

Where the mice have fouled there can be no rest. Where the cosy fire has died now swarm the stinking vermin.

Dasha came home after midnight. She no longer feared passing the dark corners of the deserted factory.

The little tongue of flame in the lamp burnt, dim and strange, in a bulb dirtied by finger-marks; and the rosette-shaped lampshade, attached to a cord of tarnished flex, hung like a frozen flower.

Gleb was lying on the bed. Through his drooping eyelashes he was drowsily regarding Dasha.

No, this was not Dasha, not the former Dasha. That Dasha was dead. This was another woman, with a sunburnt, weathered face and stubborn, opinionated chin. Her face seemed larger under the fiery red kerchief with which her head was bound.

She was undressing at the table. Her hair was bobbed. She was chewing a crust of her rationed bread and did not look at him. He watched her face, tired but tense and stern as though she were clenching her teeth. Did he embarrass her? Or was she trying not to disturb his repose? Or did she not sense the change that had come into her life with his arrival? His Dasha was strange and remote.

He decided to test her.

"Explain this question to me, Dasha: Firstly, I was in the army. Secondly, I've been fighting, and haven't had a home of my own, nor an hour to myself. Now I've come home, in my own house, and you are not part of it. I've been hanging round waiting for you here like a deserted mongrel, and I haven't slept at nights. After all, you know we haven't seen each other for three years."

She was not frightened at his voice: remained just as she was when she came in. She spoke without looking at him.

"Yes, three years, Gleb."

"That's so, and you don't seem very happy about it. What does that mean? Do you remember the night when we parted? I was all bruised and beaten and hadn't properly come to myself yet. Do you recollect how you nursed me upstairs in the attic, as though I was a little child? How you cried when we parted! Why are you so cold now?"

"It's true, Gleb, that I'm different now. I don't stay around the house so much. I'm not the person I used to be."

"Just so. That's what I was saying."

## Chapter II

## THE RED KERCHIEF

## I

## THE COLD HEARTH

GLEB did not take his rest at home. This deserted dwelling, with its dusty window (even the flies no longer buzzed against the panes), unwashed floor and heap of ragged garments, had become strange, uninhabitable and stifling. The walls seemed to press in on him and there was not room to move. Two steps to the right—and there was the wall; two steps to the left—again the wall. As night drew on, the walls came closer and the air was so thick that one could grasp it. Worst of all were the mice and the mildew. And no wife, no Dasha.

Gleb rested in the deserted works, in the quarries overgrown with bushes and grass. He roamed about, sat down, reflected. . . .

At night-time he came home and found no Dasha. She was not waiting for him on the threshold as she used to three years ago, when he returned home from the workshop. In those days it was cosy and cheerful in the room. Muslin curtains hung before the windows, and on the window-sill the flowers signalled welcome to him like little flames. The painted floor glittered like a mirror under the electric light, and the white bed and silvery table-cloth sparkled like frost. And a samovar. . . . The chinking jingle of the china. . . . Here Dasha lived in every corner: she sang, sighed, laughed, spoke of to-morrow and played with her living doll, their little daughter Nurka. But even then, sometimes, for a moment, her brows would knit; through her love, her stubborn character would sometimes reveal itself.

That was a long time ago. It was the past. And the past had become a dream, dreamed recently.

And this gave pain, because it was the past. And one felt nauseated with this abandoned and mildewed home.

Communist  
Women  
Work

Com-  
mun-  
ism  
and  
Social



"That home of ours, I've forgotten about it. I don't regret it. I was a little fool then."

"Well, well! And where shall we have a home then? In this rathole?"

Dasha gazed attentively at him from under her lowered brows. She twisted the red kerchief in her fingers. Then she leant forward, her fists upon the table (there was no longer a tablecloth upon it and it was black and greasy with dirt).

"Do you want flowers on the window-sill, Gleb, and a bed overloaded with feather pillows? No, Gleb; I spent the winter in an unheated room (there's a fuel crisis, you know), and I eat dinner in the communal restaurant. You see, I'm a free Soviet citizen."

She no longer looked at him as of old, when she was his sweetheart. Now she was vigorous, unsubduable, knowing her own mind.

Gleb sat up on the bed and in the eyes which had looked upon blood and death there flashed alarm. A devil of a woman! One had to treat her differently.

"And Nurka? I suppose you've thrown her to the pigs too, with the flowers? That's a pretty business!"

"How stupid you are, Gleb!"

She turned and moved away from the table as though she had become unaware of him.

Outside in the darkness an owl was crying in the valley— all alone like a child. . . . And under the floor, hungry rats scampered amongst the earth and shavings.

"Good. Nurka is in the Children's Home. I shall go there to-morrow and bring her back here."

"All right, Gleb. I've nothing against it: you're the father. But I'm up to my eyes in work. So you'll take care of the child, won't you?"

"Won't you have an affectionate word for her?"

"Now, Gleb, give me my share of the bed. I've nothing under my head."

"All right. If that's how it is, let's start an argument. It's my turn to speak."

"What do you think you're talking about, Gleb? There's no argument or speaking to-night. Shut up!"

Gleb rose from the bed and walked to the door. Again he felt the room was too small for him: the walls were closing in upon him and the floor creaked and shook under his feet.

He looked at Dasha. Skilfully and quickly she unmade the bed and piled the bedding on her arm. Without glancing at him, she prepared for herself a flat and uninviting sleeping place in the corner. And it seemed to Gleb that, as she flung off her petticoat, she smiled sneeringly in his direction.

Well, the question must be answered: did she love him like a woman, as before, or had her love died and had she followed it into the past?

He could not understand what was uppermost in her: a woman's guile or hostile caution? An enigma: was she tempting him as a man, or was she snapping the last threads that bound them together?

She had abandoned the fireside, left the home; and the warm fragrance of her woman's flesh seemed to have faded together with snugness and the household tasks. Whom had she warmed and caressed with her body these past three years? A healthy and vigorous woman, mingling day and night with men in her work, could not live like a sterile flower. She had not hoarded for him her loving womanly tenderness; she had dissipated it in chance encounters. Was not this the reason of her coldness and aloofness? So thought Gleb, and his tortured soul shone in his eyes with a bestial fury.

"Yes, citizenship, it was so. . . . We parted weeping; and now we meet again, without a word to say. For three years I used to think: 'My wife, Dasha . . . who is here . . . is expecting me, and so on. . . .' At last I get back . . . to this cursed place. It's as if I had been married only in a dream. There were men, all right . . . but not I. Isn't that true?"

Dasha turned towards him in amazement and cold drops again glittered in her eyes.

"And you—didn't you have any women without me? Confess, Gleb, I don't know yet whether you've come back healthy or rotten with disease. Confess, now!"

She continued to smile. She spoke carelessly, as of a tedious subject. And at these words of Dasha, Gleb shook with fury, and then slumped weakly upon himself. This carefully kept secret of his nights—Dasha knew it! She knew him so much better than he knew her. And because, without any closer contact, she could see right through him and wring out his strength as one wrings out a rag, he, the warrior, weakened and wavered, humiliated.

Then he recovered, hardening his heart; he even smiled and gulped.

Can women be faithful if they work outside the home?

SCD



“Well, then, so be it; I confess; there were occasions. The peasant at the front carries death with him. . . . But the women are different. A wife has a different lot, different cares.”

Dasha had undressed but had not yet laid down. She was leaning against the wall. She was unashamed. Under her shift, gently rose and fell her rounded breasts. She looked askance at Gleb, measuring him sharply, with a pained and understanding gaze. She answered him casually.

“That’s a nice thing: a woman has other cares! It’s an evil lot—to be a slave, without a will of one’s own, always playing the second part. What kind of an *ABC of Communism* have you studied, Comrade Gleb?”

But hardly had she spoken these words, than the blood rushed to Gleb’s head: his suspicions had not been idle. She . . . Dasha . . . his wife. . . . Somebody’s nights had been intoxicated with her; and her own blood had become drunken through the intoxicated blood of another.

With a heavy determined step he approached her. With a dark look, with the look of a beast, he looked into her face, which was smiling broadly and mockingly.

“Well, then, it means—words or no words—that it’s the truth? Eh?”

A hot shudder burst from his heart, tearing at all the muscles of his body.

She—his wife—Dasha. . . .

Outside there was an oppressive silence, stars, crickets, and night bells. Over there, beyond the factory, lay the sea in a phosphorescent shimmer. The sea sang in an electric undertone, and it seemed as though this deep reverberation did not come from the sea, but from the air, the mountains and the smoke-stacks of the works.

“Well, then, tell me, with whom were you carrying on? Who was it you squeezed in your arms at night?”

“I’m not asking you about your women when you were at the front, Gleb. Why are you concerned about my lovers? Come to your senses.”

“Now, remember, Dasha. I’m going to find out about this. I’ll find out your secrets. Bear that in mind.”

She stepped forward, the whites of her eyes were shining.

“Don’t stare at me, Gleb. I can frown just as hard as you can. Stay where you are, and don’t show off your strength.”

Enemies? She, with her eyes smouldering; he, sturdy, bold, his jaws clenched till his cheeks sank in.

Was it Dasha looking at him with the cruel gaze of an unconquerable woman, or had he never understood her real soul, which in these three years had revealed itself, obstinate and indomitable?

Where had Dasha absorbed this power?

Not in the war, not with the food-scroungers, bag on her back, not in the ordinary duties of a woman; this strength had awakened and been forged from the collective spirit of the workers, from years of deadly hardship, from the terrible heavy burden of the newly acquired freedom of women. She crushed him with the audacity of this strength, and he, a Red War Commissar, was confused and lost.

It happened all of a sudden: he seized her in his arms and hugged her till her ribs cracked. ] SCD

“Now then, what is it to be—life or death?”

“Take your hands off, Gleb! You won’t put your hands on me. You’re only an ordinary human being, Gleb.”

Her muscles were writhing like snakes under Gleb’s hands and she was desperately trying to spring free.

“Now tell me where you’ve bestowed your love while your husband was away? Come on, tell me!”

“Let me alone, you brute. I’m going to hit you! I’ll fight, Gleb!”

Frenzied, drunken with the heat of his own blood, he carried her to the bed and threw himself down with her, tearing her shift, hungrily clasping her, as a spider will a fly. She was turning and twisting, fighting silently with clenched teeth and without shame, tearing away from him her naked bruised flesh. With a final effort she flung him off on to the floor and leapt like a cat to the door. She looked away from him, breathing deeply, and setting her clothes straight.

“Don’t touch me, Gleb! It will only end badly. I’ve learnt to take care of myself. These ways don’t go with me, Gleb. It’s true you’re a soldier, but you can’t overcome brains.”

Gleb, stunned, felt as though ulcers were burning in his soul. The pain was greater than any bodily hurt.

He must not beat her. One has to fight at the war, but at home one must find other ways. Where was the enemy hidden in her, who was so strong and elusive?

He sat on the floor, leaning against the bed, tamed, grinding his teeth with bitter remorse.

Dasha  
Escapes  
Gleb



Dasha's eyebrows quivered; she laughed and went into the corner to her own bed.

"Turn the light out, Gleb, and lie down. You need rest. It's being overtired that is making you crazy."

"Dasha, darling, where is our love? Has hard work turned you into a devil, and have you ceased to be a woman?"

"Lie down and calm yourself, Gleb. I'm worn out from work. To-morrow I'm ordered into the country again, to organise the Women's Section, and there are bands of roughs throughout the district. There is no assurance against death. Don't be silly, Gleb."

She moved to the table and turned out the lamp; then she lay down, covered herself with the clothes and was silent. Gleb could not hear her breathing.

He sat in the darkness and waited.

Suffering and insult. A burning in his soul. Dasha at once so near and so distant.

He waited for her voice and for her love. He expected her to come to him and gently, as of old, to press his head to her bosom, whispering like a mother, like a friend.

She was lying there a stranger, her heart shut against him. And he was alone with his longing and his pain.

He went up to her quietly, sat beside her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Dasha, love me as you used to. You know I've been through fire and blood. I have had no caress for a long time."

She took his hand and laid it on her breast.

"How foolish you are, Gleb . . . so strong, but so foolish. . . . No, not now, Gleb. I've no strength for caresses. Calm yourself. . . . The time will come for you and me. . . . My heart is steeled against love-making; and you, you're passionate and I've no words for you yet. Lie down and go to sleep."

He looked forlornly at the blue window. The sky was studied with stars and somewhere, most likely in the mountains, distant thunder rumbled with a rolling echo from the depths. The wood was singing in the steep valleys under the breath of the north-east wind.

He got up, shook his fist and fell heavily on the bed.

"I shall find a way . . . or it won't be me. Take care! I have never given in yet, not till to-day. Remember that."

Dasha was silent, cold, near and . . . a stranger.

## THE CHILDREN'S HOME

In the morning, Gleb, still asleep, felt that the room was not a room but an empty hole. A breeze was blowing between the window and door, whirling in gusts, redolent of spring. He opened his eyes. It was true; the sun was blazing through the window. Dasha was standing at the table, adjusting her flaming headscarf. She glanced at him and laughed. An amber light shone in her eyes.

"We don't sleep as late as this here, Gleb. The sun is beating down like a drum. I've already worked out a report for the Women's Section on the children's crèches and the estimate for the linen and furniture. I've got it worked out, but where's the money coming from? We're so beggarly poor. Our Party Committee should be given a jolt, so they'll squeeze something out of the bourgeois. I'm going to kick up a row about it from now on. And you, remember you haven't seen Nurka yet. Do you want to go with me to the Children's Home? It's close by."

"Good. One—two—and I'm ready! Dasha, come over here to me for a moment."

Dasha smiled and stepped up to him with a question in her fresh morning face.

"Well, here I am. What next?"

"Give me your hand. . . . That's it! That's all. You are the same woman as before, and you are a new Dasha also. But perhaps I'm no longer the mechanic of the old days? Am I perhaps a new Gleb, grown like a new crop of corn? Well, we shall learn. Even the sun shines differently now."

"Yes, Gleb, the sun and the corn have changed. I'm waiting. . . . Make haste."

All the way to the Children's Home Dasha walked in front, along the path among the bushes and brushwood, disappearing at moments till the red headscarf showed again like a flame. Gleb felt that she was avoiding him purposely. Was she teasing him or was she afraid?

Dasha, in whom lay a riddle. A woman remains a woman, but her soul travels slowly.

The Children's Home, "Krupskaya", was there in the mountain gorge among clusters of trees, the red roof bristling with chimneys. The walls were of unworked stone, well-built



and firmly cemented. The windows were large as doors, wide open, and from the dark interior a birdlike din of voices came. From among the green bushes round the yard also came cries and chattering. There were two storeys, each with balconies, and with massive steps; with verandahs ornamented with Grecian vases. On the verandahs, like melons ripening in the sun, were the heads of children. Even from a distance one could see that their faces were like skulls. Boys? Girls? Impossible to say. All wore long grey shirts. The nurses in grey too, with white caps, also stood drinking in the sunshine.

On the right, behind the buildings and above them, was the sea, intensely blue and flecked with dazzling sparks. A motor-boat like a black water-beetle was churning away from the coast leaving a triangular wake behind. The town and the distant mountains looked very distinct and near. The burning air vibrated with a humming of golden strings. It was the bees darting starlike and the flies buzzing.

Without understanding why, Gleb felt wings unfolding in his soul. All this, the mountains, the sea, the factory, the town and the boundless distances beyond the horizon—the whole of Russia, we ourselves. All this immensity—the mountains, the factory, the distances—all were singing in their depths the song of our mighty labour. Do not our hands tremble at the thought of our back-breaking task, a task for giants? Will not our hearts burst with the tide of our blood? This is Workers' Russia; this is us; the new world of which mankind has dreamed throughout the centuries. This is the beginning: the first indrawn breath before the first blow. It is. It will be. The thunder roars.

Dasha stood on the steps by the tall vases, waiting for him, breathing deep draughts of air.

"What beautiful air, Gleb, like the sea. Nurka lives on the second floor."

She walked on a few steps. She seemed as though she were going home, as though she were quite at home here.

From the verandah Gleb saw more children down below among the bushes and the clumps of ill-clad trees of early spring. The children were straying about like the goats at the factory, fighting with each other, crying. Some groups were turning over the soil, digging greedily and hurriedly like thieves, glancing fearfully behind them. They would dig and dig and then turn and tear the booty from each other's grasp. The one who was stronger and cleverer would roll clear

of the heap of little bodies and run aside with his loot, gnawing greedily, chewing and choking, tearing at it with his hands as well as with his mouth. Near the fence some children were swarming over the muck heap.

Gleb clenched his teeth and struck the balustrade with his fist.

"All these poor little wretches will starve to death here, Dasha. You ought all to be shot for this job."

Dasha raised her eyebrows in astonishment, glanced down and laughed.

"You mean their scratching in the earth? . . . That's not so very terrible. Much worse things happen than that. Had there been no one to look after them they would all have starved like flies. We have the children's homes, but we have no food. And if the staff were left free to do as they liked they would bite the children's heads off. Though some of them are fine—real hearts of gold . . . trained by us."

"And Nurka—is she in this state too—our Nurka?"

Dasha met the white-faced Gleb's gaze calmly.

"In what way is Nurka any better than the others? She has had her hard times too. If it hadn't been for the women the children would have been eaten alive long ago by lice and disease and finished off by starvation."

"You mean to tell me that Nurka has been saved by a lot of screaming women and suchlike?"

"Yes, Comrade Gleb. Exactly—in that way and no other."

Coming down the mountain they had noticed the children on the verandah, but when they arrived the children and nurses had disappeared. Probably they had run off to tell of the arrival of visitors.

The sun was shining in the hall, and the air was thick and hot, smelling of sleep. The beds stood in two rows, covered with pink and white counterpanes, torn and patched. Some of the children were in grey smocks, some in rags. Their faces were wan and their eyes sunk deep in blue sockets. The nurses passed through the hall, in and out. There were little pictures on the walls, the children's club work.

The nurses in passing stopped deferentially.

"Good day, Comrade Chumalova. The matron is just coming."

Dasha was not reserved here. This was her household.

"Here I am, Nurka!"

A little girl in a smock, small, the smallest of all, was



already running towards them, jostling the other children, with cries and laughter. And all the other children pattered after her with their bare feet, and their eyes like those of little hares.

"Aunt Dasha has come! Aunt Dasha has come!"

Nurka! There she is, the little devil! Impossible to recognise her; a stranger, yet with something so familiar about her.

She rushed up to her mother, flew to her like a bird, shrieking, laughing and dancing all at once.

"Mummie! Mummie! My Mummie!"

Dasha laughed too, lifting her in her arms and kissing her. Like Nurka, she cried out:

"My Nurochka! My little girl!"

This was the old Dasha again; the same as ever, as when she used to wait for him with Nurka when he was coming home from the factory. The same tenderness, the same tears in her eyes, the same musical voice with the wistful quaver in it.

"Here's your father, Nurochka; here he is. Do you remember your Daddy?"

Nurka opened her eyes wide, frightened. She looked at Gleb with timid curiosity.

He laughed and stretched out his hand. But he felt his throat contracted, as if it were bound by a string.

"Well, kiss me, Nurochka. How big you are! You're as big as Mummie . . . so big!"

She shrank back and again looked piercingly at her mother.

"It's Daddy, Nurochka."

"No, it's not Daddy. It's a Red Army soldier."

"But I am Daddy, and a Red Army soldier too!"

"No, this Daddy is not Daddy. Daddy looks like Daddy and not like an uncle!"

Dasha's eyes laughed through her tears. Gleb's laugh strangled in his throat.

"Well, all right. For this first time I'm not your Daddy. But you're still my little daughter. Let's be pals. I'm going to bring you some sugar next time. Even if I have to dig it out of the mountain, I'll bring it. But why is Mummie any better than I am? You're here, and she's somewhere else."

"But Mummie is here; she's here in the daytime, and when it isn't daytime. But Daddy isn't. I don't know where Daddy is. He's fighting against the bourgeois."

"Aha, you got that off well. Give me a kiss!"

The children danced around, staring at Gleb and hungrily waiting for Dasha's voice and hand. The girls, with their hair cut like boys, kept stretching out their hands towards Dasha, clasping violets. Each wanted to be the first to put the flowers into her hands.

"Aunt Dasha! . . . Aunt Dasha!"

Somewhere off in one of the rooms the "Children's International" was being strummed on a piano and discordant children's voices were shouting:

"Arise, ye children of the future!  
Freedom's youth of all the world!"

Dasha laughed and patted the children's little heads; they were evidently accustomed to this caress and were waiting for it as for their ration of food.

"Well, youngsters, what have you had to eat and drink? Whose tummy is full and whose empty? Tell me!"

And they all shouted their answers in a general uproar. They were scratching their heads and their armpits. One dirty little wretch kept hawking and swallowing the mucus; his eyes bulged and he groaned, scratching his filthy chest under his shirt. Gleb went up to him and raised his shirt. Bloody scratches and scabs! But the boy screamed, terrified, and ran to hide behind the beds in the corner, so that only his head and protruding eyes were visible.

"Ta, ta, ta! There's a hero for you! Look at him behind the barricades already!"

And the boy and Dasha and the children all burst out laughing; and the sun laughed too in at the open windows as large as doors.

Dasha walked on with Nurka's hand in hers, without a single glance at Gleb; and this hurt him. Dasha and Nurka were as one—and he was a stranger to them—a stranger and separate. Dasha, hand in hand with Nurka, was truly a mother, and more so here than at home. And he was alone, here and at home . . . childless.

Yes, here too, life had to be conquered.

They visited the different floors and the dining-room, where the dishes were standing and the children sitting round; they went into the steamy kitchen, smelling of food, where were more children, and then into the bare-looking clubroom, whose walls were covered with mildew and drawings.

Here, clustered around a short-haired maiden with a brown



birth-mark that covered all one cheek, the children were singing the "International" in deafening, discordant voices.

"Arise ye children of the future!  
The builders of a brighter world!"

Domasha and Lisaveta, their neighbours, were here too. Gleb glimpsed in them also something new, something he had not seen before. They too seemed quite at home here.

Domasha was in the kitchen, helping with the cooking. She was very hot and bustled about, sleeves rolled up, quite at home. She greeted Dasha with kisses.

"Oh, look! Here's our boss! You won't half have to bully that scurvy Narodbraz;<sup>1</sup> it's work that's needed, and not wiping their noses on handkerchiefs. And you must wake up the Prodkom<sup>2</sup> too. How can we feed children on worms and mouse-droppings? But I see your dear husband is hanging around you again. Clear him out! What do you need him for? Mine hasn't come back, thank the Lord. The Devil take him. Stallions are cheap these days, you can pick and choose! Now then, don't you gape at me—I'm not scared. . . . Don't try to come it over me with your precious cap! As for the Prodkom, I shall go myself, and to the Narodbraz too on the way. They'll be getting my boot in the jaw. . . ."

Dasha slapped her on her broad shoulders and laughed.

"So you're gabbling away again, you old goose. You're a terror, Domasha."

"Pooh! They all need to get it in the neck . . . the blasted devils. They do nothing but look at their bellies. I'll take their trousers down for them."

Gleb was choking with laughter.

"Here's a bitch of a woman! She doesn't even stop to take breath!"

They found Lisaveta in the store-room with the housekeeper. She and the housekeeper were both tall, fine-looking women; they were cleanly dressed and looked like nurses. The housekeeper was dark, with a faint moustache, an Armenian type; Lisaveta was fair and her face was puffy, swollen through hunger and trouble. They were weighing up goods, tallying and entering them.

Lisaveta greeted Dasha in her proud manner, and it was only her eyes that smiled.

<sup>1</sup> People's Education Committee.  
<sup>2</sup> Food Committee.

"Dasha, go to the linen-mistress. The linen's all in rags when it comes from the wash. The children can't change. We shall have a demonstration to-morrow to show their nakedness. Whose head ought to be punched? The children go to the mountain to fetch wood, and it's all been gathered by the workmen. There's nothing to cook the grub with. Who ought to be slammed for that?"

Dasha made notes of what Domasha and Lisaveta said; wrinkles puckered her forehead above her nose.

"Comrade Lisaveta, you are instructed to investigate everything in the home and report afterwards to the Women's Department. The ground's got to be dug, that's true. And it's true too that we have to make a row."

Lisaveta only glanced once at Gleb and then took no further notice of him.

And he saw still more women, with white headscarves and without, who smiled at Dasha deferentially and flatteringly.

At Gleb they looked askance, nervously. Who was he? Perhaps it was one of those troublesome inspectors who had to be watched carefully so as to discover their weaknesses.

Gleb kept wanting to take Nurka's hand again; he kept whispering:

"Nurochka, come, give me your hand. You give it to Mummie—why not to me?"

She turned away and hid her hands. But when he kissed her as if by chance and took her into his arms, she suddenly submitted and looked at him for the first time, steadily and thoughtfully.

"Your Nurochka is a lovely little girl."

It was the matron speaking, a little woman, alert like a mouse, freckled and with gold-filled teeth.

Dasha looked past her at the walls and windows and her face grew stern and hard again.

"Now stop that, that about Nurochka. . . . They're all equal here, and they all ought to be lovely."

"Yes, certainly, certainly. We do everything for the proletarian children. The proletarian children must have all our attention. The Soviet power takes such great care."

Gleb could scarcely control his irritation.

She's talking through her hat. We'll have to see what sort of elements we have here.

There followed complaints, complaints, complaints.



And Dasha answered in a voice which Gleb had never heard with words that struck like blows.

"Don't grumble, Comrade. Show what you can do and don't grumble. Grumbling doesn't cut any ice."

"Certainly, certainly, Comrade Chumalova! It's so easy and pleasant, working with you."

Gleb clenched his teeth.

Dasha went everywhere, looked at everything, asked questions. Then, losing patience, she walked into the staff's rooms.

"Aha! Why are there chairs, easy chairs and sofas in these rooms? Oh, and there are flowers and pictures, statuettes and all sorts of things! But I told you not to take anything away from the children. It's disgusting! Don't you think the children might like to roll about on sofas and carpets sometimes? And they're fond of pictures, too. This can't go on!"

"Well. . . . Yes, Comrade Chumalova. You are right, certainly. But educational practice. . . . Pedagogy. . . . And besides, it's harmful—encourages laziness. And you see . . . dust . . . and infection. . . ."

There was a steely gleam in the matron's eyes, while Dasha without looking at her went on in the same hard voice, with red spots burning on her cheekbones:

"To hell with your practice! Our children have lived in holes like pigs. . . . Give them pictures, light, fine furniture. Everything possible must be given to them. Furnish the Clubroom, make it beautiful. They must eat, play, have a lot to do with nature. For us—nothing, but for them—everything. Even if we have to cut ourselves to pieces, even if we have to die, we must give them everything. And so that the staff shouldn't get lazy, they can sleep in dirty attics. . . . Don't throw dust in my eyes, Comrade. I understand very well—other things as well as your practice."

But the alert little woman, with her freckles and gold-filled teeth, laughed admiringly, while the steely gleam shone still in her eyes.

"And who doubts it, Comrade Chumalova? You are an exceptional woman, far-sighted, with keen perception. Under your direction everything will go well, everything will be splendid."

When they were leaving, Dasha again embraced Nurka and caressed her, and the children clung to her with shrill bird-like cries.

And Nurka looked long and thoughtfully at Gleb.

"Would you like to come home, Nurka? To play there like you used to . . . with Daddy and Mummie?"

"What home? My bed is over there. We've just had some milk, and now we're going to march to music."

For the first time she shyly and softly threw her arms round Gleb's neck, and the light of a question shone in her eyes, those eyes like her mother's.

All the way from the Home to the highroad Dasha remained silent. The tenderness still shone in her face, slow to fade. On the highroad she spoke, more to herself than to Gleb.

"We of the Women's Section have a lot of work to do. It's not the children we have to train, it's those damned women. If it weren't for our eyes and hands they'd steal everything, down to the last crumb. And they're servile, like slaves! Ugh! Enemies everywhere—oh, how many enemies! People like that, with gold-filled teeth, it's natural in them. . . . But our own. . . . Our own, Gleb! Like slaves! What do you think about a requisition, Gleb?"



ficed, arousing in him such poignant pity? From a wrecked ship? Thrown into the sea by a frenzied mother?

He stood there, unable to turn his gaze away from the little body. Passers-by approached curiously, looked at the corpse and at once continued on their way. They muttered a question to Serge, but he neither heard nor saw them. He stood there gazing without thought, sorrowful, his eyes full of astonishment and pain, and he felt a deep oppressive grief encircling his heart. Then unconsciously he spoke aloud, without hearing his own voice.

"Well, yes. . . . It must be so. . . . That is the very thing. . . ."

## 4

## WAVES

On the landing of the steel-trellised tower stood Gleb, Shidky and Badin, the members of the Factory Committee and Engineer Kleist. But Gleb felt alone amidst the countless crowd below, swelling, swaying, clamouring, covering the ground like a field of sunflowers as far as the eye could reach. They were there—and he was up here.

Right and left in long rows red flags blazed like beacon-fires. And the landing itself glowed with red banners floating from the metal cross-bars. The banner of the Party Group was suspended from the railing by Gleb and with its thick folds and fringe fell down towards the other flags among the crowd below. On the other side, where Badin and Shidky were standing, was the banner of the Building Workers' Union. And below the railings, lower down, on a rich expanse of blood-red bunting immense white letters flashed:

WE HAVE CONQUERED ON THE CIVIL WAR FRONT.  
WE SHALL CONQUER ALSO ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT!

It was swarming with heads and shoulders, swaying and tossing, flashing with red headscarves; or raising dark and pale faces, hats and caps—and everywhere inscribed bannerets waved like red wings. They hid part of the crowd, but behind them were still more masses surging and eddying. On the mountain slope and the rocks, still more crowds and more banners and slogans, like a poppy field. They streamed out of the valley in thousands, higher and higher. In the distance a band was playing a march, and from the depths came the

thunderous clamour of the people mingled with the roar of the Diesel engines and the clanging of metal. It was impossible to distinguish the roar of the crowd from the roar of machinery. Brynza was right: machines and people are one. The masses cannot be silent. Their life is different from the life of individuals: they are constantly in strenuous movement, always ready for an irruption.

The day was transparent, autumnal, fresh and bracing. The far-away points seemed near, as is the case in this season. Gleb looked at the mountains and at the sky, which was filled with the hum of an invisible aeroplane; silken white cobwebs swam in the blue shimmering like mother-of-pearl.

Gleb grasped tightly the iron railing and could not control the exhausted trembling of his body. His heart was swelling in his breast until he could hardly breathe. From where came this multitude? There were already twenty thousand people here, and still new columns were arriving. There were some marching nearly a mile away along the mountain slope, among the boulders and thickets, pouring themselves into the general mass and spreading higher and higher. In this way the human mass could cover the whole mountain to the very summit.

Nearby, behind the tower to the right, a regiment of Red soldiers was standing at ease. Once he had stood so with them. How long ago was that? And now he was here, once more a factory worker and, besides, the leader of the Party Group. The works! What strength had been put into it, and what struggle! But here it was—a giant, a beauty! Not long ago it has been a corpse, a devil's mud-heap, a ruin, a warren. And now the Diesels roared. The cables vibrated with electricity, and the pulleys of the ropeway sang. To-morrow the first giant cylinder of the rotary furnaces would begin to revolve, and from this huge smoke-stack grey clouds of steam and dust would roll.

Wasn't it worth while that all this countless crowd should come here and rejoice in their common victory? He—what was he, Gleb, in this sea of people? No, it was not a sea, but a living mountain: stones resuscitated into flesh. Ah, what power! These were they who with spades, picks and hammers, had cut into the mountains for the ropeway. This had been in spring, on just such a clear sunny day as this. Then the first blood was shed. Now the town had wood to burn and everything was ready to start the works. How much blood was in this immense army of labour! This blood would last long!



The ropeway was working; the steam mill would start soon. The shipyards would open soon. Were there not enough mountain streams to instal power-stations?

There had been deadly nights and days of war during which he had trembled for his life and thought anxiously of Dasha. How long ago this all seemed, how distant and unimportant! Dasha—she was not there: she was lost in the crowd and could not be found. Did this matter? Dasha had been, and was no more. All this was far off and insignificant. And he, Gleb, no longer existed; there was only an unbearable rapture and his heart which was almost bursting from the flooding blood. The working-class, the Republic, the great life they were constructing! God damn it, we understand how to suffer, but we also know the grandeur of our strength and how to rejoice!

A roar from the depths of the crowd. The machines roared and the wind in the distant mountains was howling. But this was only the trampling of the crowd and their songs which arose here and there, wordless, intermingling with cries.

“Chumalov!”

Engineer Kleist stood next to Gleb, pale, stern, grey-haired, with dry, deep-sunken eyes.

“Chumalov, I have never experienced anything like this in my life. One must have strength to support it.”

Gleb took him by the arm; he did not know who was trembling so, he or Engineer Kleist.

“Herman Hermanovitch, no one can vanquish us! Look! This is unforgettable! We are going to salute you as a hero of labour.”

Engineer Kleist turned and walked to the other side of the platform.

The crowd was in movement, some forming into groups, the masses becoming more compact. Banners and slogans waved and fluttered. Laughter echoed up from the crowd, and full-throated roaring. The planks shook under Gleb's feet. The myriad heads were cleft here and there showing grey furrows. Caps and red headscarves were flung up in joyous abandon. There was dancing, punctuated by hand-clapping and a staccato recitative. One could see pebbles and stones slipping down the face of the rocks.

Loshak and Gromada were also on the landing. Loshak, made out of anthracite; his hump, his face and greasy cap. It was the same face as they saw at the Factory Committee, morose, obstinate, scarred; but his bloodshot eyes opened

wider and wider. Gromada, hunched together as though with cold, his shoulder-bones moving under his coat like sharp pieces of wood. His face was yellow and feverish, with starting cheek-bones. He was raising his shoulders to his ears and trembling and convulsed with coughing. Damn the man, what power kept him going, while Gleb felt like a speck of dust amidst this avalanche of humanity? And as for Loshak, the devil himself wouldn't affect him: he had his work cut out to carry the burden of his hump, upon his back and his protruding chest.

“Well, Brothers? What a hell of a noise we're making, boys!”

Loshak turned his bovine gaze upon Gleb and pulled his cap over his eyes.

“We're getting on all right, eh? We've got the factory fixed up and everyone is backing us. I've got to say that much!”

Gromada waved his arms and it seemed that his bones were rattling.

“That's so, Comrades! There's no disputing that! We've done something wonderful—I can hardly stand on my feet for wonderment at the way these working masses are proving their proletarian consciousness, and so on and so forth. . . . Comrade Chumalov—! Ah, if only! But hell—! Comrades! Here and everywhere . . . and so on and so on. . . .”

Gleb could no longer stand quietly. He felt like jumping from that height into this sea of heads; he wanted to shout with all his might, wordlessly, until he had no breath left. Could one endure this? Here was everything for which he had been living all those past months—here it was, all gathered into one strength.

He walked over to Badin and Shidky, his face convulsed, ecstatic.

Badin looked at him coldly. A black shadow passed wave-like over his eyes.

“It's time to begin, Comrade Chumalov. I shall speak for a quarter of an hour and then you can get down to the heart of the business. And then, immediately, you will give them the signal. We shall have the homage after the hooters have sounded.”

Shidky took Gleb by the shoulder and shook him in an intoxication of joy.

“Ah, old Chumalov! You bloody fool! But all the same, I'd hate to part from you!”



Badin, reserved and cold, turned away and walked up to the railings. Again Gleb felt in Badin's iron carriage and the metallic glint of his leather clothing a stern aloofness and a brooding hostility in his eyes. And again his heart shuddered as from a blow.

He took a couple of steps backwards. Below on the high road dense columns with flags were still marching towards them; between the concrete walls bands, songs and footsteps thundered.

That was a man beside whom he could not stand. Badin stood alone, his hands on the railing, his shoulders raised. He was looking down on the crowd, the mountain living under this human mass. And in the supple movement of his healthy, active muscles, in the alert poise of his head, there was something of unconcern in his manner, and consciousness of his strength and importance, and the pride of a leader.

"Careerist!"

Gleb clenched his teeth till his jaws ached. Even now he shuddered at the remembrance of the scene in the House of the Soviets.

Shortly after Dasha had gone away from the sitting, he had called in passing to see how she and Polia were getting on. The corridor was quiet, half-lit and drowsy. The clock had struck eleven. Low intimate conversation could be heard from within the rooms. There was a faint rattling of china and the hissing of a Primus stove. At the end of the corridor was a square patch of light upon the wall. This came from Shibis' room, of which the door stood open.

Behind Polia's door all was quiet. Gleb had not yet knocked when quick, frightened steps came to the door—probably Polia was barefooted—and there was a low startled cry.

"Who is there?"

And the door opened suddenly, striking Gleb heavily on the shoulder.

"Damn it all! You'll cripple me if you're not careful! What a crowd these women are!"

Mekhova barred the way into the room. She was pale and terrified, her mouth open ready to cry out.

"Gleb!"

"Well, what's the matter with you, my girl? Do you think I'm a bandit? What a touch-me-not! What made you jump so? It's a long time since I've seen you. Where is Dasha?"

He stepped towards her, raising an arm to push her gently

to one side. She changed suddenly, leaned against the doorpost and smiled wistfully.

"Ah, Gleb, how startled I get! Dasha's coming in a minute. After all I've been through, Gleb, I've quite lost myself. It would be better if you didn't come in. . . . Why didn't you stand by me before? I'm ill, Gleb. Don't come here any more. It would be too painful for me. It is just as though I have been in an accident and am being crushed by the wreckage."

Confused, Gleb looked at her, not knowing what to say. He felt none of his former tenderness or pity towards her: she was too miserable, too helpless. There was nothing left in her of the gay curly-haired girl who had once touched his heart with rapture. The rapture had gone, and Polia with it.

"I must go away, Gleb, to rest and get my strength back. There's something frightful in men. It seems to me now that there's a Badin in everyone of you. Don't look at me like that: it seems that it's not you, but Badin. Go away, Gleb, I beg of you! We can talk some other time—not now, but later. In other surroundings. . . . Why didn't you give me once what I wanted? Then perhaps this would not have happened. . . ."

She laughed like a joyous bell, and Gleb recognised in that laugh a tender joy mingled with tears as though in one demented.

"Here's Dasha! Here she is! Take him away, Dasha, please, and tell him not to come back again."

Dasha took him by the shoulder and walked him away from the door. Then closed the door carefully upon Polia.

"Now then, soldier, go home; you've nothing to do here."

And although she laughed, her hand was not friendly but was strange. Gleb felt wounded to the depths; there was only emptiness and dust within him as in his room at home.

"I see there's no hope of going on together. And you? It looks as though you'd settle here for good. And things will go badly with me, eh? You spoil things all right, Dasha. When are you coming home?"

She trembled inwardly; it could be seen in her face and eyes, and she bent her brows with suffering. She did not answer at once and, in this brief pause, Gleb saw that there were two forces struggling furiously within her.

She raised her head and her face became like a pale mask. Her red headscarf slipped back, and her eyes shone hard. Even if she had not spoken, Gleb would have known what she wished to say.



"Yes, I am settled here, Gleb. It must be so. It is better for both of us. We can't live together. We must work out our lives differently."

Hot blood stormed in his head; he grew deaf and suffocated with fury.

"So, now we know clearly! I could feel it—! We were only playing the fool. Badin is a worthless scoundrel and a bandit. I shall fix him when the time comes! He's gobbled up both you and Mekhova. Both he and I can't live at the same time. That's clear!"

"Gleb, you're nothing but a stupid mad bull! You don't know what you're talking about. Go home and pull yourself together. You must think with your brain and not with your body. Comrade Badin is no more responsible for this than you are. Remember that! Neither you nor Badin have anything to do with it!"

He turned heavily on his heels and went back down the corridor. Then he stopped suddenly, remembering that he had not said the most essential thing.

"Remember this: I'm a homeless dog now. I put all my soul into the factory. You and the factory have taken all my strength. We live only with one half of ourselves. . . . I shall return to the Army."

Dasha came up to him, disquieted; she smiled kindly and her eyes glittered with girlish tears. She put her hand gently on his shoulder and sighed.

"It's not our fault, Gleb. The old life has perished and will not return. We must build up a new life. The time will come when we shall build ourselves new homes. Love will always be love, Gleb, but it requires a new form. Everything will come through and attain new forms, and then we shall know how to forge new links."

With bloodshot eyes and a dull pain in his breast, Gleb turned and stepped down the corridor. Suddenly he stood stock still: he had come face to face with Badin. He was standing by the door of his own room and looking at Gleb with a gloomy mockery. He stood erect, his leather jacket shining, his hands shoved deep in his pockets.

"Come in here! You've never been in my room before. I want to speak frankly with you."

Gleb stood paralysed and could not take his eyes off him. An icy inward shivering passed through him. Unconsciously he was fingering his belt, hips and holster.

"You are looking in the wrong place. Your revolver is in its place. Don't worry; the holster is buttoned up."

And in the other's look Gleb saw the inextinguished flame of hatred. Badin slowly and calmly turned and strode with heavy steps within his room. With every movement the muscles worked elastically at the back of his shaven neck.

Dasha gently took Gleb's hand and led him along the corridor.

"Go on, Gleb. . . . Go on, my darling. . . . I shall come to you. Without fail I shall come. Go and calm yourself. Do you think the question is settled? No, Gleb, we shall find each other again. But bound by other ties, Gleb?"

He pushed her away from him and ran rapidly down the staircase.

And now again he saw the blue shaven back of Badin's neck under the flat Kuban cap, provoking him. This damned head was asking to be shot!

Shidky was standing in front of Gleb, his nostrils twitching and trying to hide a smile.

"What's the matter with you? Are you deaf?"

He led him to the railing.

The crowd had been settling down, and the clamour of voices was subsiding in expectation. The songs and the music stopped, and the various contingents with their countless heads and banners had streamed in and joined the main body.

Badin was speaking. He spoke for some time, with all his voice and all his energy.

Is it possible to report everything which Badin said? He mentioned everything necessary for this occasion: the Soviet power, the New Economic Policy, economic reconstruction, Comrade Lenin, the Communist Party of Russia, the working-class. . . . And then he came to the main point:

"And here is one of our victories on the economic front: a great superhuman victory. The re-starting of our factory, of this giant factory of our Republic. You know, Comrades, how our struggle began. In spring, our organised forces for the first time began to strike with hammer and pick, attacking the mountain rocks. Our first blow brought us the ropeway and fuel. Without letting go the hammer, the building workers struck blow after blow, re-constructing life in the machines, in the whole complicated system of these great works. The works are ready for production at full pressure. On this day, the



fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, we celebrate a new victory on the proletarian revolutionary front. In the course of the struggle the proletariat produces its organisers and heroes. Can our working masses ever forget the name of that fighter, the Red soldier, who gave his life willingly to the great cause of the revolution, can they ever forget the name of Comrade Chumalov? And here we see him, on the labour front, the same self-denying hero as he was on the field of battle. . . ."

One could hear no more. It was as if the mountain had moved from its place and fallen in a dreadful avalanche upon Gleb, upon the landing and the factory buildings. Rearing, yelling, din, earthquake! The high platform was vibrating and swaying as though it were of wire. Another moment and it seemed that it would break like a toy and fly through the air, over this sea of heads, over the banners and the flood of human tumult. Below, and farther away, the bands blared brassily.

Gleb, pale and dazed, was muttering strange words which he could not himself understand. He was choking, brandishing his arms and laughing uncontrollably. His laughter came not from within, but through the convulsive distortion of his face.

"Speak! It's your turn! Go on!"

Why speak, when everything was clear without words? He needed nothing. What was his life, an infinitesimal speck in this ocean of human lives? Why speak, when his voice and words were not needed here—unnecessary, stupid and insignificant! He had no words, no life—apart from this tumultuous mass.

His jaw trembled, his teeth chattered. His eyes were blinded, and the crowd still stormed.

"Go on, man, speak! Go to it!"

And he did not know what he was saying; it seemed to him that he was talking incoherent, pitiable nonsense. Yet his voice could be heard to the limits of the crowd, far away on the mountain slope.

". . . it's not a matter of words, Comrades . . . not a wagging of tongues. . . . Keep your heads firm on your shoulders and get the work well in hand. That's how you have to look at it! It's no merit when we struggle consciously at the construction of our proletarian economy—! All of us—! United and of one mind. If I am a hero, then you are all heroes, and if we don't work with all our guts towards that kind of

heroism, then to hell with us all! But there's one thing I want to say, Comrades: we'll do everything, build up everything, and give points to everyone, and be damned to them! If only we had more technologists like our Engineer Kleist and a bit more of some other things—we'd put it all over Europe in no time. And we'll do it, Comrades! It must be! We've staked our blood on it, and with our blood we'll set fire to the whole world. And now, tempered in fire, we're staking everything on our labour. Our brains and our hands tremble—not from strain but from the desire for new labours. We are building up socialism, Comrades, and our proletarian culture. On to victory, Comrades!"

Again the mountains thundered and burst into a roar of voices and the blaring of the brass.

Gleb remembered as though in a dream how he had grasped a red flag and had waved it three times above the crowd. And the mountains echoed with metallic thunder and the air was shaken by a mad whirlpool of sound. The sirens shrieked—one, two, three!—all together, discordantly, bursting one's ear-drums. And their shrieks seemed to come, not from the hooters, but from the mountains, rocks, crowd, factory-buildings and smoke-stacks. The myriad crowd yelled and thundered with the sirens. They were dancing and leaping there beneath the high platform, on the rocks and mountain slopes, where the banners flashed like wings of fire, and the bands rang like thousands of great bells.

THE END