was filled to the brim with content, leaving no room for doubts or hesitation. The boy was developing his strengths, burning brightly because such was his nature: he could take the oars in a race and move the boat without resting, until in the end the oarlocks themselves would give out.

The strange relations that evolved between him and the landlady did not hinder him at all. During the day, he somehow forgot all about them, since by her behavior Tamara Vasylivna herself severely limited their daytime contact. No allusions. No privileges. Only business, everything aboveboard. Nor did Stepan attempt to transgress these limits. Indeed, he liked this reticence in his unexpected girlfriend. As if she were afraid of the light that eats away at secrets like acid. Their encounters always maintained the magic of surprise. Theirs was a peculiar, comic, but pleasant kitchen liaison between a young man and a wicked mother, a quasi-sentimental domestic romance hallowed by the unchanging night and the ticking of the cheap clock on the wall, a romance with a sudden beginning, a passionate plot line, and a boring ending. And yet sometimes, perhaps in some trivial gesture or word, he suddenly detected in his visitor a hidden virtue that aroused his respect and undermined his previous understanding of her as a licentious woman always chasing men. At such times he succumbed to a fearful anxiety, and this relationship, which he explained in such simple terms, began to seem entirely incomprehensible to him. He would ask, feigning extreme naiveté: why, with what purpose, by what cause, for what reason?

“Because you’re my little love,” she would say.

But he wouldn’t allow himself to use the familiar pronoun with her and called her “Musinka,” as she suggested.

Occasionally, while reading a book or working, he would be tempted to laugh in amazement and happy satisfaction. How strange the world was! He had appeared in this merchant’s family God knows how, attached himself to them somehow, and now look what he’s doing—and not even intentionally, without any effort on his part. It turns out somehow that the things you seek escape you, but what you don’t expect happens all by itself. Sometimes in passing he would think of Hnidy and Maksym. He hardly ever came across the former. He was sort of friends with the latter, but didn’t see him very often either. Were they catching on? No, clearly not—since there were no changes in the internal, closed, and dreary life of this strange family. As for himself, he certainly would have noticed something, caught a stray glance or inadvertent allusion. His conscience told him that everything would be discovered, discovered soon, and things would end badly. These probable results—even without any mathematical calculations—made an unpleasant chill run down his back. But the voices of alarm were quickly silenced in the whirlwind of academic enthusiasm, which rarely gave them a chance to be heard.

Nor did he trouble himself too much with questions of terminology. Was this love? All right—it could be. It was funny, but possible. Who has the courage to say what is love and what is not? Shoes can be worn out, torn, patched, warped, and orthopedic, but they're always still shoes. Why does love need new footwear each time? Sometimes it walks in bast shoes and sometimes in slippers. In any case, secrecy and prohibition inflamed the boy's excitement, which completely replaces affection for young men, and the satisfaction of his desire gave birth to feelings of tenderness and gratitude. Under their languid influence the boy even kissed her hands, and these were the very first hands that had earned such regard from him. He was acutely aware of the thrill that her touch infused in him, of that explosion of active energy that her kiss ignited, like an electric spark. She wove herself into his life as an invisible, secret, but powerful influence, allowing him also to discover in her a woman who does not alternate among a variety of trivial emotions and does not force herself to meet specific expectations. Next to her, all the girls he knew were affected dolls who imagined the act of giving themselves to someone as an accomplishment, a self-sacrifice, and an unrecompensable service.

Slowly initiating the boy into the mysteries of love, she taught him to value a kiss, which heretofore had seemed to him a mere plaything, as well as the whole intimate web of arousal that mankind has developed in the period from the Stone Age to the present. Stepan quickly mastered the accelerated course in this field of human experience, passed on from one generation to the next without textbooks or instructional guides—freeing himself from the bookish diapers that swaddled his thinking. Because nights gave him the sensation of thoughtless and therefore authentic living, free from all prescriptions and stipulations, unconstrained by requirements or explanations. At night, the sedulous eye of control and objections was closed, the odious voices that invited, pleaded, and commanded fell silent, and having rid himself of them, he could feel the wanton liberty and insolent power of life, which breaks through thousands of obstacles to deliver its eternal magic.

There was nothing artificial in her knowledge of love, although the word “love” was her favorite joke. Yet suddenly, in the midst of caresses, the boy would sense in her a commitment, something unspoken, the heat of an internal flame that scorched him and frightened him. At such moments he told himself that he would never leave her, that he could not live without her. He was ready to suggest that she leave her family and make a new home with him on the foundation of the scholarship he received at the Institute. But a moment later she was joking again, and again he did not feel the pull of any obligations. He loved her jokes, he loved the happy, tender pet names that she bestowed on him, which everyone likes to hear, although they're silly. He loved the scented cigarettes she always brought, stolen from her son, and the careless and pointless conversations that they enjoyed together. Musinka

never spoke of anything serious, she never troubled him with her soul, and he should have been most grateful to her for this favor, since knowing another person's soul is too great a burden for one's own.

A month of carefree tranquility went by, working days and amorous nights, deepening and burnishing his consciousness. The wearying rains and gray mists had begun, but his army overcoat, unpacked from storage, saved him from the weather, while his heavy yuft boots were completely waterproof. In these garments his body felt as peaceful and comfortable as his soul felt in his body. All his worries fell silent, without any great effort on his part, and he was moving forward, full steam ahead, like an arrow shot from a taut bow. An awareness of this disposition brought a blessed order to his mind, impregnating it with the clear thinking that bears no resemblance to the malignant glitter of dreams. Poisonous, selfish, worldly illusions abandoned him and thus simplified his life, because he now understood that he must cross many a stream before he could draw his own conclusions. A dangerous inclination to incomplete induction, when the young man, on the basis of the first two decades of his sojourn on this earth, years both laughable and naive, attempted on his own to formulate the basic rules that govern life in this world, knocking his head against the wall of reality time and time again, was now replaced with a judicious intention to make life's acquaintance gradually and to accumulate within himself a sufficient quantity of life's facts. He became serious, somewhat proud, and acquired the appearance of a clever young man, who, although still young, already knows a great deal, understands everything, and can explain to everyone the what, the where, the how, and the why.

At the Institute Stepan was making progress with giant strides. Aside from his studies he was becoming more prominent in the social affairs of students, who were at the time largely indifferent and mistrustful of collectivism because of its obligatory status in the community. People only recognize the sweetness of those fruits that are forbidden, and the biblical parable on this topic would be very instructive for politicians. In any case, those for whom public life was an instinctive choice unrelated to circumstances found the student population of those days an unplowed if somewhat infertile field. After a few appearances at student forums, Stepan was elected as the administrator of the student office of the Robzemlis trade union and a member of the Institute's KUBUch committee. He was swamped and extremely busy, barely able to fit into a single day all of his personal and community responsibilities.

For the theatrical event being organized by KUBUch in the Institute's auditorium as a fundraiser for impoverished students, it was decided to include, in addition to the invited performers, a talent show. Stepan decided to submit his story "The Razor," which was lying around in manuscript without any purpose, to the event committee for its consideration. Having received their approval, Stepan cleaned and sharpened it for shaving the

masses, and read his work on stage before the audience.

He was nervous only for a moment. Then he suddenly calmed down and, sensing the growing attention of his listeners, found his rhythm as a reader. He read the story through to the end in a steady and well-balanced voice, avoiding unnecessary changes of pitch or pauses, and received as much applause as the invited tenor from the opera. Even more, since a flower was thrown to him—though it did not reach the stage and fell sadly on the floor. He did not deem it necessary to retrieve this first branch from the laurel wreath of his future fame.

His reaction to his own success was very negative, and when Borys Zadorozhny, one of the participants in the talent show and a student in his last year, warmly complemented him on his story and asked if he had written anything else, the boy grumpily answered: “I don’t have time for such nonsense.”

“That’s a shame,” said Zadorozhny. “What’s awaiting us after we graduate? They’ll herd us into a factory or behind a cash register, and that’s it. You’ll soon be overgrown with moss. But writing stories, that’s a fine thing! As for me, I spend every free moment I have reading.”

Stepan thought differently. Stories were just empty amusement, entertainment. You could survive just as well without them. And a small discussion began between them about literature, in which Stepan was the detractor and Borys the committed defender.

Nevertheless, at home before a week had passed he had written two more stories. The student Zadorozhny who had so warmly welcomed his story became—was it precisely for this reason?—his close friend, to whom he eagerly turned for advice and sometimes even visited at his apartment. This cheerful and talented student’s biography was full of difficulties and disappointments. He had made the mistake of being born the son of an Orthodox priest, whose death some ten years ago had failed to erase the stain on his son’s character. Twice he had been thrown out of the Institute for his class origins, and twice he had been reinstated, because his personal past was in fact without blemish. After five years he had reached his third year in the program and got a job as a night watchman in a dormitory. He considered himself the most fortunate person in the world.

That spring Borys would finish the Institute with a specialization in the sugar beet industry. Stepan felt a friendship toward him and a deep faith in his aesthetic taste. Thus Borys became the intimate confidante of his literary efforts and the first—and sympathetic, no less—judge of his literary works.

“Listen to this,” said the boy, unfolding a pile of papers.

Borys listened, and approved.

“This is just something I threw together,” said Stepan.

He threw together a half-dozen stories about rebels. He wrote them easily and quickly, a little carelessly, but with enthusiasm.

“So why are you marinating them?” asked Borys. “Send them off to a

journal.”

“You don’t understand!”

And Stepan told his friend how he wrote the first story, how he even thought of changing his name to a more dignified Stefan, and how the great critic had burst his bubble.

“Literature is a delicate thing,” he added with sincerity. “If you don’t have the talent, don’t even start. That’s why, I think, there are so few writers.”

Borys did not agree.

“So you think it is like a professional appointment?”

“Yes, sort of.”

“You’re a fool.”

“So be it.”

Borys laughed.

“So how did you come up with Stefan?”

“Wasn’t there a king or something?”

From that day onward Borys called him little Stevie.

One evening Stepan was concentrating on calculating currency conversion, estimating how many gold rubles there were in an Indian rupee if the rate of conversion to pounds sterling were known. While Stepan was in this state of disconnection from the moment and the environment, Maksym entered the kitchen very agitated.

“I need to talk to you,” he said icily.

Maksym’s voice was trembling and the lines on his forehead quivered nervously. An expectation of something very unpleasant swept over Stepan. Guiltily, he anticipated the subject of the conversation.

“You are a nocturnal thief,” said Maksym, standing across from him by the table.

“What?”

“You are a nocturnal thief,” Maksym repeated dully, leaning against the table with his hands. “You’re a thief.”

Stepan got up, frightened by Maksym’s quiet, sullen tone.

“What’s this about?”

Suddenly Maksym bent over and raising his arm, awkwardly and angrily hit Stepan in the face with his hand, striking him, in his haste, not on the cheek but directly on the mouth. This blow to the lips was not very hard but it was deeply offensive, and Stepan felt it like the sting of a whip on naked flesh. His face reddened like a wound, and his whole body erupted. He jerked forward and threw himself at Maksym, overturning the table with his leg and knocking Maksym onto the bed.

He beat him with his knuckles, with his chest, and with his head, in senseless rage and extreme anger. Then he stopped and sat up, blinking to erase the red spots circling before his eyes. He threw back his tussled hair and, legs shaking, threw on his overcoat and cap and left the house. He walked out without buttoning his coat, mindlessly splashing through puddles,

shaking in anger and mortification. That swine had hit him in the face! Maybe he should challenge him to a duel? Swords? Pistols? Hah—what a knight-defender of his mother!

With drunken satisfaction he recalled how he had beat him, choked him, twisted him, kicked him, and, at the same time, he regretted that he had cut off the punishment so quickly. He should have killed the snake! Made mincemeat of him! Because it was not just the insult that Maksym had given him that enraged him, it was the ruined tranquility, the financial ruin, and the loss of his mistress. And the more he realized the extent of his catastrophe, the greater his emotional enervation grew—a mindless, crippling, gnawing hatred. He was entirely consumed with a boiling rage. Had someone bumped into him at that moment, he likely would have hit him.

Running out heedlessly down the familiar path to Khreshchatyk, Stepan had to stop and consider where he would sleep the next few nights. Actually, there wasn't any choice, and he set out for Borys's place on Lviv Street, behind the Sinnyi bazaar. Brisk walking tired him and calmed him somewhat. His muscles ached from the emotional upheaval, and he was yawning from nervous exhaustion. Because it was late he had to knock for a long time: although Borys was out guarding offices, Stepan, as a familiar guest, was allowed into his room. Borys's absence pleased Stepan and he expected that by morning he would invent a sufficiently plausible reason for his visit. He found some bread, ate it, and immediately went to sleep, cursing Maksym for disrupting his life.

In the morning Stepan went to the Institute, and it wasn't until evening that he ran into Borys, to whose place he had to return since he had nowhere else to go. His mood was as black as tar—he had spent the whole day walking around in a huff, but he cheerily told his friend that his landlords were entertaining a houseful of family visitors and so he had to give up his place there for a while.

“Why don't you just stay here permanently?” said Borys. “As you know, I'm hardly ever at home at night. It's a dog's life, but it's better than dying of hunger. I've tried that before—it's not pleasant.”

But, instead of jumping at such a convenient offer, Stepan graciously declined because he was infused with a secret expectation that somehow everything would get straightened out and he would return to his comfortable nest. How? He didn't know. A great “somehow” lived within him, a deep faith in his destiny, which had not been very hard on him up until now. Would Musinka really have to carry water herself? He could not fit such barbaric possibility in his head. Or would Maksym—may his soul rot in hell—really tend to the cows himself? But he had to admit that the Hnidy household had prospered without him in the past and could do so again. Musinka would cry a little and then she would find a more convenient lover. Such thoughts drove him into a deep dependency. He decided to wait. For what? Maybe Musinka would write him a letter—but she didn't know the address. And he didn't

dare write to her—he was even ashamed, since, no matter how you spin it, he had retreated from the field of battle, albeit as a victor.

For two days a longing for Musinka gnawed at him, mostly because he was distanced from her against his own will. He couldn't stand it when things didn't go his way. After another two days, however, he was reconciled to his situation and likely would have stayed at Borys's had it not been for a new difficulty, which dashed his plans once again.

That evening, before setting out on his watch, Borys noticed his unhappy demeanor.

"You're overworked, little Stevie," he told him. "Even a steam boiler can crack from too much pressure, and that's cast iron. It was Karl Marx who said that the working man deserves a rest."

"Yes, I see that myself," said Stepan, caught up in his work.

"The best relaxation is a woman's company, or, to put it plainly, a party. Somebody took me to one recently, and I'll take you there too. All we need is half a bottle and something to eat, like sausage. It's not far to go for fellows like us, just up to the Krytyi bazaar. It's not quite a house, not quite a barn—heaven knows what it is, but there are five girls.

"Five?" asked Stepan.

"A whole handful! And one of them, a real-life Beatrice. She's so fair and quiet—but you know, still waters can rupture a levee. What's her name? Natalka? No. Nastia? No. Well, whatever On one condition—she's mine."

"You can have them all!" said Stepan glumly. "I don't have time for girls."

"Do as you please, but even scholars say it's good for the metabolism."

After Borys had left, Stepan thought long and bitterly. That there were five girls rather than three was easy to explain. He himself had heard Nadika say that they would take in two more girls for the winter to help with the cost of firewood. No less certain was it that Borys was thinking of courting Nadika. And besides, if he stayed on here, Borys would keep dragging him there. Furthermore, Borys would keep telling him how the courtship was coming along. Any allusion to that girl was enough to make Stepan feel physically ill. What would happen if she came up time and again in Borys's conversation? An instinct for self-preservation prodded him, telling him that it would be dangerous to expose himself to so much pain.

That evening he felt hostility toward girls, a sad hostility over what had been lost and could not return, but now, from a distance, had acquired an ever greater attractive force. Could she possibly fall in love with Borys? For a moment he felt an urge to stay at Borys's place, to stay deliberately and go with him to the parties to prevent him from getting Nadika, to rub this conceited chump's nose in the dirt. Step on his tail a little, so he couldn't say "this one's mine." But his soul was too weary to take up such a challenge. He had a different, more important challenge before him. Picking up a book he said complacently: "Let him have her."

He decided to move to the KUBUch dormitory, bitterly disillusioned that the city was, after all, not big enough to avoid meeting certain people.

XII

This was the first morning that the most dogged student at the Institute, Stepan Radchenko, did not appear for class. Drearily, lost in thought, he walked along Revolution Street to Nyzhnyi Val Street to get his things, to remove from the home where he had found refuge the last traces of his stay there. He had specifically chosen the morning to do this, since Musinka was at home alone at that time. Although his anger at Maksym had burned out and extinguished, and Hnidy himself would hardly find the courage to say something—mostly he played the role of a non-speaking extra in this strange family—nevertheless it would have been unpleasant to see them. And they, too, would probably not want to meet him, and he certainly did not want to cause people any discomfort.

The door was unlocked, and he walked into the empty kitchen. For a moment he considered grabbing his things and disappearing forever. But he rejected this as shameful—he was not, after all, a thief. Besides, when he entered this kitchen where everything was familiar, when in the corner he saw the bucket with which he had carried so much water, the table on which he had scribbled so many sheets of paper, his books and notebooks still lying where he had left them—he felt a painful pang of regret that he must actually abandon all this. And why? He felt that he was the victim here. But all these objects were merely the background for the traces of a passion visible only to him. All of these things reminded him of his connection to a woman who had given him so much and such rich satisfaction. He realized in their midst that even if this feeling was not love, it had not yet been exhausted: its depth reached out for many more nights, the loss of which would surely be his ruin. Suddenly he felt that in losing her he had lost his spark, that the forced separation would throw him back into the despair that he had been battling all week with a subconscious hope that he might return to her and possess her again. Shaking with agitation, he knocked on the door to her room and then without waiting knocked again.

When Musinka appeared, the boy thirstily looked into her face, seeking there any signs of joy or delight at his reappearance. But her face was tranquil, as always during the day, though somewhat tired and pale. Then, without greeting, he said sharply: “I’ve come for my things.”

She smiled, and with that smile increased his irritation.

“I don’t want to bother you,” he cried. “Maybe you’ve grown tired of me. Maybe you sent Maksym yourself to get rid of me.”

“Maksym has gone,” she said.

“Gone?”

“He’s left us. He’ll live on his own.”

Terror gripped Stepan.

“He said, ‘Mom, promise you’ll get rid of that vagabond, and then I’ll

stay, and everything will be as it was before.’ I said, ‘He’s not a vagabond.’”

Stepan ran up to her, grabbed her hand, and kissed it passionately.

“No, no, Musinka. I am a vagabond,” he said. “I’m awful, and I should be run off. I love you, Musinka—forgive me.”

She replied listlessly: “Forgive? You? For what?”

He kissed her neck, the corners of her lips, her eyes, her forehead; caressing these familiar spots, he embraced her piously and sensually. And she, as if awakened, threw her arms around his neck, and pulling back his head, looked into his eyes with wild desire.

That night she said to him: “I knew you’d come back.”

“How?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

“I too was sure, despite everything, that I’d come back. I was coming for my things, but somewhere in my soul I knew that I would be back with you. Kiss me. Aren’t I handsome?”

“There you go, my love,” she laughed.

He fell silent.

“What are you thinking about?”

“About ... about the other half of your household.”

“You didn’t think about that before?”

“Very little, actually. I was scared to ask, Musinka. Everything turns out so strangely. It turns out that I don’t know my own self.”

“And you never will.”

“Why not? I’ve learned many lessons already. And how much I’ve endured. The city bewildered me. I was drowning.”

“And now you’re drying out here beside me.”

He heard so much pain and derisive mockery in these words that inadvertently he flinched, suddenly and unexpectedly coming to the realization, previously beyond his reach as something hidden and frightening, that his Musinka had had a life before she began to exist for him: that years, decades of the lost past, had unflinchingly led them toward each other, their paths crossing here, in this kitchen. And at that moment he felt more clearly than ever before, as if someone’s persistent gaze were causing him to turn around and look back, the quiet and inexorable force of destiny that governs the ordinary encounters of people, who were complete strangers yesterday but tomorrow become friends, lovers, or enemies. The idea struck him as mysterious and frightening.

Now he was afraid because he did not know what she was thinking. He clasped her hands in his own.

“You won’t abandon me?”

“You’ll never let anyone leave you.”

“Is that why I returned?”

“What do you think, my little one?”

He leaned on his elbow and lit a cigarette. Her words were somewhat

unpleasant to him. They carried an echo of a knowledge of life that he still found unattainable, as well as a hint of gloomy irony.

She remained silent. He continued smoking, lying on his back.

“This was an unhappy week,” she said.

“For me too,” he answered.

“For you too? But how old are you?”

He wanted to protest.

“I am forty-two,” she said. “I’m old. You’re going to say that’s not very old? Oh, my dear little one, in a year I’ll be a real old bag, you’ll hardly recognize me if we meet. But once, a very long time ago—you can’t even imagine how long ago—I too was young. Do you know what happiness is? It’s like the heavens. It can evaporate in a moment. But pain persists, on and on, without end.”

“That’s true,” he said, “I’ve noticed that myself.”

“People say that life is like a bazaar. And so it is. Everyone has their goods to sell. Some make a profit, others take a loss. Why? Because no one wants to die. You must keep selling, even if at a loss. After that, anyone can call you a fool. The seller who miscalculates is called a fool. But people are very different. Books tell us: this is a human being, with these qualities, and so forth. We have all kinds of sayings about people, about all human beings, and you might think we know what a human being is. Somewhere I read that there’s even a science of souls called psychology. The author claims that people don’t run because they’re scared, but are scared because they run. But what’s the difference to the guy who’s scared? He doesn’t know anything anyway. Do you understand?”

“You’re probably thinking of idealist psychology. Today psychology is built on entirely different principles. Introspection has long been discredited as a methodology.”

He put his cigarette butt on the table, extending his arm for this purpose, and turned onto his right side.

“So what happened then?” he asked, “You were young, and then what?”

“Nothing very interesting. I had two brothers and two sisters. They died. Who knows why I survived and they didn’t. Strange, isn’t it? We lived here—this is my building. We weren’t rich, but we got along. My father was a small merchant. And now listen. He had a friend—they grew up and went to school together. My father dealt in iron goods, his friend sold fish. His friend did well. He built himself a big five-story building in Lypky, he went into wholesale and put away a few million. My father still traded iron here. He didn’t envy anyone. But when four children of his died, he somehow withered. All his plans were lost. And then my mother died. I was left alone. I was scared of my father—he was so dour. He didn’t notice me. He said nothing for days, weeks even. I didn’t have any friends. No one visited us. In school the girls teased me and called me a nun. Then late one evening, when I was seventeen, that friend of my father’s showed up with his son....”

“That’s your husband?”

“Yes, that was Luka. I remember his father had a civilian medal on his chest. I can recall every day of my life, from when I reached consciousness as a child—it’s frightening to remember your entire life. As if you were standing guard over yourself. My father said, ‘Tamara, I’m going to die soon. You should get married.’ I said ‘Yes, father,’ and kissed his hand. His hand was cold. He really did die two months later. That was when I first saw how distant people are from each other. Father was buried with honors, because everyone liked him. They put me in a black dress and led me by the arms behind the hearse, Luka on one side, my aunt on the other. I glanced over to the sidewalk and noticed people stopping, taking off their hats, asking who was being buried, and then going on about their business. When I saw this, I stopped crying. I felt ashamed to be crying in front of people who were going about their business. I imagined that they would go home and relate over dinner that some fellow was being buried and his daughter was crying wildly. After that, my tears dried up forever, though there were plenty of reasons to cry.”

She stopped and leaned back against the cushion. The serenity of her words gradually bewitched the boy, and the more he fell under the spell of her story, the less he could say himself. Cautiously, he pulled out another cigarette and lit it.

“Don’t shine that in my face,” she said. “I haven’t yet told you anything about why Luka, who had maybe seen me once somewhere by chance, came to get engaged to me. I didn’t learn this until later. You can be certain that if anything’s unpleasant, they’ll always tell you about it eventually. Sooner or later, intentionally or not. So this is how it was. Luka fell in love with a girl who was also a merchant’s daughter, and the affair reached the engagement stage. But the father or mother of the girl, I don’t remember which, was careless enough to say that it was a great honor for the Hnidy family that they were letting them have their daughter. So old Hnidy immediately took Luka by the hand, and that same evening he brought him to our place. Luka hated him, but was subservient. You can imagine the fate that awaited me. In a word, Luka said that since I had ruined his life, I would at least need to cheer him up a little.”

“Why didn’t you leave him?” asked Stepan.

“Oh, he took care of that. All the doors were locked and the windows on the fourth floor were left wide open. How he wanted me to commit suicide! But he was scared to kill me himself. I was waiting only until my father died. But after his death Luka changed his attitude toward me. He stopped beating me, he completely forgot about me. I rarely even saw him. Of course, people told me exactly where he was and with whom he was living. And I kept living just for show. Do you know what dreams are for those in pain? They’re a curse. But what dreams I had! The harder it was for me, the happier I became. I knew the most unusual worlds. I traveled to the evening star, the one that

rises at twilight, where I lived in exotic orchards, with quiet murmuring streams in an endless autumn. I dreamed only of autumn. And the love I enjoyed there! Later, I had a son.”

“Maksym?”

“Yes, Maksym. I wanted him to have a different name, I wanted ...”

“What name did you want?” he asked.

“You’ll be surprised—I wanted him to be named Stepan.”

“Why?”

“I didn’t know back then, but later I figured it out. I had enough time to study myself, to uncover every thought. In the end, you see, I began to wonder at myself. I did not have the kind of self-love that other people have, but I was very close to myself. Do you understand? Self-love means being divided from yourself, but it’s also possible to merge with yourself. In that case you can no longer love yourself—or better yet, there’s no way to love yourself. And then you’re not scared of your own self and your own thoughts. So here’s why: when I was maybe twenty years old, a tradesman was working in our home. One evening I fell asleep over a book and he carried me to my bed. While he was carrying me I woke up, but I pretended to still be asleep, so he wouldn’t put me down. I closed my eyes—it was both frightening and pleasant. Later, I had such an urge to ask this Stepan to carry me around that I would flee the house in shame. I tried in various ways until I finally succeeded in getting Luka’s father to take him into the store, and I didn’t see him any more.”

Stepan felt a vague uncertainty. Could this really be her, his smiling Musinka, always cheerful and merry? Suddenly he felt uncomfortable that this woman, whom he thought he knew well, had her own secrets, unconnected to him.

She went on:

“And then came the revolution, and it destroyed all his millions. Luka went gray in a week, and we were chased out of Lypky to this place. That’s when he noticed Maksym and me. One day he came into my room and asked, ‘Tamara, do you hate me?’ I said, ‘You don’t exist for me.’ He began to fear me. He was scared to look at me. He began to wear blue glasses. And Maksym was growing up. Maybe it was my own fault—I loved him madly. Sometimes I thought he would be abducted. I stood guard over him night after night. When he started going to school, I would die of fear—I missed him so much. He grew up to be quiet and gentle. He collected butterflies, insects, then later, postage stamps. He loved to read. Every evening he would tell me about everything he saw and did in school, everything. I helped him study, as long as I could. When he became a teenager, I was overcome with grief. He would be pulling away from me soon, he would have to. I was heartbroken, I cried. He didn’t understand. Once he came up to me and said, ‘Mom, I’ll never leave you.’ ‘That’s impossible,’ I said. But he replied, ‘You’ll see. Have I ever deceived you?’ And indeed, he did not deceive me.”

She fell silent, falling under the spell of her own words, overcome with the sadness of her own story, as if hearing it for the first time from a stranger's lips. Because when it takes shape in words, a recollection acquires a previously unknown reality. In the interplay of sounds it acquires a sharp edge, very different from its peaceful existence in silent thought.

He, too, remained silent, smoking, and looking out the leaded window, listening to the ticking of the clock over his head, which in the silence seemed to have accelerated. But his thoughts were hard at work, receiving and internalizing what he had just heard and what he needed to accept. The distant horizon of her past, the long dark corridor of time, illuminated here and there by the words she had spoken, first astounded him with the mysterious complexity of its turns and branches, but then dimmed and faded before his eyes, replaced by the growing smirk that forced itself onto his lips. So, what's the point? What was so strange in this banal story about an unhappy marriage, in this familiar urban story that gets repeated everywhere and anywhere under the low roofs of residential areas near cities where life consists of nothing more than love and tranquility? A merchant's submissive daughter, an unfaithful and tyrannical husband, autumnal dreams, motherhood followed by pride in a handsome child, clutching at the remnants of life, a sickly need to find at least some meaning in that life before it descends into old age, when the last, tearful, mindless flame erupts in a woman's blood. This was neither new nor rare. And yet he felt renewed energy from the unexpressed thought that somehow he had managed to squeeze into her squalid life, to reorganize and control it. When he appeared, everything changed. That was most important to him. Suddenly, embracing her and taking command of her, he whispered, "Musinka, you do love me, don't you?"

The handsome and bright boy's life, disrupted for a week, crossed the next threshold, and resumed its steady and surging flow. Whether at the Institute or at home, he felt marvelous, with too much work in school and in his community activities to give serious thought to any matter, particularly an unpleasant one. And Musinka, such a delicate woman, did not poison his satisfaction in possessing her with any painful reminders. Within the subdued home of the Hnidys, which had managed to expel one of its residents, everything was peaceful again, decomposing, dying a slow death that might take months or even years, yet emitting through its doors a fresh shoot from the random seeds in its manure. Within this rotting nest a wayward chick was shedding its immature feathers and resolutely learning to spread its wings. And indeed, after this remarkable event the boy could not help but feel himself the master of not only the kitchen, but also of the rooms beyond, which he never entered in the exercise of his invisible authority. Having caught a momentary glimpse into Musinka's uncovered soul, the inevitable consequence was that he immediately sent out his roots into this new area, established himself, and made himself at home there, freely soaking up the nutritious juices that can be drawn from a woman's body before it decays. He

enveloped her and fed his vitality by possessing her, and her cheeks burned in a feverish blush from the flame that consumed her while it warmed and nourished him, like the fruit that swells until it must fall away from its branch.

Winter should long since have arrived, as the reports from the Ukrainian national weather bureau affirmed, but it was delayed for reasons beyond the control of science. A timid snow would fall in the morning, only to melt on the cobblestones, leaving a watery mud that was not harmful to Stepan's yuft boots but was very troublesome to the street kids, those urban outcasts without waterproof footwear, who therefore needed to relocate to their winter quarters in manholes and trash dumps. In the endless slush people seemed as gray as the mud on the streets. Then one day something strange happened, and the snow, squeezed by the frost, did not flow down the streets to the awaiting sewers, and the city majestically unfurled its white arteries and proudly raised its forehead. Showered with white petals, it was reaching the apogee of its industriousness, hardening and contracting so that, come spring, it could throw off its wedding veil and begin its gradual wilting. This was the time when the windows of buildings were not extinguished until late, and inside, around tables, those altars of the new paganism, sat attentive two-legged owls, gestating, birthing, and raising administrative, operational, artistic, and scientific plans. It was the time when sleighs glided along the icy streets, when music from the bars grew louder, when revolutions of the roulette wheel accelerated, when buses donned chains, and women donned fantastic boots, and when students wrote their first reports at Institutes and in life.

XIII

Spring is brought to the city not by sparrows but by wagon drivers who, with the blessing of their collective farms, begin to break up the trampled snow on the streets, load it onto their sleighs, and haul it off where it can melt without affecting the welfare of the city. Before these harbingers of warmth arrive, not a single bud on the trees along the boulevards dares to fluff up and open. That would be a pretentious transgression against local laws, and a barbarian assault on the foundations of civilization.

The awakening of nature did not pass by without affecting Stepan's soul, which resembled an extremely sensitive plate, suitable for instant photography. Nothing highlights the artificiality of a city like spring itself, melting the snow but uncovering dead cobblestones rather than the expected plants. The boy still longed to smell the moist breath of the earth, to bury his gaze in the endless greenery of open fields, in the black rows of fluffy soil. All around him he saw the terrible subjugation of nature. The trees on the streets and behind fences in the yards, like animals in cages or a zoo, sadly stretched out to him their swollen limbs. So what did the change from cold to warmth mean here, besides an appropriate change of clothing? What was there to remind one of the steam rising on the steppes and the happiness of the man who feels the fertile earth beneath his harrow? There spring was the trumpet of a shining god, the luminous oracle of happiness and work. Here it was but a trivial, though pleasant, episode: the disappearance of streetside sand boxes and the renewed running of the suburban trains. The city rolled over in the sun, like a giant pampered cat, squinting its innumerable eyes in the sun, stretching and yawning in satisfaction. The city was preparing to rest.

But Stepan's springtime recollection of the village, brought on by the warm temperatures and rains, did not have sufficient strength to really subdue him. He was mournful about his childhood, and wistful about the past, which, at some distance, acquires a charm unrelated to its quality, but he hoped that this quiet grief would dissipate, like a thinning fog. Or maybe these were just the dregs of those indistinct appetites and unformed desires that are stirred up in the heart by springtime, whispering flattering words about the future, stoking a greater thirst, promising change and a new direction. Spring awakens and confounds the soul with various seeds that germinate more often into tough wormwood than delicate roses. Because life is a verbose and loud lottery with colorful posters, enticing billboards, and a sophisticated advertising campaign that promises extraordinary winnings, silently ignoring the fact that for each winning ticket there are thousands of thin and empty bits of paper on which their holders have staked their only hopes.

At the Institute spring meant exam fever, a disease that affects only students. It begins slowly with a lengthy period of latency that can be characterized by a heightened concentration, as well as a tendency to create

outlines and underline passages in textbooks. But the first symptoms of a full blown pathology follow the posting of an announcement on the professor's door, after which the disease passes into the typhoid stage, with fever, nightmares, and insomnia, reaching a crisis in the examination hall, where all the complications and possibilities of a relapse are revealed. Having received a grade of 'good' in the serious disciplines, such as political economy and economic geography, Stepan reflected on the Ukrainian language requirement and decided to get that out of the way, too. These were the only classes he had not attended, and he did not intend to waste much time preparing for a Ukrainian language exam, assuming, with very substantive foundation, that this was the language that he knew and used very well, even wrote stories in, and that he himself was precisely one of those Ukrainians for whom this language exists; therefore, he had every reason to believe he could pass this exam, all the more so because in his career as a rebel, before he had hoisted the red flag, he had for some time held the flag of the autumnal steppes and sky. But one can trip even on his own native doorstep. Stepan cowered at the first explosion from the heavy artillery of voiceless vowels and the laws of i-kannie while the rapid bursts of fire from the nominal and verbal cannon forced him into a shameful retreat, with the firm resolve to capture this unexpected fortress at all cost.

Armed with copies of the very best language textbooks from the library, he abandoned all others and that very evening began to explore and study them. Heretofore he had known only the Russian terms for grammatical concepts, and he pronounced their Ukrainian equivalents with a strange trepidation, seeing that his language had also been dissected into chapters and paragraphs, its laws summarized and rules established. He immersed himself in these matters with ever-increasing interest and satisfaction. Simple mundane words seemed somehow deeper, more meaningful when he mastered their component parts and the secret of their declensions. He fell in love with them, appreciated their function, and was overcome with respect for them, as if they were important dignitaries whom, from his own ignorance, he had previously treated as plain folk.

So, one month later, having mastered Olena Kurylo's Talmud and studied the history of the language according to Shakhmatov and Krymsky, he stood before a professor at the Institute who, not recognizing the student before him, marveled at the depth of his knowledge.

"You see how useful it is to listen to all my lectures," he said. "But I must say how rarely I have the satisfaction of testing a Ukrainian who knows his own language."

"Unfortunately," Stepan noted, "the majority think it is sufficient to be born Ukrainian."

"Yes, yes," answered the professor. "But I must admit that I persecute them mercilessly. I'm very happy you avoided that."

Their conversation developed and the professor asked Stepan about his

origins and his circumstances. Stepan depicted the latter in the bleakest of colors, since his arrangements really had begun to seem miserable to him. He described cleaning up around the cows as something dreadful, as if it involved dangerous work with African lions, and his kitchen as so dirty and stuffy that it might have been the cell of an anchorite monk in the thick of a dark forest. The good professor took pity on him and said:

“You seem to me to be a talented and serious student, and I’ll try to help you. I must admit, I don’t have that many students who listen to my lectures and whom I have not failed in an exam at least once.”

After this the professor wrote a note of recommendation to the head of the Bureau of Instructors of the Ukrainization Program and also promised to speak to this eminent person himself. Then he added, squeezing Stepan’s hand: “I expect that there you will be transformed from a student into an instructor.”

Early the next day Stepan appeared before the Areopagus of Ukrainization, where an informal examinational conversation took place *between* or *among* the members of the board and *he* or *him*, depending on the linguistic theories of each of the members of the board. Next the defendant confirmed that according to all the relevant authorities of grammar, infinitives were to never be split, and sentences were not to end in prepositions, even if there seemed to be good reason for them to. Having spent some time analyzing the prohibitions against dangling participles, it was concluded that as a matter of fact, the theory that it seemed likely that in many cases various and sundry expressions could often be deleted from a sentence with no discernible effect on its meaning was true. Finally, after explaining why the word *which*, that is a non-restrictive pronoun, should be distinguished from the word *that*, which is often—mistakenly—used in its place, and why it is better to maintain verbal parallelism on both sides of the word *than* than not, Stepan was proclaimed a Knight of Ukrainization of the first order, with a payment scale of one karbovanets and eighty kopecks per academic hour.

Taking down his address and writing out a certificate for him, the elegant administrator of the Bureau of Instructors said, in a friendly manner: “Comrade, I expect that within a week or two you will receive an assignment in some company and,”—he added with a pleasant smile—“turn in your field jacket for something more appropriate. The biggest problem with Ukrainians is that they don’t know how to dress.”

Stepan himself was perfectly aware of how accurate these words were. Indeed, his worsted wool clothing was not only old but quite uncomfortable in warm weather, and it was high time to change it. He had often thought of this while dressing in the morning and undressing at night, when he came into closer contact with these rags and became convinced how poorly this exterior covering suited his abilities. And actually, it wasn’t the lack of money that held him back—he had managed in these seven months to put aside about a

hundred karbovanets from his scholarship—but an embarrassment before his own sensibilities. Although his field jacket and boots had become a moldy costume for him, they still had the power of tradition. Changing his wardrobe seemed too audacious an undertaking, one that required a significant justification.

His horizon was expanding. To have three hour-and-a-half classes in some institution every week, getting a whole chervinets, that is, raising his monthly earnings to almost six chervinets—for him, this was no joke but a limitless expansion of his possibilities. These calculations excited the boy and comforted him, and then the springtime agitation would not leave him, even for a minute, churning from day to day into a seductive worry that draped his beautiful eyes in anxiety. It was increasingly wearisome to return home, and he spent evenings sitting in the library until closing time, immersing himself in books far deeper than any studiousness would require. In the morning, remembering that he was obliged to clean out the dung from the stalls and give the cows fresh hay and water, he began to lie around in bed, getting up at the last moment; sometimes he hit the meek animals with a stick in anger, although they always greeted him in a friendly manner. With growing irritation he imagined that for the entire summer, when the Institute was on break, he would be chained down in his kitchen, since he saw no need to show up in his village. The Podil, and particularly Nyzhnyi Val Street, this god-forsaken little hole in the ground, a suburban thicket, were no longer attractive to him, and the distance to the Institute, which he hadn't even noticed before, now seemed overly tiring.

Besides, anticipating his future wealth, he foresaw a real possibility of becoming better acquainted with urban culture—going to the theater, cinema, exhibits, and talks—but the distance to the center of the city meant he would be wasting a great deal of time on needless walking back and forth, discouraging him from taking part in these activities and thus hindering him from freely communing with the benefits of civilization. And in consequence of these unhappy reckonings, the boy was filled with disaffection, which poisoned his academic achievements, discolored his expectations, and diminished his energy. Suddenly he imagined that he was exhausted, and he secretly attributed a portion—maybe even the largest portion—of his exhaustion to Musinka, whose passion was needlessly, it now seemed to him, consuming his strength, worthy of higher and more valuable uses.

The Bureau of Instructors did not mislead him. Within a week and a half he received an offer in the mail to take over a class at the Housing Administration from comrade Lansky, who had announced his intention to give up teaching. That night, Stepan shared his good news with Musinka, but her reaction was not very supportive.

“What do you need these lessons for?” she asked. “Do you want for anything here?”

“But it's almost two karbovanets for forty-five minutes!”

“Your studies will suffer because of them,” she said. “Those two karbovanets will cost you the Institute.”

“Never,” he answered, and, sensing a deeper suspicion in her words, he added bitterly, “I’m not going to play with cows all my life.”

“Yes,” she sighed. “You’re right.”

He was silent and continued smoking. Abruptly he added, “I’m tired. In the evenings my head hurts.”

“Does it hurt? This wise little head? No, my shopkeeper’s joy, it is your heart that’s bored and filled with longing. How long will it keep beating? But Musinka will never hold you back—when she becomes unnecessary, she’ll never—”

“Musinka, you’re insulting me,” he said. “I will never forget you.”

“I see—you’re already saying farewell. Those are always the final parting words: ‘I will never forget you.’ Your soul is like a slate tablet—rub your finger on it and you erase what was written there.”

He would have preferred to listen to her jealous anger than to the soft bitterness of her words, which troubled him precisely by their accuracy. And, wanting to convince her and himself of the impossibility of a separation, he embraced her in the throes of a simulated passion, attempting to recreate the ardor of their first meetings.

The next day he had to be at the offices of the Housing Administration at 3:30 PM. Up until 11:00 AM he leafed through several textbooks and prepared his introductory speech. He wanted to begin his classes with a certain degree of grandeur, knowing full well how important first impressions can be. No less did he understand that appearing in the clothes he now had before an audience that he needed to win over was tantamount to playing on an untuned piano—even the finest symphony would turn into a cacophony of sounds. He needed to transform himself in the name of Ukrainization—this basic premise finally overcame his earlier hesitation. Gathering his savings, he set off for the store whose window had arrested him half a year earlier, its grand finery filling him with envious daydreams. Now he flew into it on the wings of his cash, fluttered and circled within it like a nimble sparrow, and in three-quarters of an hour he walked out with a sizable package containing a gray demi-season trenchcoat of indifferent quality, a similar suit, a pair of shirts with button-down collars, a Caucasian silk tie, green enameled cufflinks, and three colorful handkerchiefs with checkered edges. After further purchasing a gray cap, pointed shoes of chrome-tanned leather and matching galoshes, he spent the remainder of his wealth on good cigarettes and took the bus to Revolution Square in the Podil, because he needed to hurry. This bus had the honor of carrying him on his very first bus ride and the good fortune of pleasing him completely.

Musinka, who was cooking dinner for three in her *ménage à trois*, was very surprised to see the boy in the image of a youthful Santa Claus, carrying so many parcels, but he only asked, secretly, for permission to use her

room for a half-hour, since it had a mirror. There, he completed his transformation, easily adapting himself to the requirements of his new clothes, since his quick eye had often observed on others where everything belonged. Only the tie gave him trouble, unwilling to tie itself, but with brilliant insight he eventually achieved the desired effect. Examining himself from head to foot in the mirror, he froze in excited satisfaction, as if he were seeing and recognizing himself for the first time. His energy, flagging from secret anxiety, was immediately restored when he saw his tanned face set off against the white collar and the powerful arc of his chest beneath the close-fitting jacket. In rapturous delight he observed his high open forehead, welcoming the reason hidden behind it, and he slowly raised his hand to his hair, to smooth it, to stroke it, to caress his own self and thus show his love for his own person.

With an eager new spring in his stride he stepped back into the kitchen and stopped in front of Musinka, who could not hold back a joyous cry on seeing this butterfly that had emerged from its chrysalis. She hugged him and kissed him, forgetting in her fervor that she had less right to do this now than ever before. Then she stepped back a little, and her more careful observation completely confirmed her first impression—the boy was devilishly handsome, poised, and seductive.

“Your eyes are laughing,” she exclaimed.

Hers were also laughing, in part. He, too, was looking her over from the heights of his European wardrobe, seeing in her signs of fading as much as she saw him in bloom. Never before had he noted so painfully her scrawny cheeks marbled with thin wrinkles, her anemic lips and sagging breasts. Her girlish smile was a grimace on her aging face, and he could not suppress the haughty thought that if she had been worthy of a first-year student at the Institute, she was certainly not worthy of a full-fledged language instructor.

At the appointed hour he ran into his predecessor, comrade Lansky. Looking at him carefully he asked: “Aren’t you Vyhorsky, the poet?”

“True,” grumbled the man, unhappily. “But we’ve been Lanskys from the time of my great great ancestors.”

Then they talked about the business at hand. It turns out that the poet was leaving this class in pretty bad shape. He could not even say for sure what topics they had last covered in class.

“On the whole, I don’t actually believe that studying is of any use,” he finished, “especially the way I teach.”

“OK, we’ll go over the material from the start,” said Stepan. “But tell me, if it’s not a secret—why did you choose to use a pseudonym? I don’t understand. You have such a beautiful name.”

“It’s not a secret at all,” answered the poet. “You see, at first I signed my poems with my real name, and no one wanted to publish them. Then I invented a pseudonym, and they were accepted.”

“Can that really happen?”

“Of course it can. Besides that, there’s another reason. It’s too big a responsibility to sign your own name. It’s like an obligation to live and think the way you write.”

“That’s not impossible, is it?”

“It’s possible, but it’s boring.”

Stepan offered him a cigarette.

“No, thank you—I don’t smoke,” said the poet, “but I do drink beer.”

The new suit gave Stepan unusual boldness, surprising even him.

“Comrade,” he said, “I write too, you know.”

“You don’t say?” the poet said sadly. “What do you write, if I may ask?”

Stepan cheerfully told him not only about his stories but also about his experience in visiting the critic, which now seemed to him a pleasant anecdote.

“I know him,” said the poet. “A little wasp that tries hard to inflict painful stings. If you like, give me your stories—I promise to be attentive. But you must bring them to me this evening—12 Mykhailivsky Street, apt. 24. I’m leaving tomorrow and I’ll take them with me.”

“You’re leaving? Where?”

“I’m not sure yet. I have three hundred karbovanets and I’ll try to get as far as possible for as long as possible. I’m sick of this stupid city.”

“Sick of it?”

“Aren’t you? Just wait, you’ll see. It will reveal itself to you. This one in particular. You know what our city is? It’s a historical corpse, rotting for centuries. It needs to be aired out.”

But the bell rang, signaling the end of the work day and ending their conversation, which Stepan had found of considerable interest. Together they entered the large room where the classes were held after work hours. The office workers sat in a group around tables that had been pulled together, across from a large piece of linoleum, which served as a blackboard for the class. After introducing his replacement the poet left, and Stepan, standing by the table, loudly, confidently, and energetically, like a nightingale singing its very first song, gave his lecture on the benefits of the Ukrainian language, in general and in particular.

XIV

Only a first-year student can truly appreciate the meaning of the term “Perfect score,” which represents something of an imaginary, magic island, unreachable even by silver-tongued poets. In any case, Stepan Radchenko was the only one in his circle of friends who achieved this result, that is, he earned perfect grades in all the courses he had taken during the year. This achievement cost him an enormous expenditure of energy, particularly since he was also giving Ukrainian-language lessons three times a week and needed to spend considerable time preparing, as his theoretical knowledge did not quite meet the practical needs of the institution where he was called upon to enlighten the tired office staff who wanted to eat, not conjugate, and who had only a very dim understanding of the enormous obligations to the Ukrainian nation that had fallen on their shoulders.

The days he taught his classes were all the more difficult for Stepan because he needed to change his clothes. He couldn’t risk showing up at the Institute in a tie, lest he provoke unnecessary questions or, heaven forbid, lose his scholarship. This was a giant headache for him, but he kept up the same annoying routine without fail: leaving home first as a poor student and then as a well-groomed instructor, with the appropriate changes in his facial expression, gestures, and gait. He was singular, but in two incarnations, each of which had its own separate function and goals. Man could not invent multi-personed gods without himself being heterogeneous, because, as a strange combination of striking contradictions, he needed an embodiment for each of them, and the inclination to create a single, great god with a small devil was an indication of the normalization of the human being, that is, a shriveling of the imagination. Mankind does not break down into so-called good and evil, into plus and minus, no matter how convenient this might be for public use.

Having fallen into the state of uncertain balance between his brown field jacket and the gray suit, Stepan was not worried by the duality of his existence, being sufficiently hardened against the minor superstitions that frighten the conscience and poison the lives of weaker individuals. In the process of development he had risen above them. Over the previous winter he had been convinced by personal experience that an individual should view the world and himself in a more forgiving spirit, because in life, as in an ice storm, one can fall and even knock down someone else quite accidentally, fully unexpectedly for both one’s self and the other person.

All of this running around and the stress at work would, perhaps, have exhausted him, except that he finally resolved to find a new apartment, to open up new possibilities, whose very existence was the most important stimulating factor for him. This decision promptly cleared away all of his springtime gloom and changed his attitude toward the cows and toward

Musinka. Knowing that he would soon be rid of them forever, he began to show them the graciousness of a host whose unwanted guest has finally picked up his hat. Meanwhile, he inquired among his friends about rooms and viewed a few, but they all involved either renovations or the buy-out of a lease. He did not want to spend the money, knowing full well that his resources were insufficient to allow for an apartment that would be fully commensurate with his tastes and dignity; so he preferred to take something worse until his situation improved, rather than spend money on something middling.

At the end of June the Institute fell completely silent. The last examination session had ended, the corridors emptied, and there were just small groups of students finalizing their documents for summer leaves. But Stepan still went there often to deal with community matters. It was in the small room assigned to the KUBUch that Borys Zadorozhny, the friend whom he had lately been avoiding, ran into him.

“So this is where you’ve buried yourself,” exclaimed Borys. “Why did you disappear so suddenly?”

“I was busy,” answered the boy, pointing to the account books.

“Busy-shmizy—it’s not right to forget your friends. Remember what Shevchenko said, ‘He who forgets his friends is punished by God!’ Well, it’s a good thing I found you.”

“Were you looking for me?”

“I certainly was. You see, I’m all done. I’ve finished the Institute.”

“I have two more years,” sighed Stepan. “They say they’re going to add another year to the program.”

“I suffered for five years, and it was nothing. But here’s the point: I’m moving out and I’m looking for a decent person—”

“I’m dying to find a room!”

“And you’re wondering why I was looking for you! Let’s show some gratitude here. But don’t think I’m leaving for a professional appointment somewhere. Nope, I’m taking the academic route—staying on with the department at the Institute. And I found myself a big, sunny room.”

“You’re a lucky stiff.”

“There’s got to be some reward for all my misery. But you, my dear little Stevie, don’t know the most important thing. I’m getting married.”

“The same one?”

“Yup, the same one—the fair one. I can’t control myself when I think about it. You understand—it’s love.”

Stepan gave him a congratulatory hug, feeling a strange sense of relief, as if a great weight that he had been carrying all this time had fallen off his shoulders.

“Now, if I could just find someone to marry Musinka,” he thought.

That evening they settled the details. Stepan said to his friend: “At my place it’s always so noisy and busy, there are always guests visiting my hosts,

it's too much to put up with. You've really done me a big favor. I'm very grateful to you, Borys."

Borys warmly squeezed his hand.

"It's really nothing, don't thank me," he said with feeling, dropping his joking manner. "It's a great pleasure to me now to do something nice for someone. I give a kopeck to a beggar, and I feel good. I feel like thanking him for taking it."

"You're getting all starry-eyed, my friend," the boy observed.

"Maybe because I'm head over heels in love. Don't laugh. Love is real. I'm beginning to believe in eternal love. Really!"

Borys gave Stepan his new address and invited him to come over in a couple of weeks, after they were settled in at their new place as a couple.

"Well, that would be dangerous," thought the boy. Then he said aloud: "I'll move in tomorrow."

On parting, after a slight hesitation, they embraced.

After Borys left, the boy shrugged his shoulders. What a strange fellow, this Borys. He couldn't imagine that the feelings might be mutual. He recalled Nadika's face for a moment, her eyes that used to smile for him, and he came to the ultimate conclusion that she could love only him, Stepan Radchenko, and no one else. Although they were not apparent to others, he had special rights to her, and if he called her she would have to come immediately. The boy felt as if he had some kind of power over his friend's happiness and was allowing him to make use of it.

Then he felt sorry for Borys. The fortunate are, after all, just like the sick, and they need careful attention. Happiness, in the final analysis, is a disease of spiritual shortsightedness: it's possible only under an incomplete calculation of circumstances and an incomplete understanding of things. Sharp vision is also a problem, like blindness, and the most unfortunate people are astronomers who see dark spots on the surface of a bright sun.

Agitated, in part by the meeting with a happy person and even more by the inevitability of parting tonight from Musinka, the boy was cheerless and could not fully appreciate the satisfaction of his long-hoped-for change of apartments and the beginnings of his independent path into the beautiful world. Although he cheered himself with Musinka's words promising not to stand in his way when she became unnecessary, he was not at all sure she would admit that she was unnecessary at precisely the same time that he reached this conclusion.

He sighed and killed time until it was dark, even growing angry at the thought of a possible unpleasant scene, considering all the work he had done for the Hnidy family.

Indeed, when he, feigning levity, announced the news, it broke over Tamara Vasylivna's head like a thunderclap. For a moment she bent over and the boy feared that she might be fainting. That would be a real mess.

And then she whispered so softly that he could barely make out her

words: “You’ll leave ... that’s all right. You have everything before you. Just stay until the fall. You’ll leave in the fall. The leaves will be falling, the evenings will be quiet. Then you’ll go. Let this be your little sacrifice. You have everything before you: life, happiness, youth. You have everything, I’m only asking for a crumb. Is it so hard? Are you so stingy? You don’t want to tend the cows? All right, we’ll get a hired man. You want to move out of the kitchen? All right, take one of the rooms. What do you want? All right then, not the fall, just one month. One week. One day—but not right now, not now!”

He let her express herself, and then, wrapping his voice in sorrow and pity and struggling to express his deep sympathy for her pain, he said: “That’s just how it turned out with the apartment, Musinka. I’ll still come to you.”

Abruptly, she pushed aside the hand he had raised to embrace her.

“And you’re a liar, too!” she exclaimed. “You want to deceive me. I took him in off the street, like a bastard, and now it wants to give me charity!”

However uncertain his situation was, he understood these words as a terrible insult. He? A bastard? He had earned top honors, the “Perfect score.” He had entered the second year at the Institute. He was active in community work. He wrote stories that had caught the eye of a well-known poet. And he’s a bastard!? Maybe it’s time he stopped screwing around with this old hag. But before he could articulate an answer worthy of his offended self-respect, Tamara Vasylivna was patting him on the head.

“Don’t be angry, Stepan,” she said, so meekly that he felt appeased. “This hurts me. But all this is nonsense. Tomorrow you will go. Tomorrow, in a week, in two—it’s all the same. I’ll have to endure it. My dear little one, you don’t even understand what there is to endure. You’ll leave, whistling as you go, and that’s that. I won’t cry, either. Only those who expect happiness cry. I’m all alone. Maksym has left. And he’ll never come back.”

She laughed, quietly, with a snuffle.

“Remember, I told you about myself?”

“Sure, what?”

He would be happy to listen to her entire life story from the beginning, as long as she didn’t speak of tomorrow’s separation, although at the moment he didn’t anticipate that her story would be very interesting.

“I didn’t tell you the most important thing. ... I never loved anyone.”

He didn’t quite understand what she was saying.

“You were the first one I ever loved,” she went on. “Before, I didn’t dare, because of my son. How I hated him sometimes! You don’t even know how beautiful I was. My clothes scorched my flesh, I slept without a nightshirt, it burned me. That was a terribly long time ago. And then, you came.”

She kissed him on the forehead quietly.

“I didn’t believe in God. That is, I had once believed, and when I saw you I began to pray again. It didn’t help. I came to you like a nightmare, and

you pushed me away. I left. Then you called me, and I came. My will was broken.”

She squeezed his hands in her own.

“Tomorrow you’ll go, and you’ll keep going for a long, long time. You’ll pass by many people. Maybe I, too, will still have many days, only I won’t ever meet anyone again. Many empty days, if I can sleep at night. I will tear them off like sheets from a calendar and there won’t be anything written on the other side. And then death will come. That’s frightening. Say something, anything!”

He shuddered. There was something unspeakably difficult and hopeless in her words. Again they drifted into a whisper, pushing him into an endless distance; they fell on his soul like drops of warm oil, softening all the callouses there, smoothing out all the wrinkles and folds, awakening a calm and happy sensitivity.

“Well, Musinka,” he said, lost in thought, “You must do the talking. I can’t say anything. I don’t know anything. I don’t know what will come of me. But one thing I have learned—we don’t live the way we want to, and we can’t help but give pain to others. That much I have understood. Sometimes it’s nice, like now. Quiet, peaceful. What you have done for me, no one else will ever do. Musinka, you know this. I did not give you much thought when you were with me, but I will always remember you when you’re gone.”

Gratefully, kindly, she kissed him, but when, feeling encouraged, he wanted to answer with more than a kiss, she pushed him away.

“Let’s not steal from ourselves, my love.”

She embraced him and began to cradle him quietly, indistinctly singing, rocking him to sleep with gentle kisses to his eyes and forehead. The boy soon fell asleep, wearied by events and the warmth of his own kindheartedness.

In the morning he didn’t awake until eight, and he lay in bed for a long time. Then he washed up and knocked on the door to the bedrooms. Getting no answer, he entered quietly. No one was there. As if no one had ever lived in these rooms. He stood for a while in Musinka’s room, which resembled a young girl’s bedroom, with its white duvet and the embroidered curtains on the windows, and then he returned to the kitchen, laden with distant memories. He drank the milk that had been left out for him, performed his duties to the cows one last time, and brought in some water. Now he was free, and he began gathering up his few possessions.

After some consideration, he lit the stove. As the logs ignited, he changed into his gray suit and then began to burn his field jacket, his pants, and the sacks he had brought from the village. The boots would not burn, so he threw them into the trash. All that was left were his notebooks, books, and underwear bound up in his bedroll.

He tied up all his things into two bundles, locked the door, put the key under the porch, as always, and left with the two parcels in his hands, carrying

in his soul sadness, the bitterness of his first encounter with life, and troubling hopes.

End of Part One

Translated by Maxim Tarnawsky

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