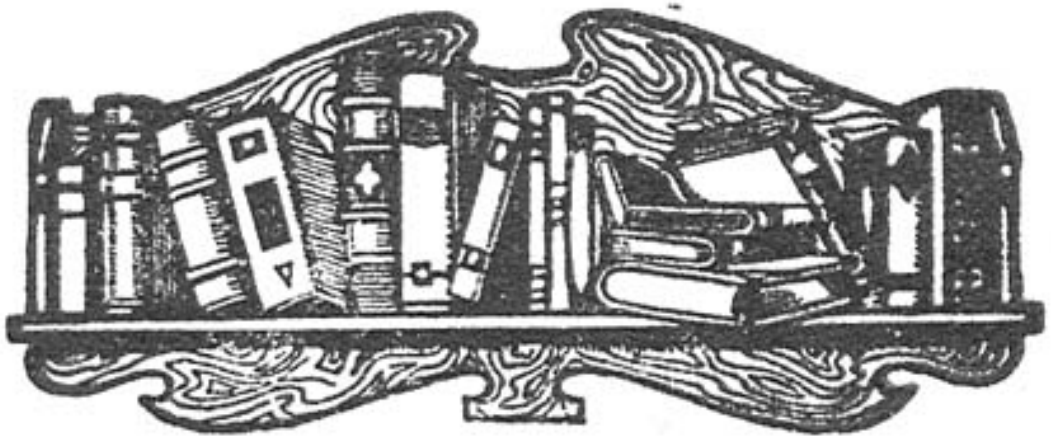

From the Books of

Henry Earl Fuqua

March of the Past

»——«

Portrait in Sunlight
Alexandra Fechin on the Shore of Mother Volga, 1914

MARCH of the PAST

BY

ALEXANDRA FECHIN

WRITERS' EDITIONS
SANTA FE : N. M.

FIVE HUNDRED COPIES OF
MARCH OF THE PAST
by Alexandra Fechin

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by the author of which this copy is

Number
112

Alexandra Fechin

This book is published by Writers' Editions, a cooperative group of writers living in the Southwest, who believe that regional publication will foster the growth of American literature.

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Printed in the U. S. A. by The Rydal Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico

For My Friends
in the New World

»—«

For Henry Fuqua—
to remember
Sandrouskk—
in Taos.

August 17th
1939.

На памет
от Сандруцкая в Таос.

Introduction

»—«

THE PUBLICATION OF THESE TWO STORIES by Alexandra Fechin introduces the work of a hitherto unpublished Russian writer of great promise. Writing for the first time in an unfamiliar language, Mrs. Fechin has used certain forms and constructions which may jar upon some readers' literary sensibilities. The publishers have elected to pass the manuscript with a minimum of editing, in the belief that these peculiarities of style are more than offset by the whole effect.

A work is encountered occasionally which nullifies the arbitrary standards by which literature is judged, and this is such a one. To those who prefer their truth unadorned, these two stories will come as a breath of fresh air and a revelation of the literary essence, for here are beauty and charm as inevitable as the unfolded flower.

Faithful to her knowledge and experience, and to herself above all, the writer of these tales has set down

her essential part in violent and dangerous times. Disclosed is an entirely new aspect of revolutionary Russia, no less vivid and moving than the more pretentious histories of its wars and hatreds. The stories are so complete in themselves that they are beyond the reach of literary artifice and device. Their naturalness is their own justification.

Raymond Otis,
Santa Fe, N.M.
1 9 3 7

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MOTIVE FROM A. BLOK. BY
ALEXANDRA FECHIN

Author's Foreword

»—«

THESE GLIMPSES OF THE MOVEMENT THAT swept so violently across the placid face of my Motherland, Russia, I caught when still there some fifteen or twenty years ago. Now I want to re-create them for my friends in the New World.

The great waters of two oceans are flowing on either side of this new land, separating me from my old home. And it seems to me that all I remember of Russia occurred in some dream life, almost on another planet.

Through the years, currents of life, swiftly running, have washed away much that I had then stored in my memory and now only a handful of crystallized remembrances is left me from those days.

But the memories have a halo and now and then my mind is carried back to them. Musing over them I see pictures that are true and real, yet they pass before my eyes, as do the visions of a crystal gazer.

Thus, although I wish to be exact, minor errors

may appear and for them I beg my readers' forbearance, for I am a dreamer and not concerned with problems of the social order. My aim is to draw a true picture of what I saw and heard during those eventful days.

Many people have discussed the Russian revolution from all angles and will probably do so for years to come, even as the French revolution continues to be of absorbing interest.

To me, Russia is a newly ploughed field and what the harvest will be depends on the quality of the seed and the favor of the weather. Maybe under the guardianship of the spirit of the idealists who undertook the ploughing, it will flourish. Perhaps the parasitical element inherent in the soil may yet damage the new sprouts or even destroy the entire crop. Who knows?

In any event I was there at the time of the ploughing and can describe the pungent scent of the newly broken soil and unfold the picture of my world, as I saw it in upheaval.

Revolutions do not happen so very often through the ages and they do not effect every citizen of the afflicted country in the same manner. As I saw it, most of the Russians had different problems to solve and each, according to his environment, in his own particular way.

So, I believe that my experience and the experience of those near me was essentially different from anyone else's. And answering the request of my friends in the New World, to tell them something of the Old World I came from, I am recalling the thoughts, the feelings and the sights of those strange days, for they are the first to arise in my memory.

Thus my first book, March of the Past, is concerned with the time of Russia's revolution. I hope my reader will accept it as the first offering of a thankful stranger in the young country that has received and sheltered me, as it has so many others, splintered from the shattered old world.

It has been suggested that one or two stories added to this book would give a more complete characterization of the people and the time of which I write. After much consideration I have come to the conclusion that to develop all the ideas and consequences of my experience in passing through the Russian revolution would take several years of work. I have thought it best therefore to present in this my first book the material already finished and at hand, and to follow it with memories yet unrecorded.

It is my hope that my readers will find in Travelling Jugglers, the first story, a quality of movement, almost military, which was one aspect of the revolution, contrasted to the pastoral simplicity of Krasavka,

the second story, in which another aspect, virtually untouched by revolutionary violence, is protrayed.

Perhaps, for the time being, these two stories will suffice. The door to the past is never closed, and in time I shall take up the task once again.

Alexandra Fechin
Santa Fe, New Mexico,
1 9 3 7

Travelling Jugglers

»——«

Travelling Jugglers

»—«

IN THE SPRING OF 1923—JUST A FEW WEEKS before we left Russia—I met in Moscow my cousin Paul, who with his family had left Kazan, the city where we all lived in 1919, following the retreating White Army.

The intervening years were very troublesome and neither of us had heard a word about the other. Each even doubted if the other were alive.

Then in 1923 Paul had to come to the capital city on official business and I and my family were passing through on our way abroad. We ran into each other accidentally in the street. My joy on seeing once again—and perhaps for the last time—the boy with whom I had spent many happy days in my childhood was very great. We had so many early memories in common, and now each had acquired so many new ones during those turbulent revolutionary years that for several evenings we talked and talked without ever coming to the end of our varied experiences.

Although a few streaks of silver ran glistening from the temples over the dark thicket of his hair, Paul was still a very young man, not over twenty-eight. His eyes shone eagerly, and the expression of his face constantly changing, he spoke with great enthusiasm.

In his youth my cousin was nicknamed "the Troubadour" and I saw that he still retained some of his youthful characteristics. Now humorous and sardonic, now pensive and even a little feminine, he was inclined toward mysticism and reverie.

Our meeting and subsequent conversations left deep traces on my mind. In retrospect it seems to me that Paul's experiences are well worth recording; and summing up our talks I have this story, which I will try to give you in my cousin's own words:

»—«

When I look back upon the days of July, 1919, I still can feel the tenseness and sinister gloom which permeated the atmosphere.

Kazan still belonged to the Whites. But some fifty miles west there was a great battle going on bewteen the White Army and the Red Army. It had already lasted five weeks and by now had reached its highest pitch.

Rumors were heard that the Reds might enter the

town before we would have time to cross our hearts or to say our prayers. However, no official orders were given until late afternoon of the day we took our flight from home. I had just come from the office when the telephone rang and an excited voice said: "Leave at once! The Bolsheviks are on the way to the city! No officials of the White Army will be left in town by midnight. Citizens will find themselves at the mercy of hoodlums and outlaws. Hurry!"

For a time I stood still, not knowing what to do—then went out to the City Hall. It was true. The Whites were retreating, directing their troops eastward to Siberia. Just how soon the Bolsheviks would enter no one could tell.

On my return home I found my wife frantic with fear.

"Paul," she exclaimed, "we can't stay here—we must leave immediately. I have heard that when those Red devils enter the cities every aristocratic girl is raped, every noble lad shot!"

"Well," I told her, "you know very well that I'm not mixed up in politics. I'm an engineer and be it Whites or Reds, they all need the services of men in my profession."

"You don't mean you are ready to work for those beasts?"

"Why beasts? Don't you see they are all our own

Russian people and there's no place to run away from them?"

"You're a fool and there's no use in arguing with you," said Vera with great disgust, "but do listen to me. Take a good look at yourself! It is obvious from your appearance that you're a gentleman. Well, they say that that is quite enough to be shot or bayonetted through your head by one of those bloodthirsty Red soldiers. And then what about Vladik?"

As you know, our son Vladik was a baby then, only a year and a half old.

"Vladik isn't an aristocratic girl fearing to be raped," I tried to reason with her, "nor is he a noble lad going to be shot. Vladik is only a baby—and who will fight with a baby?"

"Oh, for God's sake stop your silly jokes," said Vera. "You had better go and ask your brother what he and his family are going to do."

So I went to see my brother.

»—«

The streets were practically empty. Now and then a figure of a woman appeared, but soon disappeared like a frightened little squirrel dashing back into her nest.

My brother thought that it really was dangerous

to stay in Kazan and risk meeting all the debauchery of the army of conquerors. It would be much safer to leave, even if it were only for a few days, and that was what he was planning to do. When I asked him where he would go he had to admit that there was no other direction to take except to follow the retiring White Army, because that was the only open highway left.

"But don't you think it will be difficult to return, once you leave?" I asked.

"I don't think so," he replied, "it seems that half the town is leaving. Some of the people certainly will have to come back."

I went home to report to Vera what my brother had said. She hardly listened to me. Her mind was made up already, and running from room to room she tried to collect a few things necessary, as she thought, for the trip.

"But darling," I told her, "if we go we must depend upon our own feet. The White Army hasn't enough carriages to take one half of the citizens with them."

"Don't you worry about my feet," she threw at me, "watch out for your own," and kept whirling and whirling around the place.

She spread a large table cloth on the floor and into it dropped now babies' clothes, now my shirts, now

her own dresses. She also called the nurse and told her to get milk, biscuits and some other things for the baby and prepare herself for the journey.

About eight o'clock that evening we were ready to leave, the nurse with my little son asleep in her arms, Vera dressed like a peasant woman, kerchief on her head and a big bundle over her shoulder, myself in the oldest suit that could be obtained, shabby shoes, a cap on my head and another bundle over my shoulder. Vera said that by no means should we look like gentle folk, just for safety, I suppose, in case we met one of those Red devils on the road.

Standing in the middle of the living room we took a last look around and at each other. None of us realized of course, that we were leaving never to return, never to see our home again.

Vera, after running here and there, was now in high spirits, her step buoyant, her eyes shining and full of humor. A gay girl and a good sport was my wife in those days. She led us as though we were going to a jolly picnic.

"Look, Paul," she laughingly called at the last moment, pointing into a large mirror, "look! Travelling jugglers! Aren't we?" and she spun around, her wide calico skirts gaily flying.

"Come," said I, "don't be silly. God only knows where we'll find ourselves at the end of it all."

A Type of Russian Woman

"In a fairy land, my darling, in a land where water runs clearer than crystal, where banks are pure gold and emeralds, the fields full of flowers and life full of happiness." And she made a great gesture toward the baby. The poor girl did not know then what terrible torture was awaiting us, just within the span of a few days. I was the last one to pass through the main door and to lock it behind me.

»—«

The night was soft and warm. A few city blocks, a few turns, and there we were at the highway leading east.

The scene that met our eyes was really appalling. I had been at war fronts before, I had seen cities evacuated, but I never saw anything to equal this. Searchlights on both sides of the road cast a long strip of white mysterious light, and in that light moved a continuous line of military carriages, horsemen dressed in full uniform and thousands of people on foot. Every face of which one could catch a glimpse was obviously refined, but every figure was wrapped in rags and looked grotesque.

Old men, young men, women. Oh, what a gathering of beautiful women and lovely children, but all of them attired in the most fantastic costumes.

The whole thing would have looked like a gigantic costume parade if only the clattering of the guns and the rattling of the military carts had not reminded us of the reason which was forcing all those people to march on the highway through that dark autumn night.

We marched all night long, reaching by morning a village on the bank of the Kama river. A number of steamboats were prepared to take some of us farther; but by now everybody was tired, hungry and cross. Few cared any more what might happen to them—all they wanted was food and rest. How could that little village possibly manage to take care of all our appetites? What did we eat? I do not remember, but we must all have been fed, and very soon the sandy beach was covered as far as one could see with human beings exhausted with fatigue, like a mass of seals on a solitary island.

At noon many came to life again and sprang to their feet. Discussions were heard on every side as to what to do next. Finally some left on the steamboats going up the Kama river to Perm, others started to walk toward the railroad which passed within some miles of the point of our halt, while many others stayed where they were, waiting for news from their home city.

By evening it became known that the Bolsheviks

occupied Kazan, and that the soldiers were entering the houses of all those who had left the city and were using whatever they found there for their own enjoyment. Great feasts were held in every abandoned home and scarcely anything was left behind after the conquerors had helped themselves to our possessions.

It also was announced that the Bolsheviks had no intention of staying in Kazan for long. Everything indicated that they wanted to pursue the retreating White Army without wasting much time in feasting.

So there we were! The only thing left to do then was to walk toward the railroad and see if there were a train going eastward.

»—«

More marching on the highway, more suffering with our bruised feet, at last the railroad station—and a long, long train collecting the straggling members of the White Army and those citizens who refused to be left behind.

Every car was filled beyond its capacity. With great difficulty we squeezed ourselves into one of them. Soon the locomotive blew its whistle and we started on the way to the far East.

The trip was very exhausting. No food, no water,

the air stifling. Most of the time we were standing on our weary feet while the train went on and on, without stopping anywhere until the fuel and water for the engine gave out. Only then did it stop in a small town to refuel. Passengers were allowed to get off and hunt for food.

By this time my little son was very tired, sick from the lack of air, food and exercise. All the length of the trip the poor child had been held cramped in someone's arms. We told the nurse to take him out into the open air and let him walk a little while we would try to buy some things. Thinking that we were parting just for a few minutes, we even did not kiss him goodbye, but rushed into the town.

To buy things at the stores was not such an easy matter. Everybody wanted to buy something. The little town looked as though it were holding its annual fair. Crowds everywhere. We had not gotten half of what we wanted when the gong at the station sounded alarmingly. The human tide began to flow swiftly backwards, carrying us in the midst of it.

"Hurry! Hurry!" the conductors yelled. "Don't waste time! The Bolsheviks are following right at our very heels! Get in! We must start at once!"

I saw Vera's eyes searching the crowds.

"They'll be in the train," I motioned to her, "it's hard to find anyone in a mass of people like this.

Don't worry. They'll show up."

"But Paul," she protested, "what if they're delayed? Shouldn't we wait until the last minute? Perhaps we'll see them and then get on the train together."

At that moment we were pushed to the very steps of a car and the conductor grumbled, "What are you two doing there? Telling each other your fortunes? Get on! Don't you see you're holding people up?"

Vera obeyed and climbed the steps, her face very pale, torn by anguish.

"I'll find them," I said, trying to comfort her, "as soon as the commotion has died down I'll look for them."

She did not say a word, her eyes still nervously searching. More crowded than before, the train began to move. One could hardly stir in any direction, one could see nothing but the back of one's neighbor, one could not hear one's own voice. I tried to squeeze myself through it all to look into the other cars. Useless! Vladik's nurse would have to be a giantess, standing head and shoulders above everyone for me to have seen her.

Vera grew more and more anxious. Not feeling so very certain myself, I became irritable.

"Vladik and his nurse are in one of these many cars." I said rudely to my wife. "Will you stop brooding over the idea of their being left behind? Women

always seize on something to dramatize and they torment themselves and others by brooding over it."

She gave me a glance full of reproach and turned her face away.

"If you don't feel like going any farther why don't you jump out of the window?" I flippantly added, trying to conceal my own pain by hurting her.

"I certainly feel like doing so," she returned, and glancing at me once more became silent for the rest of the journey, looking above and beyond everything.

Several times I tried to catch her eye, only to become more and more aware of the misery in her soul, and of my own fear.

Oh, those eyes of a mother longing for her child. They are like the eyes of a wounded antelope. Without shedding tears, they cry and plead for the relief of their insufferable pain.

With lead in our hearts and heads incapable of thinking we had to stay in what now seemed to us a huge monster which, squealing and rattling, raced farther and farther East.

»—«

Was it the next morning? Or was it the morning of the day later? Who knows? To me it seemed that I had been on that train always. One morning it ar-

rived at Ekaterinburg. Vera and myself were the first to leave it. Standing back to back, one turned to the right and the other to the left, we watched every person that passed by. Alas! Vladik and his nurse were not to be seen. We asked everyone who would listen to our questions, we went through every empty car—no sign anywhere. Frantic, we rushed to the telegraph office to send a wire to the place where we had left them. To our despair the clerk told us that there was now no connection with that station, as that town had already been seized by the Bolsheviks.

At first I couldn't even grasp the situation. Vera, all of a sudden, grew very weak and slowly sank down. For a moment she sat on the cement floor, then her head fell between her knees and there at my feet was my pretty wife like a little bundle wrapped in calico.

I tried to lift her but she didn't respond. Her body was completely lifeless. All my efforts to bring her back to consciousness were in vain. I had to call the ambulance and take her to a hospital.

"Acute brain fever," they said.

I was directed to the office, questioned endlessly it seemed, and finally advised to leave Vera in their charge while I myself should find lodgings and try to get work.

"It will be at least a month before she recovers,"

said the doctor. "In the meantime you have to live. We will take good care of your wife." After reflecting a moment he added, "You don't know anyone in this city, do you? Well, let me see." He reached for the telephone and called several numbers, one after another.

"Sit down. A friend of mine will help you out. He'll be here in a little while."

I sat like a mannequin, hardly understanding what was going on about me. Soon the man came. First he had a long conversation with the doctor, then asked me to follow him. I remember driving in a cab, I remember going in and out of places. At last he established me in some boarding-house and left until the morrow. The next day he was determined to find me a job and he did—a good job too, as it afterwards proved to be.

But at that time, with Vladik lost and Vera in the hospital, I was entirely indifferent to the rest of the world. Like an all-consuming fire burned the question in my mind, "Shall I ever find my son and will my wife recover?" All the rest was wrapped in a dim and dark mist. Automatically I moved. I ate, slept and pretended to work. But, oh God! Is there any feeling a human being can ever experience worse than the one of complete helplessness, complete inability to do anything for those whom one loves, or for

one's self? My very soul was paralyzed by desperation.

After six weeks of such an existence a first ray of sun pierced the darkness that enveloped me. Word was sent from the hospital that Vera had at last regained consciousness.

I went to see her. Without saying anything she looked into my eyes for a long, long time. In that gaze there was a mute question, a silent understanding of the heart-breaking answer, a call for help, then it all was covered over with a mighty wave of compassion. I saw a promise of the alleviation of my sufferings.

She finally lifted her thin hand, whispered a few words and lightly touched my head. That touch and those words of her's fell upon me like a long needed shower upon soil scorched to cinders. Life began to stir and throb in me again. But before I had time to say anything I was called away and told not to tire her.

"If everything goes right she will be well enough to go home in a fortnight."

"Home!" I thought, as I left the hospital. "But where? We have no home."

From that day my only aim was to prepare something that would be a home for Vera.

In the meantime the Bolsheviks came and occupied

Ekaterinburg just as they once had occupied Kazan. This time I didn't follow the retreating White Army. I stayed. And the men who were regarded a few months before as enemies were now welcome to me, for with them came back the hope of finding our son. At least from now on we all were under the same Red banner.

It took only a day or two for the new rulers to take control of the city. Like all the others in our office, and, I suppose, in every other office, I was questioned, cross-examined and finally advised that I would be permitted to keep my position, with the understanding that I was only on trial. If I proved an honest, earnest and loyal worker I was very welcome in the midst of these proletarians because in their ranks they did not have as yet many specialists in my profession.

Although the work became very difficult because of constant surveillance, there was no other choice but to submit myself to the circumstances. My leisure hours were very few but even then I felt that every step of mine was followed and spied upon.

In a situation like this there could not even be a suggestion made that I leave to look for my son. All I could do was to try by correspondence to establish a contact with the place where we had lost him.

I wrote countless letters. Most of them brought

no answer. The great turbulence of the time involved everyone so that no one could be blamed for not being interested in another man's struggles. One could hardly keep one's own self alive.

Time swept by without bringing any news of Vladik.

I was more fortunate in finding a place for Vera and me to live in. It was a very small, very simple house on the outskirts of the city, partly occupied by an old lady and her grandson, a factory worker. All we could have was one room and the use of the kitchen. But the people seemed decent and the house clean. We certainly could not except more in those days.

When I told Vera how different the home I prepared for her was from the one she had left in Kazan, she only smiled and said, "So much the better. We have to start life anew. Let's start it at the bottom."

»—«

When she at last came home and we began that new life of ours I saw with my own eyes what a wonderful, all-surpassing power the human spirit is. She found enough strength within herself not only to live, but to do all the rough work she had never done before, to do it well, without complaint and gaily chatted to me in the evenings when, tired and cross, I

came home. She never showed the slightest sign of the grief which I knew she was holding in her heart all that time.

Only occasionally, when she was unaware of my presence, did I see her looking as though she had stepped out of the picture "Sacrifice at Dawn," which I had seen once as a child in my grandmother's collection of images of saints. But those occasions were rare. Most of the time, all through those days of hard work and bereavement, my Vera was to me a bird of paradise, happy and gay under all circumstances.

The Bolsheviks insisted on doing away with all the so-called impractical dreams. They wanted their people to remember that human beings are born not to muse about castles in the air but to work and to sweat upon the earth. We worked and we sweated. Every morsel of bread we ate, every simple necessity we procured ,was attained with tremendous, almost unbelievable diffiuclty.

Yes, those were the days of anguished struggle, pain and deprivation. But even then if a man had for a companion a real woman as I had, he knew that no matter how distant the blue sky seemed, it could be seen just above his own head if only he would raise his eyes from the ground. Women are more pliant than men. They adapt themselves more easily to circumstances. A true woman hitches her wagon

to a star and lets her spirit soar in space. In this way she realizes the desires of her heart more quickly than we men who tread heavily but, as we think, surely, the roads made by our own hands.

Intuition, a little real intuition, would lead people out of their miseries if only they knew how to follow it. There are some women who know how to do it and I had such a one at my side.

Two years passed, however, before I reached the point of being trusted as a loyal worker. After two years of steady work I was at last given two weeks' leave on vacation. When I told that to Vera she looked inquiringly and asked,

"Will you go there?"

"Yes," I said, "I will."

In the morning I found a small travelling bag packed with a change of clothes and a basket of food. Never before do I remember Vera saying goodbye with such a happy radiance in her eyes. The agony of parting that usually took place whenever I had to leave home did not touch either of our hearts this time. A swift kiss, a glance of benediction, and I was on the way to the place where two years ago our little son Vladik had been lost.

»—«

The train ran through the same scenery, so well known to me since childhood. Green meadows, dark forests, rivers sparkling in the sun and little white clouds gaily chasing each other across the all embracing blue sky.

The scenery was the same but the people were different. The train struck one's eye by its unkept appearance. The paint was peeling off, windows were broken and dirty, floors were covered with mud and the shells of sunflower seeds.

I found myself a place in one of the old compartments used now as an ordinary day coach. Two Red Army soldiers and an old gentleman, obviously a former aristocrat, occupied the compartment when I entered it. I took the only vacant place and got myself comfortably seated, expecting a quiet trip which would permit me to make my plans for further action. But the two soldiers were in a very playful mood. The old gentleman who sat opposite them attracted their attention as a red rag attracts a bull. Soon they began to amuse themselves by spitting sunflower seeds into his lap. For some time the old man contained himself beautifully. Not taking any notice of the malicious game he kept looking out of the window without turning his head even for an instant away from it. But the play grew more and more impertinent until he finally got up.

"Sorry," he said, taking his hat off and bowing in the old pre-revolutionary manner. "Very sorry to have annoyed you so much. It seems it is best for me to look for a place in some other compartment."

Bowing once more he departed, walking out with great dignity. A roar of laughter accompanied his departure and for a while the soldiers entertained themselves by aping his gestures and exclaiming, "Sorry, sorry."

The scene made me almost sick. At the first opportunity I left my seat and went into the next car. Chance placed me among women this time. Working class women, dressed in calico, kerchiefs on their heads, shawls over their shoulders. The conversation, interrupted by my entrance, soon regained its flow.

"I tell you," said a neatly dressed little woman with face and eyes of exceptional beauty, "I tell you we haven't got any benefit from this 'new regime.' What good is there in our equality with men? My husband and I both go to the factory in the morning. There I probably accomplish more work than he does because I don't waste my time in smoking, spitting and cursing. I take charge of my stand and never leave it until the rest hour comes. But then in the evening at home he sits and reads the newspaper—he's tired if you please—while I have to scrub, clean

and feed the children. As though I'm made of a different material and cannot get tired." Her beautiful eyes glared with fury.

"Why don't you let the school take care of your children?" remarked her neighbor, a young, husky girl.

"School? You should see the way the school takes care of my children as well as of many others! There they get soup that washes out their bowels and makes them hungrier than ever, and there they catch lice from those kids whose mothers rely completely upon the school to take care of them. Those lice would eat them all to death if we didn't wash our little brats at home once in a while." The glare of her eyes became even more fiery.

"Dear me!" said the girl, "one shouldn't get married nowadays. What for? There are other things to do. Help the revolution. Our only duty is to help the revolution in every possible way. So I'm going to join the Red Army soon, enlisting in the Women's Battalion of Death. I bet it's thrilling—bobbed hair, pants, gun in arms. Wouldn't I be a good soldier?"

"Heavens above!" cried an old dried up woman, crossing herself as she sat in her corner. "The whole world is going crazy. What do you want the gun for? Isn't there enough bloodshed without your help? A blossoming fruit tree should be left to blossom

and to bear fruit in time. He who chops it down for wood and throws it into the fire commits a great crime, for many trashy sticks can be used to keep the fire going, while only a few trees bear fruit to feed the needy."

"Stop your preaching, you old owl," grumbled the girl. "If they leave me to blossom they may pick you up and dress you as a scarecrow to use in the front line. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Yes, wouldn't it be fun if we would all join the Red Army. Men probably would come to their senses then and see that the red color is not the only one we live by. Pure white is very necessary to keep the world spinning."

The girl knitted her eyebrows.

"You better hold your tongue, grandma," she said very seriously, "or believe me you'll find yourself in jail one of these days for counter-revolutionary propaganda."

"And what's the difference?" bluntly spoke out the old one. "In all probability the jail is a better place to live in than the madhouse. The whole of Russia is a huge madhouse now. Perhaps the jail is the only safe place for sane people and I'd be flattered to get in there."

"I bet you would, only no one would want to be bothered fussing with an old babbler like you."

The argument broke off as the conductor entered to check the tickets. Later on it picked up again and lasted forever, with all kinds of variations of low tones, high tones, old voices, young voices. At first I was interested, then I became bored. In any case there was very little opportunity for me to concentrate on my own thoughts.

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Thus, when I finally arrived at my destination I found myself standing in the middle of the station at a loss as to what to do next. Of whom should I make inquiries? The superintendent of the station, if by chance he could be the same man who had the job two years ago, seemed to be the most likely person to go to. For a moment I looked around and soon saw the man in the special uniform of a railroad superintendent, giving orders to a group of workers. He used very rough, rather heated language and frantically waved his hands. At my approach the men were dismissed and he rudely demanded, "Now, what do *you* want?"

"Two years ago," I started, but he flew into a rage and did not let me say another word. "What!" he screamed, "what was there two years ago? Have you just been dropped from the moon? Don't you know

that we are living in a country of great changes? No law is made and liked in Russia now for more than a day, no money holds its value longer than an hour, jobs last but a week, places are fit to live in but a fortnight. Here we are, moving around, wondering what to do with ourselves and with this great freedom of ours that we're all bragging about! To hell with it all!"

He paused for a moment, then continued in a little quieter tone.

"I have no idea what was going on here two years ago. I've been only a week on this job and I'm already looking forward to leaving before long. Go to the town. Perhaps you'll find an old witch who will know and tell you all about what happened here not only two, but twenty-two years ago. Wish you good luck." With that he spat on the floor and turned his back on me.

It was not such a good start. I shrugged my shoulders and went into the town.

Every day for a week I walked through that city, from sunrise to sunset, like an indefatigable peddler visiting school teachers, hospital nurses, doctors, priests, former bartenders and innkeepers. No results. The whole of Russia seemed to be a deck of cards constantly shuffled. All old connections were broken, nobody remembered how things stood yes-

terday, only a few understood what was going on today and who could tell what would happen tomorrow? Every hour brought something new, every person changed his or her position frequently. I also visited the neighboring villages within walking distance. People out in the country were more kindly. There I received plenty of sympathy but no help in my adversity.

At length, weary and desperate I wandered back to the railroad station to find that the train for Ekaterinburg had just left a few minutes before, and there would be no other until the next morning. Absentmindedly I walked out of the building and paced for a while along the rails. The station, as is usual in small places in Russia, was on the edge of the town. My eyes rested on the other side of the track, where fields and woods were bathed in the gold of the last rays of the setting sun. A cuckoo called monotonously in the distance and crickets chirped in the grass.

Something very peaceful softly entered my heart. Was it the gold of the setting sun that, penetrating my body, reached and caressed my soul? Or was it the cuckoo that by its repeated cries, reminded me of that regularity by which nature works, regardless of human dealings? Or maybe it was the merry chirping of the crickets that awakened my dulled mind. All

of a sudden I felt strong, certain and indomitable.

"If destiny makes me spend another night in this place," I said to myself," there must be a reason for it." Taking another look around I saw two log houses on the other side of the tracks.

"Why should I go back to spend this last night in that hateful town? Why not try one of those houses?"

As though led by an invisible hand I crossed the track, passed through a field of burdocks, stopped at a small log hut and knocked at the window. The face of a young woman appeared behind the pane, then a hand lifted it up and a low and very melodious voice asked, "What do you wish, my brother?"

"Shelter for the night, my good woman."

"Well, I am alone at home with a small child," she said and then glancing at my face hurriedly added, "God forbids us to refuse hospitality to pilgrims and strangers. Come in—you are welcome."

I climbed a few steps to the door, she opened it from the inside and I crossed the threshold. Newly cut pine twigs were spread on the floor by the door instead of a carpet and my feet sank into the green, fragrant needles.

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It was a typical peasant log house, just one room,

but kept with immaculate neatness. The boards of the ceiling, the logs of the walls, and the wide planks of the floor were equally scoured to an ivory-like gloss and the large brick Russian stove on one side gleamed in its spotless whitewash. There was a bedstead with a muslin curtain along the wall where I stood at the door, a few benches and a table, all of natural wood, glorious in its purity. And in the corner above the table hung "God's case," with it's doors open, the picture of the saints within and a single amber-colored *lampada* burning in the center. The little light illumined the dark faces on the ikons and the gilded robes of the saints with a beautiful glow, warm and vivid, like a beam of light from the heavens. The whole room seemed to vibrate, responding to the flow of that holy radiance.

Feeling self-conscious, as though in church, I stood by the threshold not daring to step forward.

"Welcome," bowed the woman. "I beg you to feel at home and to rest in peace." Then noticing my shyness she added, "Don't you trouble yourself about my poverty. I haven't much but I'm always glad to share with wayfarers whatever God provides for me."

"My boots are dirty," I said, "I fear to spot your floor."

"Take them off—you will feel more at ease," she suggested simply and pointed at her own feet, one

showing from under her long skirt. It was clad in a clean white wool stocking.

I sat down on the threshold and pulled my boots off. At once a feeling of comfort came upon me, a feeling of being at home, safe from storms, secure as I felt once when a child, running in fear from the outside world back into the arms of my mother.

"Come," said the woman, "sit down at the table. I'll make the samovar boil and we'll have tea. There isn't much food in the house, but the little there is, is yours."

I sat and watched her as she moved about.

What majestic beauty! In this little house of her own this woman was more than a queen. She was a true priestess, with great devotion performing her rites. Tall and slender, her flaxen hair laid in braids around her head like a crown, she moved with virgin grace, full of reverence for everything that surrounded her. Every motion was so easily flowing and at the same time so unmistakably direct, that one watching her could expect that at any moment some miracle might happen.

She spread a cloth of homespun linen on the table and brought, one by one, a round loaf of rye bread on a board, a glass bowl of honey, a pitcher of milk, a dish of apples and last of all the boiling samovar. Then she turned to me.

"I beg you to taste of my bread and salt, stranger. But first let us pray God to bless the food, the drink and the hour of leisure. By morning you'll find yourself rested and strengthened to continue on your difficult way."

For a while she stood silent, gazing into the "God's case." It seemed that some most subtle emanation flowed from her to the saints and from the holy light back to her. The air, where the radiance from her eyes met that of the *lampada* pulsed with myriads of tiny golden sparks. Those sparks ascended higher and higher until she dropped her gaze and seated herself opposite me.

"Eat, and tell me what need brought you to this part of the country."

I ate and by and by told her my sorrowful story. She never interrupted me to the very end. When I finished and lifted my eyes to look at her I was amazed by the effect which the tale of my misfortune produced on her. Her face was white as though made of marble and from that stony whiteness a pair of immense dark eyes, filled with tears, stared out at me.

"Holy Mother of God," she at length whispered rising, "help me to do the right thing." Then to me, "Come."

Following her I went toward the bed. She lifted the curtain with one hand and pointing with the other,

stepped aside and motioned to me. I looked.

A small head with rosy cheeks and curly fair hair rested on the pillow and the outlines of a little figure, covered with a quilt, suggested a child of four or five.

"Your son," she said and let the curtain fall.

"Don't waken him. It isn't good to disturb the sleep of the young. The morning will come soon enough and you'll see him in all his loveliness."

Obedient to her I walked back to the table.

"We shouldn't talk any more," she said, looking straight into my eyes. "Each of us has enough to think about. The morning being wiser than the evening will teach us what to do. And now I'll make a bed for you and bid you good night."

"But how did he get here?" I exclaimed.

"Well," she said, "you are eager to know my part in the story. Very well, I'll tell it to you."

We seated ourselves again and she, holding her head in her hands, elbows resting on the table, began her tale.

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"I can see it all before my eyes as though the whole thing happened only yesterday, and I know that for the rest of my life I'll feel about it the same way; it always will seem to me that it happened only yesterday.

"I was digging the last crop of roots in the garden. The sun in the sky was high up still and the autumn day mild and pleasing. The trains at the station across the field came and went as I had seen them come and go for the last ten years. We have lived here, my husband and I, since we were married. This house and the plot of land around it are ours. To make ends meet he works repairing the tracks and often is away from home. In the years of our married life God has not sent us any children, so most of my days I spend here, all by myself. And that day, as on many other days, I was alone. Early in the afternoon a large passenger train drew in. The travellers left it on the other side, rushing to the town.

"From here I seldom see the people. I hear the whistle, I see the smoke, the locomotive, a long string of cars with windows shining in the sun and wheels grinding as they slow to a stop. Then from the other side of the train I hear many voices. Sometime later the great brass bell at the station clangs, the shrill whistle blows, again smoke, again noisy whirling of many wheels and then once more all is quiet and our life flows on in its own way. But that day something unusual happened. As the train stopped I saw a woman with a child in her arms leaving her car on *this* side and walking in *this* direction. The child seemed to be very restless. Every time the woman tried to stop

and let him down he would urge her to go farther until they reached my place.

" 'Look, Vladik, there is an auntie working in the garden. Shan't we stay here and watch her?' the woman suggested.

"I love children very dearly. So when I saw a pair of starry eyes looking at me I couldn't help stopping my work.

"The child's eyes, full of surprise, dwelt on my face for a time, then he tried to free himself from the arms of the woman. She set him down.

"He was a wee bit of a fellow dressed all in white. The sun played in his light downy hair and he stood before me in the yellow and brown grasses of the autumn like a living image of the Holy Child. My heart left my body and went out to him.

" 'He's very fractious,' the woman was saying. 'I am his nurse. His parents told me to take him into the open air for exercise. We're all going somewhere in that train. Where? I really don't know. Won't you help me to make him walk?'

"I took a few steps backward to the path and squatting down stretched out my arms. He made a couple of uncertain steps, then ran to me. The nurse, a few yards away, repeated my gesture. He ran back to her, then to me again, so back and forth several times. Greatly amused, the baby laughed and we two, re-

ceiving him by turns into our arms, beamed with delight, for is there a joy on earth for us women greater than that of having a laughing child hiding its little face on our breast?

"All three of us lost track of time in the joy of being alive, when suddenly the bell at the station rang. The smile on the nurse's face faded away and a stern look took its place. She called Vladik who at that moment was with me.

" 'Come now child, we must go back to the train or your mamma will worry.' Vladik clung to my skirts and began to scream.

" 'No! No! No! I won't go back to that bad train! I like it here!'

"Kicking with his feet and pushing with his hands he wouldn't let the nurse get hold of him. We both tried to reason with him but while we were struggling the train started. On hearing the noise of the engine the little rascal put his nose from under the folds of my skirt, cunningly smiled and waved his little hand to the departing train.

"The nurse almost lost her mind. She stood there, her arms hanging at her sides like sticks, her mouth open, her eyes round with terror, watching the train as it disappeared around the curve of the tracks. She made an attempt to run after it, then threw herself against a tree and started to moan and wail.

" 'Good Lord! Here I am left on the road. No money, no food, not a change of clothes and the child on my hands! Gracious Mary, have pity on me!'

"In the meantime I rose, lifting the baby in my arms, and he, putting his plump hand around my neck, whispered into my ear that he wished to eat and trustfully laid his head on my shoulder.

"Now what could I do but take him to my house and give him some food?

"For the first time in my life I crossed the threshold of this room holding a child to my breast, right over my heart. I stopped at the door to pray God for a blessing and truly felt that the saints in the holy case had given it to us. After that I placed Vladik at the table, where you are now, and brought some milk and buckwheat gruel. The nurse, who followed us into the house was too upset to take any food. She sat down limply on the stool by the bed, weeping bitterly. I took a place by Vladik and told him to eat. He took a few mouthfuls, then leaned against me and fell asleep. I picked him up and put him on the bed.

" 'Merciful God!' exclaimed the nurse jumping to her feet. 'Why do I waste time here weeping. I should be at the station for the next train going East. Surely my master and mistress will get off their train and will be waiting for us somewhere on the road. I'd better be going!'

"She moved towards Vladik. Her hands were already stretched out to pick him up, when I held her back.

" 'Don't! You're too upset and will disturb his sleep. Let me carry him for you.'

" 'All right,' she said, 'let's be going then.'

"I took Vladik, who was happily smiling in his dream and we walked out to the station. Leaving me and the baby in the waiting-room, the nurse dashed in and out. The poor woman acted so much like a dizzy lunatic that the people seemed to be afraid to talk to her.

"After much excitement she at last came, telling me that she found there would be no more trains passing through here because of the war and the front lines, approaching nearer and nearer. Only the locomotives with a car or two for the couriers would run. But there was a locomotive right then leaving for the East and the engineer agreed to take her with him if she would be willing to sit in the tender as there was no place for a passenger in the cab.

" 'Good heavens, woman,' I told her, 'you cannot travel with a baby in the tender!'

" 'That's it,' she replied, 'the man said that too and he wouldn't even consider taking me with the baby because who knows, he says, how the trip will turn out? But I can go alone. Won't you keep Vladik

for a day or two until I find his mother and bring her back with me?'

" 'Of course I will,' I said, 'but do you think it is safe for you to go?'

" 'I won't be long. I may be back tomorrow,' she returned and disappeared through the door.

"Since then I never had sight of her and, from what I gather from your story, she never found you either. What became of the poor woman, only God knows.

"But ever since that day I've never been alone. Vladik is a wonderful child, lovable and understanding. It was a great joy for me to watch him grow, to hear him lisp and to see his eyes looking at me questioningly or smilingly. We've lived these two years in great peace and harmony. The Holy Ghost seemed to abide with us. Ever since Vladik entered this house I've heard something like the flutter of wings in the air and the light in the 'God's Case' never ceases to glow. But, God be my witness, had I only known where to find you I would have taken your son to you. All this time I was thinking that you were lost—maybe driven by the war into another country, maybe killed, maybe dead from sickness like many more of our good people.

"I never regarded Vladik as belonging to me, but I never told anyone that he was not my own son be-

cause I always feared that the Bolsheviks might take him away from me. I even avoided going out any more than necessary. This house and this garden were our world. There (she pointed to the big stove and out into the garden) our workshops, here our living quarters and there (pointing to the holy case) our church. What else does one need? The outer world is much too troublesome nowadays to mingle in it."

"Was your heart set all this time on keeping Vladik?" I asked.

She reflected a little and then said: "No. Deep in my heart I always knew that he was only a blessed guest in my house. The streams of our lives met and for a while flowed together. Now they must separate and each will go its own way again. To me it will all be like the dream of a short summer night. But I know that to the end of my days, at the bottom of my soul, I will carry an image, equally sacred with those in my 'God's Case.' And the tenderness of my love for the child will warm my heart and the memory of the light in his eyes will brighten my mind."

After a moment of silence she rose.

"Allow me now to make a bed for you and to leave you. I need rest. Vladik wakes early. A few hours more and you'll see him. Good night."

She walked away. But I, lulled by her voice and lost in visions, sat for some time alone. In my dream-like state I felt as though I were lifted up and looked on the earth from above. And I saw a beautiful panorama illuminated by a great heavenly glow. In it the dark, dense forests and the light open spaces, the mountains and the valleys, the large cities and the small villages were all bound together by roads, trodden by people, beasts, machines and bound too by waters on which boats sailed, slowly moving. Then straining my sight, I saw a multitude of lesser motifs, each having design of its own but all falling into an harmonious whole, which looked like a piece of gorgeous tapestry.

"Why?" I asked myself, "Why don't we look on the face of this wonderful fabric? Why do we have to entangle ourselves in the knots and ends of thread on the wrong side? Is it because the ups and downs are inevitable in our existence? Is it beacuse each life is nothing but a thread thrown in the shuttle of some Great Weaver, through the warp of destiny, weaving day after day, year after year, these poignant and beautiful patterns?"

The vision faded and slowly I came to myself.

It was very quiet. The room was flooded with the glimmering semi-darkness of the northern summer night. In the "God's Case" glowed the tiny but per-

petual flame of the *lampada* and in its light the serene faces of the saints seemed almost alive. Caught in the magic of their gaze my eyes could see nothing else and my hand unconsciously moved from my forehead to my waist and from shoulder to shoulder tracing the sign of the cross over my breast.

In my childhood I had known how to pray. But, as a true Russian would say, many waters had flowed by since then, many things were washed away and growing up I had forgotten what I had known. This time, though, my lips moved of their own accord and I said, "The ways of Providence are unkown to us. Be it with me and mine as Thou willest, great God, because Thou art the One who knowest all. Only help us in our time of misery, as well as in our time of joy, to bear our lot with dignity without losing the clarity of our vision either in the tears of our grief or in the brightness of our happiness."

Then I looked down and saw a bed made for me, along the front wall under the open windows. I took off my coat and sank down upon it. A large bag filled with newly cut hay served as a mattress and soon I became drowned in the fragrance of the grasses, dried in the sun and brought from the fields and meadows into the house.

Was I sleeping or was I waking through that night? Were those dreams that floated through my drowsy

mind, or were they golden clouds that slowly passed above me, across the luminous sky, filled with the glow of the remote northern light?

And the Night spoke to me.

"There are two sides to thy road, lonely traveller. The delusive complexity of the one only emphasises the simplicity of the other. Contemplate the wondrous vista spread out before thee and let not thy ear be deafened by the noise of the multitudes. Listen to the call of the cuckoo in the woods and the chirping of the cricket in the grass. Far goes thy road, always before thee. Oh pilgrim! Walk steadily! Sing joyously! Fear not, when crossing the fragile bridge over fast running water or the precipice! Sing joyously!"

»—«

"Oh, mamma! Is it a holy day today?" A childish voice startled my revery.

"No dear. Why?"

"I see you've laid out a new shirt for me."

"Yes, I want you to look nice because we have a guest in the house."

"Is he a fine old man like the one who came last week?"

"No dear, he's young but very, very good."

Opening my eyes slightly I could see a cunning little face peering from behind the bed curtains at me. Then came a whisper.

"Oh! He's asleep! Quick mamma, help me to put on my clothes. I want to see him."

I felt, rather than heard, the woman crossing the room noiselessly. Evidently she had already been up and about for some time. Lifting my eyelids a little more I saw her back bent over the bed. In a moment my son appeared beside her.

He was still a very little boy, scarcely more than a baby. But somehow I didn't yet want to give evidence of being awake, wishing, I suppose, to catch unseen a further glimpse of their intimate life. So, feigning sleep, I quickly closed my eyes.

"How can he sleep, mamma, when the sun is getting up?" said the boy.

"He must have been very tired, Vladik."

"Did he come late last night?"

"No, he came at twilight, soon after you went to bed."

"Have you asked him who he is and where he comes from?"

"Yes, we had a long talk while he had his evening meal."

"Then it must be true. At first I thought I had been dreaming, but now I *know* that I overheard you.

Is it true, what you said?"

"What did you hear me say, Vladik?"

"You said: *There is your son!* Am *I* his son?"

"Yes, Vladik, you are."

My heart stopped beating and my eyelids closed tighter. After a moment of silence the boy said: "Well, isn't Daddy coming back?"

"Oh yes, he is."

"Then am I to have two fathers? Is this man going to live with us?"

"No Vladik, I suppose he will want *you* to go with him."

"Where to? To another mamma?"

"Yes, to your real mother, who for more than two long years has been waiting and longing for you."

"Will *you* go with me?"

"No, dear, I cannot."

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Feeling that it was too hard for the woman to keep the conversation going I pulled myself together and sat on the bed, my eyes wide open. She was bending over the boy combing his hair. The rosy light of the rising sun changed the room from the mysterious semi-darkness of the last night into joyful freshness of the morning. Everything seemed to be smiling.

The small mirror on the wall, the glass pitcher filled with water on the table and the nickel-faced samovar caught the slanting sun rays and sent forth in all directions many bright, moving reflections. The quivering lustrous spots gaily played on the ceiling and on the walls, stood in little pools, like trembling mercury, on the table and on the floor, and on my own bed. The air tinkled; and in the midst of this rosy light palpitating with silver the woman and the child appeared like the living heart of it.

"May I see my little son now?" I said, and my own voice sounded strange to me; it also vibrated in tune with the glory of the morning.

They both turned to me. The woman in straightening herself placed her hands on the boy's shoulders. The eyes of my son flashed up at me and rested wonderingly on my face. I could see in his features traces of Vera's. The same form of eyes, nose and mouth, the same chin broken in two by a little dimple. But his expression, the way he held his head and the whole posture of his body reflected the manners of the woman with whom he had lived for more than two years of his short life. There was a serene poise, some faint but glowing devotional smile radiating from the whole of his being which made him look like a little messenger from above. I opened my arms; he walked into them and hid his face on my bosom.

"Won't you go with me to your mother?" I asked.

He made an affirmative motion with his head but said nothing. It took some time for us to become fully acquainted. Later after a simple breakfast I asked my hostess for leave to depart.

"How can I ever repay you for the work and the trouble you went to for my son?" I asked in bidding her good-bye.

"To wash his little shirt, to cook a bowl of porridge for him, wasn't so very much work," she replied. "If only by taking upon ourselves *that* little trouble we could gain such happiness on this earth, life would be much too easy for us. I had my joy as payment for the little care I took of him. So be God's and my blessing with both of you."

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She herself opened the door to let us out and stood in the frame of it until we reached the station. Vladik, walking hand in hand with me, turned several times to take one more look at her.

"If Daddy were home," he pensively remarked, "I don't believe he'd let me go. Aren't you afraid that she'll cry, after we are gone?" His little mind sensed already the pain that the human heart goes through in living.

At the station, after looking at the train schedule, we went to the telegraph office and sent a wire to Vera saying: Vladik and I arrive at such and such a time. Meet us at the station.

The reunion of the three of us was a piercing flash of happiness which is beyond words to tell.

Late into the quietness of that night I talked to my wife describing my strange experience.

"Will we ever be able to establish a relationship with our son as close as he had with that woman?" said Vera. "Don't you think that the memory of her will always guide him through the rest of his life?"

"It probably will," I replied, "but what of it? Aren't we happy? Isn't the land we live in just as bewildering as a fairy land? And we ourselves, aren't we *the poor travelling jugglers?*"

"I guess we are," Vera smiled back at me, and for the first time in more than two years we went to sleep fully happy.

»—«

Krasavka

»——«

In the depth of the heart
There is many a song
Yet unsung.

In the swift flight of thought
There is many a word
Still untold.

Prologue

»—«

"TRUE FRIENDS ARE PROVED IN TIME OF ADversity," the old proverb says, and I believe it is right, because lovers, families and friends always cling more closely to each other when passing through a storm, and days of common grief and anxiety bind people together more firmly than days of prosperity.

My memory holds many a picture out of the past when, saddened and almost crushed by circumstance, I was helped over my difficulties not only by the sympathy of my family and my friends but also by the kindness I saw sometimes in the eyes of animals. And that mute understanding of dumb creatures always touched me so deeply that I was able to gather my strength and go on.

The three most difficult years of my life were made a little easier by the presence in our midst of such a dumb creature, and I want to dedicate this story to her: my sweet, never-to-be-forgotten friend Krasavka.

You may think I am going to tell you a story about one of the house pets: a cat or a dog. But you are greatly mistaken. Much help one could get from a hungry dog or a hungry cat in the days of the revolution when most people wondered where they would get the next bite of food for their own wretched selves.

Then the horse, so often glorified, may come next to your mind. But again you are mistaken for it was not a horse. It was an animal whose virtues are rarely mentioned in literature and whose image in a fine painting makes people in the United States turn their heads away and say: "This is a well painted landscape, but who wants a picture of a *cow* on the wall of the drawing room?"

There you have it. It was a *cow*! And just because so little attention has been paid to the goodness of the cow I am going to tell my story so that the beauty, the placid kindness, the good nature as well as the great usefulness of my dear friend Krasavka stand revealed to take in your imagination a place at least equal to that held by the horse, the dog or the cat.

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THE WINTER OF THE YEAR 1920 WAS ONE OF the hardest in the history of the Russian Revolution. All at once everything seemed to reach its lowest ebb and people lived in an atmosphere of rapid deterioration without means to prevent it.

Houses, unrepaired for a long time, began to crumble: one could see here a fallen-in roof, there broken windows patched with card board or stuffed with rags and still farther would be a dilapidated house leaning to one side on its caved-in foundations.

The big fields around the city where coal and wood had been stored were now as clean as race tracks, without even a chip to remind one of their former use. Storehouses of clothing and food were just as empty and bore no evidence of what they had been.

Fuel and supplies of vegetables still were obtainable in the countryside but communications between city and country were so disrupted that one going in search of provisions to a village some thirty or forty miles

distant ran the risk of unexpected delays or perhaps fo never returning. Either the tracks were buried under the snow, or the locomotives broken or there was no fuel for the engines.

The ardent citizens of the new, free Russia were now to be seen going about poorly clothed, half-frozen, hungry and very much depressed.

The first two years of the Revolution they had spent in a rather intoxicated state of mind. Feeling at the moment the importance of breaking down the old order and building up the new, they willingly and gladly gave up for a while the then so-called "petty bourgeois" worries about bread and butter. What difference did it make what one ate or where one slept to those who were called upon to help establish the New Regime for the nation that in the future should stand as an example of "free brotherly union" to the rest of the World?

So, for the first year or two the enthusiastic members of the "Free Brotherly Union," eager to hear the speeches of their leaders and to present their own innumerable ideas for making the Revolution a success, rushed from meeting to meeting, devoting their time and their energy to the great problems of the state, leaving the petty questions of everyday life in the lap of the gods.

But, as they flippantly denied divine power, it seem-

ed that God, who so often before had helped the faithful folk of the old Russia, now turned His face away from their imprudence and let everything go astray.

The skies which had been so near in their loving intimacy to the Russian people before, rose now to an immeasurable distance and gave way to the sun, which scorched the ground almost to ashes in summer, and to the winds, that seemed to freeze the whole world to death in winter.

For two successive years the weather was unfavorable and the crops poor. Domestic animals were attacked by malignant diseases. And by 1920 the economic situation of the whole country had reached a very pitiful state. Old reserves, public as well as private, were consumed and to obtain any object of even the first necessity became a problem very difficult to solve. Added to this, an unusually cold winter overtook the already exhausted people and unmercifully tortured them by frost, darkness, and, above all, by hunger.

»—«

I, with my little daughter Eya then lived in a place called, The Pine Grove of Vasilievo, some twenty miles out of the city of Kazan along the Kazan Moskow railroad.

Before the Revolution the pine grove belonged to an association of prominent people in the town, who made it their summer home.

The whole reserve, except the areas designated for parks and play-grounds, was divided into plots of several acres each, which one could rent on a ninety-nine year lease, provided that one subscribed to the list of rules which the association required of all members.

The place, situated in a dense wood only a mile from the shore of the Volga river, was very charming. Tall pine trees, straight as candles, surrounded the open fields and concealed houses, flower-gardens and lawns, one from the other. Members of the group could live there in great privacy yet assemble, if they wished, at the library, the amateur theater, tennis-court, croquet ground and the yacht club of the association.

In the fall nearly everyone returned to the city, leaving caretakers and perhaps a few individuals, who under the excuse of writing books, painting winter landscapes or making studies and discoveries of some sort, preferred to break away from their families and stay over the winter in the solitude of The Pine Grove.

Just a year before the outbreak of the Revolution, feeling an incessant longing for a refuge from the trials of city life, I rented a plot in The Pine Grove

and we built a house fully equipped not only for summer but also for winter use. Late in the fall my little daughter, myself and a few servants moved to the seclusion of the forest.

My friends and my husband, who decided to remain in the city, laughed at my new notion and prophesied that before long I would be back in Kazan, leaving my beautiful country house to the owls and the squirrels.

But things turned out differently. Early the following spring the first Revolution broke out and after that changes of all kinds came so rapidly that neither could I nor did I wish to leave my peaceful refuge. Indeed I never again lived away from The Pine Grove until we left for America. And the more the revolutionary spirit took possession of the people, the less desirable grew the conditions of life in the city and the more I realized the blessing of my hermitage in the forest.

Our summer association did not exist for long under the pressure of the new order. Most of the group either had to leave Russia, or were under such strict surveillance that the idea of having a summer resort had to be given up as a "super-bourgeois habit."

On the other hand those of us who made our permanent home in The Pine Grove were disturbed very little by the frequent changes of government. City

authorities were much too preoccupied with affairs right in the town and could not give their immediate attention to places as remote as ours.

At the same time peasants, who lived in the "Big Village of Vasilievo" on the bank of the Volga river, at their meeting considered adding us to their community, but then decided that it was better not to involve themselves with "city folks stuck in the wilderness," as they called us, and to leave us alone until orders from the Central Government came. So, for the first few years of the Revolution we were left to ourselves.

Of course like everyone else we lost everything entrusted to the city banks, and like everybody else we were deserted by our servants. But the few acres of land and our houses were still left us and we soon learned to manage our households.

The plot of land I had was on a hill side. The house, with a flower garden in front and a thicket of raspberry and currant bushes in the rear, stood on the top of the hill. The pineclad slope extended from it to the swift-running brook, which edged the lower boundary of my grounds.

We turned most of the flower garden into a vegetable patch, placed several beehives in the raspberry beds and cleared the grounds along the brook for a cabbage and potato field. The work was by no means

easy. Our efforts, with the little experience we had in farming, to raise good crops against unfavorable weather were sometimes so pathetic that now I do not like to recall them. But I *do* like to remember the feeling of triumph which used to take hold of me in those days whenever I did succeed by my own striving in wresting anything from the earth.

Little by little we learned to produce most of the food we needed by our own hands. And such things as we could not raise or make we could sometimes obtain from the so called *speculants*, peasants who carried on the sale or exchange of goods, regardless of the fact that such traffic was at that time unlawful. I made the acquaintance of one such *speculant* in the "Village of Vasilievo" and with his help pulled myself and mine scantily but safely through the chaos that reigned in Russia in those years.

»—«

Time flowed on. Month after month passed in the endless struggle of keeping ourselves alive. A great many things we learned to do with our own hands, but still every day brought something new, which we did not yet know how to do. And the New Year of 1920 greeted us with a whole pack of problems promising to bring others, as soon as these were solved.

We wasted no time celebrating the holiday but set ourselves to unriddling the new puzzles. The greatest need confronting me at that time was the problem of where and how to get fresh milk. Living close to the village it had not been difficult in previous years. But by now so many cows had been slaughtered and others had died from disease, that dairy produce had become scarce even in the country. First we had to give up cream. Neither my daughter nor I grieved very much about it, but my husband, who still lived in the city and visited us only occasionally, usually on week-ends, expected always to find at my "Country Seat" a perfect paradise with no lack of anything. Proud of my place and of myself I tried my best not to disillusion him, but the day came when I served him cabbage soup and he asked:

"And how about the sour cream?"

"There's no cream today," I replied meekly.

"Why? Couldn't you get any?" he asked with surprise.

"No, I could not," I answered, feeling my voice rise.

"Too bad!" he sighed, sadly looking into the void.

"Too bad!" I retorted almost shouting.

By the next meal the scene seemed to have slipped entirely out of his memory and at the sight of the cabbage soup without sour cream he began the whole

story over again. His next visit was a repetition of this. The same sad query: "Is there no cream?"

The burden of his plaint became so tiresome that on those days when I expected him, I would spend the entire morning going from house to house in the village trying to buy a little cream, offering almost any price for it if only I would be spared his sighs and his questions.

On one such excursion I knocked at a window of a peasant hut where I knew the woman. But a heavy face with a red bushy beard appeared behind the pane. Opening it a little the man thrust out his beard and mockingly asked: "Well, my beauty! What need brought you out this cold morning?"

I explained my errand.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed with a wild twinkle in his eye, "isn't that funny! In the old days you used to drink cream and we had to be satisfied with skimmed milk. All of a sudden times change, and now my lady *WE* drink the cream and you can have a little skimmed milk. Would you like a pitcher full?"

Unable to say a word I turned around and started for home. His wife, who was a simple religious soul, caught up with me before I had gone more than a little distance.

"Lady, my sweet-heart," she wailed, placing her hand on my shoulder, "don't take it as a personal

offense. Nowadays from dawn to dawn we hear nothing but carousing men. They mock the lords of the earth, they mock God in the Heavens. The devil seems to be the only suitable company for them and between them they turn our lives into a hell. Oh, Holy Queen of Heaven!" she sighed, "save and protect us from evil."

"It's all right, Marina," I told her, "we'll manage one way or another."

"Of course you'll manage," she brightened up. "Don't I know how clever you learned folk are? You don't need cows; you'll mix this and that and cream will come out of nothing."

"No," said I, amused by her remark,"we don't know how to make cream by mixing this and that or out of nothing, but I simply will not be bothered any more with it. We can live without it, can't we?"

"Sure enough one can live without cream," she agreed and we parted in a friendly spirit.

At home many things were waiting for my attention and soon I had forgotten my unpleasant experience of that morning. But by evening, after working hard all day and constantly listening for the train that should bring my husband from the city I grew very tired. He finally arrived and seating himself at the table for his supper after the usual questions, not knowing about my adventure he jokingly asked:

"Well, and have you got any sour cream for my soup this time?"

His joke struck right at my weak spot. The spiteful red-bearded face arose before my eyes and it seemed to me that my husband had something in common with it.

"Nowadays we hear nothing but carousing men who mock at everything." Marina's words passed through my mind. And abruptly jumping to my feet I let my chair fall and ran to my bedroom. There burying my head in the pillows I broke into sobs. My little daughter came several times, petted me on the shoulder and tried to console me.

"Oh, don't cry!" she said "don't cry, dear! I scolded him; and he really isn't angry, he says," she whispered, "'damned be that cream—after all I don't want it,'—see? He isn't angry!"

The child was sweet but I couldn't pull myself together and kept weeping. At last he, the cause of it all, entered the room, paced up and down for a while then stopping by my bed said: "I'm sorry! I really never realized how hard it must be for you to keep things going. After the hectic life in the city, everything here seems so orderly, so easy that I forget about the hardship of the times. Eya tells me that it's very difficult for you to keep things going."

My tears dried as the fire of rage caught at my

throat. "Yes!" I shouted, sitting up, "a child of five has to explain to a man about the difficulties of life nowadays! Are you blind? Or are you just dumb? I bet like Marina you think that I can make cream out of nothing!"

"Now mamma!" Eya ran up trying to pacify me, "please, don't talk about cream anymore! Warm water tastes just as good to me!"

"Warm water?" I frantically cried, "you want me to raise my only child on warm water! Is that what you want me to do?"

"But what can be done about it?" he said and made a hopeless gesture with his hands.

"What can be done?" I aped his gesture, "cream and milk don't come out of nothing? They come out of a *cow*. The thing to do then is to get a cow!"

The last words were so unexpected that even I myself sat for a long time surprised at the very idea. My husband stood blinking his eyes and repeating: "A cow! A cow! But what are you going to do with a cow?"

"Milk it! Isn't that what people usually do with a cow!"

"But there is a certain amount of care that the animal requires—one can't just keep on milking it."

"Well do you think I could never learn how to take care of a cow? Do you think I'm stupid and

not capable of learning what every peasant woman knows?"

"I don't think you stupid; you may learn how, but you may not be strong enough to do it."

"Leave that worry to me and do *your* part. When you go back to town try to raise enough money to buy a cow."

"Good heavens!" *he* began to shout now, "where can I raise that much money? A cow nowadays costs more than the largest of the palaces. You may just as well order me to raise enough money to buy the whole city of Kazan for you."

"I don't want your city of Kazan, you can keep it for yourself," I retorted, growing more and more certain of the reasonableness of my idea, "I'm not ordering you to do anything. If you don't want to help me just leave me alone. After all it was because of *you* wailing for cream that this whole trouble started."

"Dear me!" he grumbled nervously turning now here, now there, "first she wanted a house in the country, now she wants a cow! What next? And where do you think you'll find that cow—as far as I know there aren't any for sale."

"Leave that to me!" I said decisively and as my good humor was restored I pulled Eya towards me. She, all radiant at the thought of a new adventure, climbed upon my knees and kissing me all over

chirped: "Oh my mamma! Oh my darling! I'll help you! When summer comes I'll pull the best, the greenest grass in the fields to feed our little cow and I'll bring lots of cool fresh water from the stream for her to drink when she's at home. But still more I'd love to sit all day long in a meadow, the way shepherds do, watching her pasturing, and how I'd love to lead her home in the evenings so that we can all have plenty of fresh milk."

"Yes, we'll all have plenty of fresh milk if only that little cow of yours won't set you both on the end of her horns," scornfully added my husband. But his eyes gazing at us told a different story and I knew that he somehow would find enough money to buy a cow.

»—«

All that night I could not sleep very well. Thoughts, like big drones, flew buzzing round and round my head and I was unable to chase them away. The prospect of purchasing a cow excited me as though I were expecting the arrival of a new member of the family. In my mind I prepared everything for her comfort. And by the morning I felt I knew much more than anyone has ever known about how to receive and treat a cow. I grew very impatient to carry out my plans.

"If he goes to town for money," I said to myself thinking of my husband, "he may not come back for weeks or even months. Things are complicated nowadays and he doesn't like to hurry anyway! But I? How can I wait with folded hands?"

As I certainly could not do that, I decided that the very minute he should leave I would go to the village to see my friends among the peasants and consult them in the matter. Maybe I could borrow money right here and the whole thing could be arranged in a day or two. That was the way I liked business to be done.

My husband left for the city and Eya and myself, after bundling ourselves in furs, for it was very cold outside, went to "The Big Village of Vasilievo."

There was a peasant named Anton, who for years had been an elder of the church and when contributions were needed he used to come to us for help. Although we seldom went to church, I never could refuse his pleas and that made a bond of friendship between us. First of all we went to see him.

Anton and his wife cordially greeted us at the door. It was Sunday and their house glowed with cleanliness. Fresh straw floor-mats glittered, reflecting the sun. White curtains seemed to breathe slightly moving over the geraniums blossoming in pots on window sills. The whole atmosphere was so warm, and the

freshly baked bread smelt so good that on entering it from the windy outside one felt softened and joyous.

"We came to the right place," I said to myself and stepped over the threshold. Upon being invited in we crossed the room to a bench.

"Won't you kindly partake of our humble meal?" offered the wife.

The boiling samovar cheerfully zummed, the fresh rye buns gave off such an appetizing fragrance that it was impossible to refuse. Laying aside our furs we seated ourselves at the table.

Anton moving and talking slowly with ceremonious dignity assumed by elders of the church, asked about our health, about the general state of our affairs and about our prospects.

"I came to ask for your advice Anton," I told him and laid before him my plans.

"Your task is going to be a difficult one, my lady," he said shaking his head. "But of course all things are possible. If one desires a thing hard enough, it is always bound to come. I can't help you with money, for I have none, but I can make inquiries about the cow. Somewhere there may be a good one for sale. Then, if you wish I'll take you to see it and if the deal goes through I'll help you bring your purchase home. Now, you secure the money and I'll try to find the cow. How does that suit you?"

"It suits me perfectly," I replied, "how much money do you think we'll need?"

"Well," he reflected a moment, "not less than ten million rubles. You see Aunt Martha sold her cow a month ago for five. All prices have doubled since then, so you must have at least ten on hand. Isn't it ridiculous! Ten million rubles for a cow! Believe it or not but that will be the price!"

"Believe it or not, I think I'll get the money," I laughed and feeling that half of my problem was nearly solved I hurried away in search of the money.

»—«

As I walked along the broad snowy streets, holding Eya by the hand, several passersby greeted us, saying:

"And where does the little fairy lead her step today?"

My daughter was very popular in the village and always was called by all kinds of nick-names.

"Where are we going mamma?" she asked.

Yes, where were we going? I had to see my acquaintance the *Speculant*, for he was the person through whose hands money poured like water in those days. But was it proper to take Eya there? His house had the reputation of a drinking and gambling den.

"Would you like to stop and see Aunt Martha, while I go to attend to some business?" I asked the child.

"Yes," she nodded, "I like Aunt Martha."

Widow Martha lost her three sons in the war and now lived all by herself in a little hut on the edge of the village. We knocked at her door.

"Pray come in!" her voice called from the inside, so we entered. The room, almost severe in its simplicity, looked like the cell of a nun. Two slender home-made waxen candles were lit before the images of the saints, in celebration of Sunday and old Martha, very erect, with spectacles on her nose, was sitting at the window reading a prayer-book. She glanced over her spectacles, hurriedly put aside her book and removing her glasses, rose. Her wrinkled countenance broke into a radiant smile as she moved toward us. Being very fond of my daughter she exclaimed, "For God's sake ! Whom do I see ? The little Princess from the Pine Grove come to see me! Welcome! Welcome!" And she bent over Eya, trying to unbutton her wraps.

"Martha," I said, "I have to go and see Philip 'The Speculant,' do you think it is right to take Eya there?"

"Good Lord, no!" She clapped her hands. "An innocent child should never visit 'Philka The Rat' and if I were you, I wouldn't cross his threshold either."

"Now, Martha!" I protested, "many times he's been good to me and right now I have great need of him."

"All right! all right, go then and God be with you! But leave the little one here. She can play with the lambs. See, what I have?" She pointed toward the corner. On a straw mat two young white lambs were curled up in a fluffy ball and sweetly dozed muzzle to muzzle.

"Oh mamma! May I stay here!" Eya pleaded.

"They were born only a few days ago. It's cold outside! I had to bring them into the house." Martha was saying tenderly gazing at the lambs.

"Well, I'm going then," and I started towards the door.

"Yes, do go! I'll have tea ready and we'll chat when you come back."

»—«

Philka, nicknamed 'The Rat,' lived at the other end of the village. As I approached his house, I saw at his gate a horse harnessed to a sledge and my heart sank down.

"He has visitors even in the day time," I thought "and now I won't have a chance to speak to him."

Nevertheless, I hastened and reached his yard com-

pletely out of breath. Frosty air clung to my nostrils and my heavy coat, wrapping itself about my legs, hampered my steps.

Philka, a huge man of the type of pirate or bandit one sees in children's books, was in the yard.

"What has happened?" he asked in a harsh drunkard's voice looking at me inquiringly.

"Nothing! Oh nothing!" I stammered, "only I thought you had visitors, for there's a horse at the the gate!"

"And what if I had visitors? Are you afraid of them? Besides, that's my own horse. Go in, I presume you have some business for me?"

"Yes! Yes! I have something to ask of you!"

"Oh! Go into the house and rest a while," he said, annoyed with my stammering. "Wife and children are there and I'll be with you in a moment."

I went in. A spacious room divided by a partition presented an entirely different effect from that of the house of Anton or Martha. Evidences of newly acquired prosperity stared at one from every side. The corner given over to the pictures of Saints was richly decorated with paper flowers of all shapes and colors. Right next it hung a portrait of Karl Marx, evidently cut out of a magazine and pasted on the wall; then there was a large mirror with a crooked glass in a fancy gilded frame and many other things

over-loaded the walls, usually so beautiful in the bareness of pine logs, that the whole room appeared like the booth of a clown at the fair.

For an instant I closed my eyes. A girl about ten took my hand and led me to a chair.

"Would you like a glass of water?" she asked and the sound of her voice brought me back to myself.

"How do you do!" I hastened to say.

"Good day!" she smiled at me.

The child was pretty, but like her surroundings she was over decorated. The top of her curly head was embellished by a huge red bow, a pair of earrings flopped down from her little ears, jingling and sparkling at her every motion and a double row of cheap beads, the kind one hangs on the Christmas tree, completed the frame out of which her face seemed to laugh and to cry at the same time.

"The head of a little gypsy," I thought.

Her nondescript clothes were neither of the peasantry nor of the city folk, but a queer mixture of both.

"Mother will be in presently," she announced, in the manner of a badly trained waitress.

"I'll wait," I said and began again to examine the room. The most prominent part of the floor was occupied by a large overstuffed armchair, obviously a remnant of, bourgeois furnishings which Philka

probably got in exchange for provisions or liquor. It stood in the middle of the room like a throne. More chairs, tables, and an old gramophone with a nickel-plated horn. This and that, every piece telling a sad story of someone's struggle for life, and of Philka's skill in both delivering prohibited merchandise and getting away with anything he could lay his hands on by way of payment.

At length from behind the partition came the hostess with a small boy clinging to her skirt. In contrast to all that I saw there, she bore an air of melancholy weariness. Greeting me with a silent bow she passed to the cupboard, opened it and gave something to the boy, who swiftly turned and ran back.

"He's small and shy," the woman gloomily apologized.

"Then he isn't like his sister?" I asked, trying to start the conversation.

"No, no he isn't. That one is bold. She likes her father's business and enjoys helping him. But the boy is timid, he mostly stays with me behind the partition."

A sound of heavy steps was heard. Approaching from the outside and noisily banging the door, in came Philka. He threw his hat and sheep-skin coat on a chest, ran his big fingers through the thicket of his hair and caressing his belly ordered: "Brew! quick get me some brew!"

The girl hastened to carry out his order but the woman, glancing at him disapprovingly, slowly marched to a window and throughout my visit stood there pretending to watch the street. She listened though, to our conversation and now and then made a sharp remark.

"A-a it's cold!" Philka rubbed his hands, "wind like a razor slashes the skin to pieces."

"It won't hurt *your* hide," the woman grumbled.

"Amphissa! you keep quiet. The lady came on business and we're going to have a good talk, you may listen, but don't you interrupt us," and he sank into the "throne."

The girl brought a large earthen jug, placed it on a table and after getting two glasses on a tray was ready to fill them with the contents from the jug when Philka stopped her.

"No, move the table here, I want to treat my guest with my own hand."

The girl obeyed.

"Take your coat off and come here!" He turned to me. "Drinking before an important conversation is like greasing a cart before going on a long trip,—it keeps the wheels rolling."

"I don't drink," I protested.

"Nonsense!" he yelled, "anyone who wants to deal with Philka has to drink first, such is my habit.

It won't poison you! Come here, I tell you!"

I took off my coat and seated myself opposite him.

"Well! Well!" he kept saying, pouring the brew and smacking his lips. "It's a great life! Drink this and it'll seem to you still greater! Then we'll talk business."

The dark, sparkling liquid foamed in the glasses. I took a taste. It was good. But after the first swallow my head grew light, a gay ringing filled my ears and all the doubts that troubled my mind before, now melted away. I was quite ready to speak business to Philka the Rat, the wheels of my cart were well greased.

"Now, what did you run short of?" Philka asked, wiping his whiskers with the sleeve of his shirt and pouring himself another glass. "Flour? Meat? Sugar? Anything your Excellency wishes! Philka is at your service!"

"No Philip," I shook my head, "I have enough flour, neither do I need meat, but I'm short of money this time."

"Bah!" he made a face of great surprise, "I thought you were manufacturing the damned *creditcas* right at home, in that blessed Pine Grove of yours. How is it that you happened to be short of it?"

"Well, you see," I made a face too, trying to keep in tune with him, "I need a large sum in a hurry and

have no time to spare manufacturing it myself."

"That's bad! That's very bad!" he wagged his head, "let's see, how much do you need?"

"Ten million rubles!" I threw in one breath.

"Phew!" he gave a long whistle, "is that all? And may I ask your Excellency what you're going to do with it? You know, money isn't much in favour, these days? If you're minded to put it under your pillow for safe keeping, you'll be sorry, for in a couple of months a new pattern of bills may be put in circulation and yours will be worth nothing."

"No," I pleaded, "if you get me the money I'll not put it under my pillow, I'll spend it right away in one big gulp."

"How?" His eyes shone with curiosity.

"I'm going to buy something very interesting."

"There aren't very many interesting things on sale nowadays, my lady," he shook his head again, "but enough fooling, tell me what have you in mind to buy?"

"A cow! A live, healthy, well behaved cow!" I stated.

For a time he looked at me as though not knowing if he should take me seriously. Then flinging himself back on his "throne," he began to laugh.

"Listen to her! Just listen to her! Amphissa!" he called to his wife, "have you heard that? She wants

to buy a healthy, well behaved cow! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"What is there so funny about it?" Amphissa came out of her melancholy, "maybe she likes milk more than you like your brew, besides the lady has a child," and she gave me an understanding, sympathetic glance.

"Yes, Philip," I continued encouraged by her expression, "I have a child, and we like milk better than you do your brew, and there's no risk for you in lending me the money because you know I'll return it, with interest too, and if I fail, you can take my cow and slaughter it. Meat is growing every day more and more expensive, so you'll suffer no loss, and altogether it's a splendid proposition."

"Good investment, all right," Amphissa nodded, "if his head weren't swimming in brew all the time he'd probably catch on to your reasoning, but as it is now, reasoning doesn't reach his thick brain."

"Oh, hell!" Philka jumped to his feet, "it's bad enough to have one female to pick at you all the time but when *two* of them get on the job there's no escaping,—they most certainly will pick one to death!"

"Look at him!" Amphissa grew more and more excited, "just look! Ain't he dying? His little hands are worn to the bone from hard work and his belly sticks out, swelled from too much worrying, I guess, about his family!"

For an instant Philka looked at her with scorn, then turned away, sat back in his chair and grinned.

"The old woman doesn't approve of my business! She's acid because her friends, hypocritical old females like herself, don't come here anymore to make a 'mortuary' out of my house."

"Indeed a 'merry-go-round' suits *you* better. There we have it all around us," she spread her hands, "and it costs you plenty to keep it going."

"Last night," Philka winked his eye to me, "I lost a little money in gambling, now she's trying to eat me alive."

"A little!" Amphissa flamed, "indeed a little! it's called a little if *you* lose it, but it seems *a lot* if somebody else asks for it. He gambled away almost as much as you're asking now for your cow," she said to me and again gave an encouraging glance.

"You see Philip," I at last had a chance to put my word in, "what is ten million rubles to you? Today you may have it, tomorrow it may be gone? You had better give it to me. Really it's a good investment and there isn't the slightest risk of your losing the money."

"Well," he scratched his head, "a live animal is alive, but many of them die, you know, and then what?"

"Don't you trust me to take good care of it?"

"That's just it!" he said, "you may try so hard, that it'll die in your good care."

"Oh, Lord!" Amphissa waved her hand, "will you stop braying. We'll pray God that the cow survives."

"Pray God! Pray God!" Philka imitated her, this time in a good natured way, "all you women know is to pray God and may I be damned if that dear God of yours does not help you, only he uses our men's hands to do it."

He laughed, reflected a time, then poured another glass of brew and drinking it said at intervals: "Very well! I'll get you the money. You may return it when convenient. I won't charge you any interest either. On one condition," he placed the empty glass down, "if you let me watch you, the first time you milk the cow! That'll be a sight worthy of Philka's admiration! Just think! Her excellency! The grand lady! With her own white hands milking a cow, ha! ha! ha! Have you ever been near a cow? Have you ever smelt a cow? Well, watch out it may knock you down a couple of times before you even start milking."

"Never mind him," Amphissa sighed, "he's just silly on drink! Everything will be all right. God helps the needy, only don't forget *my* little boy when you have the cow. He likes milk too, but his father wants to raise him on brew!"

"I'll try not to," I answered and feeling that my

visit was over, rose to my feet and started to put my coat on, "When can I expect the money Philip?"

"Tomorrow morning before nine o'clock you'll have it," he said escorting me to the door, "wait, I'll take you home in my sledge, the horse is still harnessed and stands at the gate."

"But I'm not going home," I said.

"That makes no difference, I'll take you wherever you're going. Or are you ashamed to be seen driving with Philka the Rat?"

"No," I said, "why should I?"

"That's right! why should you?" and he put on his coat, his hat and his enormous gloves.

"Good day," I said to Amphissa.

"Good luck!" she returned and the expression of her face grew sad and melancholy again.

»—«

I was not riding, I was floating along the streets, as Philka drove me in his sledge to Aunt Martha's. The successful ending of my visit and the swallow of beer I had had at his house, made me feel as light as a feather, as though drifting through the air from one charming place to another.

Martha apparently saw us coming and met me at the gate.

"Will be at your place tomorrow before nine!"

Philka yelled at the top of his voice, as he turned his horse and galloped gayly away.

"Jesus Christ! What a scoundrel!" Martha pulled me by the sleeve. "You should be careful in dealing with such a rascal. He's a bad one and might get you into trouble."

"Not this time! Not this time! Dear Aunt Martha!"

"Hush!" she said, "lets' be quiet, I want you to see what's going on in the house."

Walking on tip toe, carefully opening the door just a little we went one after the other through the slightly open door into the house.

The sun, on its low short course of the Russian winter, reached Martha's window and sent its warm rays into the middle of the room, leaving both sides in blue shadow.

The two baby lambs, very much alert now, faced each other from opposite walls, the shaft of light glowing on the center of the floor between them. They were prancing the way racehorses do before the race begins. Then, as though by an invisible signal, both started to trot towards each other, holding their bodies sideways and rythmically beating the planks of the floor with their little still soft hoofs. On reaching the sunlight they made a short pause, getting ready to strike with their budding horns, and rushed at one another, muzzle to muzzle, forehead to fore-

head. The touch on the magical spot sent them both high into the air; then, once on the floor, still holding brow to brow, they began to dance, round and round.

The rays of the sun played in their white woolly pelts and seemed to break into a mass of tiny rainbows, interlacing and shining at their motion, like a fine netting of all colours.

After a number of bouts the lambs stopped their dancing, merrily looked at one another and leaping backwards, retreated to the walls. A moment of rest, then the play started over again.

My daughter sat on a low stool propping her head with both her hands—elbows on her knees, completely absorbed in the game. She did not even notice our entrance.

We, too, stood silent and enchanted until a sudden cloud obscured the face of the sun and the limpid joy was gone.

"Oh, Moussia!" Eya finally saw me. Jumping to her feet she threw herself into my arms. And my hand trembled when I passed it over her hair—life seemed strange to me at that moment.

"Now, let's have our tea!" said Martha and went to the stove. Soon all three of us were quietly conversing with cups of tea in our hands. The lambs lay back on their straw, dozing.

I told Martha about my plans and how well they seemed to be progressing. She did not say much, but after tea was over went out, saying that she had to go to the storeroom and soon returned with a blue bowl in her hand.

"This," she said, "was filled with caramels and given me by a lady years ago on Easter Sunday. There was enough candy in it to feed the whole village. The children had a great feast that year. But I never could bring myself to use this bowl, it seemed too beautiful to be spoiled in everyday service!" She lovingly caressed the glossy surface of the vessel with her old wrinkled hand. "But now, I want to give it to you. You must accept my present, for I've filled it plumb full with my good wishes, and good luck will come to you every time you milk your cow." She ceremoniously bowed and held her gift to me. I took it. It was a perfect milking pail, made without seams so that no dirt or grease could settle in it. A very large, deep, sky-blue bowl resting on four legs, a spout on one side and a brass handle spanning it.

"What a beautiful milking pail!" I exclaimed.

"Now, don't thank me," Martha warned, "the futile words only chase away the delight of giving. My heart is light and joyous, don't burden it."

I began to collect our wraps. Martha kneeling dressed my daughter.

"There!" she said, putting little fur-mittens on Eya's hands, "the Princess is all ready to depart, I'll walk with you as far as the forest."

The red disk of the sun was at the horizon now. The snow tinted in rose, lavender and blue crackled under our feet; in the icy air our breath rose like tiny, light clouds one after another ascending into the sky and the high collars of our fur coats became instantly covered with frost. It was cold. Very cold.

»—«

The Pine Grove already had plunged itself into the dreams of twilight. My house stood dark and silent waiting for us to put life into its many windows. Stiff from cold we sat for a time by the dutch stove in the hall trying to get our hands supple again.

"Moussia, is my nose still there?" Eya asked.

"It's there all right," I stated examining her flaming face.

The stiffness gone we began to move about. My daughter had many ideas to communicate to me that evening. Trotting at my side from room to room, as I attended to this and that, she kept chattering:

"We had a good time today! Didn't we?"

"Yes," I said, "it was a well spent Sunday."

"I like Martha," Eya continued, "she gave me a

thimble and told me I should learn to sew."

She ran back into the hall and from the pocket of her coat brought, wrapped in a kerchief, a little thimble.

"See? The kerchief too she gave me and said I should remember at times her son Grisha; this was his. But I never saw Grisha—how can I remember him?"

"Just think of the boy whom Martha misses very much."

For a time she became quiet, thinking.

"Well, didn't she give you a nice present, too?"

"Yes," I said, "the gift is much too nice, I feel embarassed. And now we have a milking pail, before we have the cow."

"You know," she said, "I've been thinking, maybe the cow is really too big for us to take care of, maybe two little lambs would be much better!"

"How did you figure that out?" I laughed, "lambs wouldn't give us milk. Do you want me to walk to the village forever begging people to sell me cream or milk?"

"Oh, no! but milk isn't that important! We could drink something else instead."

"But what? . . . Water? . . . Dont' be silly! Even baby lambs have to have milk—you couldn't raise them just on water."

A Bit of Fluff—Reading

At this point the argument became too strong for her to continue. She took a book and sat a long time looking at the pictures.

I prepared our evening meal, set it on the table and finally when we were eating, she returned to the subject.

"If after buying a cow you still have some money left will you buy me the lambs?"

"Dear me, you're at it again! Baby lambs don't stay little for very long, they grow into big sheep. You don't want sheep here, do you? That would turn our house into a menagerie!"

She looked down pretending to be very interested in her food. But after a while she lifted her eyes to me again and in a rather triumphant way declared: "But listen, when they grow big we can exchange them in the village for the newly-born! Can't we?"

"Perhaps we could, but we'd have to do it quite often. It takes only a few months for lambs to grow."

"I wouldn't mind, I'd love to have different lambs every few months to play with."

I saw there was no way of escaping her eager persistence.

"And how long would you like to keep that up?"

"Oh very long! For ever!"

"I hope as you grow you'll change your mind," I said. "A business of growing baby lambs and turning

them back into the village in exchange for newly born ones doesn't sound so very interesting to me."

"But it could be very, very interesting," she sighed, "I'd love nothing better!"

Later when I kissed her good night she whispered into my ear: "You promised? Didn't you?"

"What?"

"Oh, you know!" and sliding into bed she hid herself under the blanket.

I still had a few daily tasks to finish and as I did them thoughts of all kinds passed through my mind too. How strange is life! Thunder and lightning—brief moments of sunshine through the torn clouds and then the rainbow arches over the misty plains. Hence, the long chain of monotonous days becomes vivified by the echos of thunders and sweetened by pastoral melody. In the midst of it all birds pursue flies, cats stalk birds, dogs chase cats, man hunting them all. . . . And what force makes human beings heighten their speed at one time and immerse themselves in blunt drowsiness at another?

Right then I was longing for rest and as soon as my head touched the pillow I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

»—«

Next morning long before nine; in fact it could not have been later than seven, for I had a light in the kitchen, Philka arrived with another man, whom I suppose he brought as a witness. He threw a pack of notes on the table and in a deliberate manner asked: "Do you wish to count them?"

"Hadn't we better?" I replied, and by the candle light we counted the bills! There were ten million rubles.

"Well, now you have the damned *creditcas*! I wish you good luck!" He started for the door, then stopped. "I can't help you get the cow; dealing in live stock isn't my line, I hate to bother with it. You have friends in the village, someone will help you. As for the money, everything I said yesterday goes as well today. We have a perfect understanding about it, don't we?" he winked his eye and laughed.

"Damned be that heart of mine, it gets soft so easily," Philka complained to his companion as they walked to the door and lingered with their hats and gloves. "It gives me a pang to see a wee bit of a woman like this, working and struggling with all sorts of things. What does she know about hard work and what can she do with those lily-white hands of hers! I bet her life nowadays is not a bed of roses but I like the way she takes it. Well," he turned once more to me, "Good luck! Remember our bargain and let

me know when the cow arrives. Now we're in a hurry on our way down the river!" And they disappeared in the glimmer of the dawn.

For a time I sat with my fortune in my hands and wondered if Anton had accomplished his part of the undertaking as well as I had mine.

Early in the afternoon he and his wife came to call on me. In return for their hospitality I offered tea. By and by, after many traditional formalities, which the elder of the church could not escape performing, he finally asked: "Are you still interested in cows?"

"I certainly am!" I exclaimed, "have you got a piece of good news for me?"

"Yes," he said, moving his chair closer to mine and whispering as though afraid someone would hear us. "I know for sure that there are two cows for sale across the river. As soon as you have money I can take you there."

"The money is here already," I stated.

"No—o!" he said in amazement. "That's too good to be true!" His eyes and the bald top of his head began to shine. "Well, then! We shouldn't lose time! One has to act promptly these days or else the goods might slip away before we get there."

"How soon could you start?" I asked.

"You mean you're willing to go right this very day?"

"Why not! What else should we be waiting for?"

"True enough, there's nothing to wait for. How soon may I leave?" he addressed his wife.

"Any time," she answered, "there isn't anything for you to do at home. I can get along all right."

"Well, I have to feed the horse, look the sledge over, get myself in shape; that'll take a couple of hours. Now it must be after two. After four then, if that suits you?"

"I'll be ready," I said.

Giving me many instructions about how to dress and what to take for the trip, they departed.

I threw a shawl over my shoulders and ran down the hill to the gardener's cabin. The gardener and his wife, both elderly people, had nowhere to go at the outbreak of the Revolution and stayed on the place even after we left Russia.

In a few words I explained the situation and asked Darya, the gardener's wife, to spend the night with Eya. She agreed.

Once home again, I began to make the necessary preparations.

Imaginings of an explorer dreaming of new lands, could not surpass the fancy that filled my heart in those few hours. New vistas, not of land but of life, were before me and I was getting ready to make the final move and plunge myself into hitherto unknown trials.

Time went fast. It seemed only the twinkling of an eye before the night fell and it grew dark. Bundled like a mummy in all sorts of wraps by the busy hands of Darya, wearing two fur coats of my own and the gardener's sheepskin cloak over all, I stood at four o'clock in the middle of the hall waiting for Anton.

Eya walked around, looking up, trying to find my face above the mound of furs and shawls.

"You look so big," she said, "but your face is so very little! Can you see me from up there?"

"Yes," I answered, "I can, but run along, there's Anton and we must be going."

"Moussia!" she said suddenly clinging to the sleeve of my coat and trying to get hold of my hand, "Dearest! You won't leave me here alone? You'll come back? Won't you?"

"Of course I will, you silly child, and I might bring a lamb for you. Think of that and of nothing else!"

"But I don't want *a* lamb," she brightened up immediately, "I want *two* of them."

"Well, I might bring two, if you're really a good girl. Bye-bye!"

"Bye-bye!" she chirped and ran away to the window to see Anton and his sledge.

Slowly, like a Pope in full attire, I marched to

the porch and with great difficulty, because my feet, clad in several pairs of wool socks and felt boots, would not bend, I made a few steps down to the snow-covered ground.

Anton was spreading a fur robe over the hay in his vehicle, which was what they call a "wood-sledge": no back, no seat, just a bent frame of lime-bast on runners. Filled with hay and covered by a rug or a fur robe it offers a very comfortable means of transportation. One can sit or recline on it, one's back to the horses and driver, facing an ever receding landscape with nothing disturbing one's vision of God's wide world. I loved it.

"Can you climb in?" Anton asked, "I'll tuck the robe around you."

"Good heavens, Anton!" I cried, "I'm so swaddled, I can hardly move as it is."

"Never mind, you won't have to move! Just lie quietly wrapped in these furs and I'll take you where you want to go."

There was no sense in arguing. I climbed into the sledge, and wrapped in furs to the top of my head caught the last glimpse of the lighted window, where Eya was waving her hand to me.

We started. At the first move the air blew violently across my face. I hid it under my furs and for a long time did not dare to reappear in the open.

At length when I peeped out the wind seemed to have ceased and the air, although still sharp, did not bite my skin so fearfully. I began to look around. There was nothing but endless plains of snow below and the great vault of ether filled with stars above. Evidently we had been crossing the wide ice-bound River Volga.

I flung myself on to the flat of my back and let my eyes see nothing but the sky. Oh! What a sky! A huge crystal ball on dark blue velvet, the stars and I inside of it. And as I glided amidst them in one direction they slowly passed me in the other. On meeting, the large ones glared full into my face, wearing a cool and grave expression; others, smaller, twinkled and gaily laughed, and there were still smalller ones that seemed to do somersaults, and now and then one would fall into the void. I glided and still gazed—soon from far away rhythmic sounds reached my hearing, growing more and more distinct until my ear could catch the full blend of a gorgeous music. What was it? The hushed murmur of the waters beneath the ice and snow? The chime of stars in the seventh Heaven clanging as they passed through ether? Or maybe they were songs that frost had played, ringing in my heart and sending vibrations across the cords of my half-frozen being.

"Don't you hear me?" Anton shook my shoulder.

"For God's sake, don't allow yourself to fall asleep, you may never awaken! A night like this is known to send spells over people."

"Hmm? What did you say?" I came out of my dream.

"We are nearing the other side of the river. The village is right on the top of the steep bank. Would you like me to help you get seated?"

"Yes, please! I'm all stiff and can't move."

He stopped his horse, jumped out of the sledge, walked towards me, loosened my fur robe and pulled me by the arms.

"Come! Come! You must turn yourself the other way, it'll be interesting to watch the village coming from afar."

"My limbs are just as hard as stone. I can't move at all," I cried, "how do you expect me to turn around?"

"Move at any cost!" and he began again to tug at my arms and to swing them to and fro. After a while I became able to stir a little and with his help changed my position.

"Why it wasn't so very cold!" I wondered, "this must be the numbness of being too long in an uncomfortable position?"

"Oh, no, my lady!" smiled Anton, "those are the doings of Grandpa Frost!"

"How could it be!" I exclaimed, "with all these

furs! You don't have half of my clothing and yet it doesn't stiffen you!"

"Old Grandpa Frost and I are well acquainted!" laughed Anton, "I know all his little tricks and there's no fun for him in playing with me. But you're a different matter. I bet you never met him face to face in the open, at night like this?"

"No," I admitted, "I never did."

"Well, be careful then, don't let him come too near you, or in one frosty breath he may send you into heaven. Soon we'll be in the village, though," he added comfortingly and taking his seat, close to me this time, he urged his horse and we pushed on.

»—«

A faint scent of smoke gave the first evidence that we were nearing human dwellings. Then came the barking of dogs and finally, as the horse pulled us toward the top of the steep bank, signs of buildings appeared over the crest. At first, as though emerging from under the waves of snow, a large cross loomed, catching with its sharp edges the glints of stars. Then slowly arose the dome, its metallic roof sparkling over the black shadow-like church. Dark rows of houses spread this way and that, with reddish yellow patches of light shining in their windows.

How poor, how feeble these little earthly lights appeared under the brilliance of those in heaven! The village looked like the toy setting for a child, playing a chapter out of his book of Fairy Tales, so small, so fragile in the immensity of the Universe.

An instant later the horse gained the heights and we were driving on a level with the village. It seemed to move toward us, and soon the houses following one after another received us into their maze of streets.

"Here we are!" joyfully called Anton, pulling up his horse at a large closed gate.

A figure wrapped in a cloak came out of the house, exchanged a few words with Anton, went back, and then the gate swung wide open, giving a long and plaintive squeak. We drove into the yard. The evidence of human and animal presence grew thicker in the air. A door from the house stood partly open and a beam of light shot with vapours pierced the darkness. After the crystal air we had passed through, this felt heavy and miasmic. The first impression of the people was not good.

"Come in! Do please come in!" a woman urged, appearing in the shaft of light. Anton helped me out of the sledge and led me to the house. But the instant we stepped over the threshold I became dizzy. Someone brought a bench and I sank down on it right by

the door. My only thought, during the short time we spent there, was of how to get away from that untidy place. One seldom saw in that vicinity such indescribable filth. Apparently the house was too small for so large a family.

Anton looked around and understanding my distaste hurriedly explained our business. He induced the woman to light a lantern and take him out to see the cow. I followed to the stable. On opening the door we saw a bony animal on long legs, with dirty long-haired pelt, standing knee-deep in wet straw, noisily munching. I stood by the door, fearing to spoil my felt boots. The woman called:

"Loushka! Loushka! Come here!"

The cow stepped forward. It was dreadful to watch such a large, thin, scabby creature moving its skeleton. On passing me she cast, from the corner of her wild, blood-shot eye, a bad unfriendly glance. I turned around and hastened to the sledge.

Anton lingered a while talking to the woman, then joined me. In the dark I could not see the expression on his face, but as he spoke some sardonic notes played in his voice.

"What's the matter?" he asked as we drove out of the yard, didn't you like the cow? A splendid breed, I can assure you!"

"Indeed!" I said, "it must be a specimen of a very

fine breed, but did you notice the wicked look she cast at me?"

"Upon my word, lady!" he exclaimed, "one doesn't choose a cow by its smile! You're not planning to install her in your drawing room to keep you company, are you? What does it matter how a cow's eyes look, as long as she gives plenty of milk?"

"This one won't give much milk, either," I retorted. "It'll take a whole stock of hay to put a bit of flesh on her poor bones, and as to milk, that may come next year, about this time."

"At that you may be right," he agreed and the tone of his voice changed. "It's a pity the way some people keep their livestock. It could be a fine animal, you know! But masters like those don't know how to keep either themselves tidy, or how to take care of anything that comes into their possession. No matter how fine a thing might be, the minute they lay their hands on it, it becomes a mess, such is the touch of their fingers. And not always because of their poverty. I've seen people much poorer keep the little they had in perfect order. Well—Do you wish me to take you back home? Haven't you had enough of it?"

"Oh, no!" I cried, "how about the other place? Didn't you say there were two cows for sale? Let's go farther, we may find something better!"

"And we may find something worse," he retorted,

"chances are even on both ends. But come what may! I promised to take you to both places and I'll keep my word. Only mind you, the road from now on won't be as smooth as it was over the Volga River. This is the hilly side and the snow drifts are very bad. It'll swing us up and down."

"How far do we have to go?"

"Oh, just about five miles."

"Well, that won't kill me. Let's be going!"

And once more we passed beyond human dwellings into the open snowy fields.

»—«

Up and down, to and fro, this way and that. The sledge squeaked, Anton urged his horse and I had no chance to gaze into the sky this time. In fear of being thrown out I held on, as best I could.

Imagine being in a canoe in the open sea, admist the waves of a storm. My feelings were of that nature. "Hold on! Hold on!" was the only prayer in my heart, the only thought in my dulled mind. "May be by some lucky chance you may yet reach the promised land!"

When at last we arrived at the house of the owner of the second cow on sale, I was so exhausted and so glad to set my feet on steady ground that I noticed

neither the smell nor the look of the place. I went right in and asked if someone could help me take off my wraps. The hostess, a plump middle aged woman, with rosy round cheeks and merry dimples playing about her mouth, looked into my face and clapped her hands.

"Mercy! Thou man art beast! I bet thou drivest too fast, look what thou hast done to her!"

"Well!" said Anton with a guilty smile twisting his lips. "I had to, for she almost froze to death while we were crossing the river."

"Froze to death, indeed!" The woman busied herself peeling the furs off me and piling them one after the other on the bed. "Good Heavens! Who packed the little humming-bird in all these robes? She didn't freeze, she nearly smothered to death!" And she kept undressing me and treating me as though I were a child. I let her do whatever she wanted and didn't say a word. What difference did it make to me whether I was frozen or smothered, in either case I felt half dead.

"Jesus!" the woman continued. "Just look at that! A humming bird wrapped in layers of fur, squirrel, martin, sheep and on top of all, bear! Can you beat that! Someone wanted to be sure she wouldn't freeze, but then they didn't think she might be choked. Sit down lady, I'll pull those boots off you and see how your feet are."

I sat down. She took the felt boots and all the wool socks off and holding my feet in both her hands exclaimed: "Perfectly warm! Poor little doves free to fly wherever they wish to, bound up in all that wool! Oh dear! Oh dear! Go to bed now and rest a while. I'll get the supper ready. Food should be the best thing for you to set the blood back to rights!"

Obediently I went to bed. It was good to feel free of all the heavy furs and to stretch myself on something that did not rock to and fro. I believe I fell asleep, but not for long. An odor of hot food awakened me.

"How do you feel?" asked Anton on seeing me wakening.

"Hungry!" I cried.

"That's good! You scared me! By God! Did I really drive so very fast?"

"I don't remember, let's not speak about it now."

"Katherina gave me a good scolding" Anton continued, "she seems to know all about how to dress ladies and how to drive when they are in one's sledge. You see, she was once in service with a young lady in the city. Well, she knows all about it and I don't. I thought I did the right thing!"

"Never mind," I said, "nothing particularly bad has happened to me. I'm alive and well."

"Yes," he said in a relieved tone, "the old saying

is 'Bad deeds seem good when they come to a good ending.'"

"And good ones go to waste when they reach a bad ending!" Katherina, the woman who undressed me, smiled from behind the stove and came to me.

"He gave you a treat not to be forgetten through your life time. To the end of your days you'll remember Anton and his driving! Let's have supper now, I happen to have some soup; that may do you good."

She helped me to rise. I still felt a little shaky, but the savory odor of the food intensly attracted and my feet, clad in Katherina's slippers, found the way across the room to the table.

There was another treat never to be forgotten. It seems to me that I had not tasted a better soup in all my life. And Katherina seated at the head of the table was so serene, so joyous, her little dimples never ceasing to play about her mouth and on her firm, rosy cheeks.

"Such a small lady," she said looking at me compassionately, "Anton, how did you ever hazard taking her on such a trip?"

"Well, she wanted to buy a cow!"

"Couldn't you have done it for her, on your own risk?"

"She wouldn't trust my choice. She chooses her cow by its smile. What do I know about smiles?" We all laughed.

"Then you may like my Krasavka," said Katherina, "she isn't of any special breed, but I brought her up myself, almost upon my own lap. Her mother died at her birth, so the little one grew very attached to me. Up to now, I believe, she takes me for her mother. And I'd never part with her if it weren't for my daughter, who's married and lives in Moscow. She wants me to come and help her with the children. I can't take Krasavka there and I need money for the trip, so I have to sell her. Isn't that a stroke of a bad fortune?"

"Your bad fortune may turn into good fortune for me," I cried, "it sounds as if she were just what I want. Let's go, you must show me your Krasavka."

"What's the hurry," she smiled on seeing me spring to me feet. "For Christ's sake wait! You're not going into the stable wearing my best slippers! Finish your supper, we have plenty of time!"

I grew impatient. Anton glanced at me and said: "We'd better take her to see the cow. Katherina, you shouldn't have mentioned it before the right time came. Now the lady's appetite is spoiled, she isn't interested any more in your food, she wants to see your cow."

"Good gracious!" Katherina grumbled, "are all ladies like this? I remember the one I worked for was the same way! Anything she wanted must be gotten and laid before her, in less time than it takes to wink

the eye! Oh my! But be it as you wish! Let me help you into your boots!" And as I moved toward my many coats she added: "Don't put all of them on, one will be enough, it isn't so very far to go."

»—«

Krasavka's stable looked to me much cleaner than the house of the people we visited a few hours before. Katherina's best slippers, if I were still wearing them, would not have suffered from walking on the smooth, well swept floor. Anton hung the lighted lantern he had brought with him on a nail over the door and in its light I could distinguish a heap of straw, in the far corner of the stable, glistening like a satin quilt spread over a feather bed on which lay, her back to us, my future friend Krasavka. The ends of her horns and the edge of her backbone shone.

The odor of hay and straw mixed with the breath of the healthy animal was not bad at all and there was nothing to prevent me from stepping forward and walking up to her. Katherina followed on my heels. At our approach the cow made a jerky motion with her head, shook off her sleep and sprang to her feet. As she turned to us, I saw a pair of huge, black, sleepy eyes sending two streams of light at us.

At the first sight I was fascinated. She really was

a beauty! Small, but perfect in proportion, in a red-brown glossy pelt, touched with soot black along her nose, over her eyes, on the tip of her ears, at the end of her tail and around her feet. It changed into snow white on her chest, as though showing her clean waistcoat. Immediately I sensed that this one would cast a wicked glance at no one. She loved the whole world and expected love in return from everyone whom she approached.

The grace with which she moved and licked Katherina's shoulder was touching beyond description. After greeting her mistress in this way, she came to me and gave a smacking lick on the back of my neck too.

"What a darling!" I exclaimed. "She wouldn't mind coming with me?"

"No, I guess she wouldn't mind." Katherina nodded. "You two will get along pretty well, I can see that. And I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that she's well cared for."

I put my hand on Krasavka's warm back. She moved her ears and wagged her tail. Right then I learned that cows express their emotion in this strange way: they move their ears, and wag their tail and mutely gaze into your eyes.

"What does she like to eat?" I asked.

"Well, being the only living creature in my charge, she's a little spoiled, I have to admit that. She doesn't

eat much hay but loves sweets: bran, potatoes, bread, and any 'left-overs' from the table," replied Katherina looking somewhat reflectively at me.

"Don't worry!" I enthusiastically cried out, "she shall have her sweets, even if I have to share my own portion with her."

"Much bread and potatoes a small woman like you needs," Katherina critically surveyed me, "I should say you'd gladly give your portion to Krasavka in order to get an extra spoonful of her cream. I wager you like sweets too?"

"I do, my darling Katherina! I do!"

At that moment the joy streaming through my heart was so great that I felt ready to throw myself on Katherina's neck.

"Enough of this!" she said, "let's be going. If you plan to take Krasavka home with you, she should be resting before the trip."

I kissed the cow on her glossy, hairy cheek and ran into the house.

"Such a funny buyer you are," Katherina grumbled as she followed me. "Why don't you ask how old she is? How much milk she gives, and other business-like questions?"

"That doesn't matter!" I replied, "I like her and I'll take her home with me."

"Now listen to that," interfered Anton, "at first

she said she wanted to buy a cow because she couldn't get milk and cream any other way. Now, once she's found a cow that gives her soft glances, she doesn't care for milk and cream. That doesn't matter any more! She just wants the cow to look into her eyes always in the same soft, sweet way!"

"Yes!" I laughed, "that's the only thing I care for. Won't she give some milk anyhow?"

"And wouldn't it be better to inquire at least about the price of goods before you set your heart on taking it home with you?"

"And what did I bring you here for?" being in good humor, I joked. "Can't you do that much for me? I gave you my money before we started and you hid it under your shirt. Now go ahead and arrange it so that tomorrow I have Krasavka in my own yard. How? At what price? It's up to you to decide. And I'll rest."

"She hasn't recovered from your fast driving yet," said Katherina. "Leave her alone. Can't we discuss the business and make it up between ourselves?"

Leaving Anton and Katherina to finish our deal I went again to bed. My body, tired from the trip and now comforted by warmth and food felt soft and languid. My soul enraptured by the benevolence of Katherina and her pet seemed to melt in sweet tranquility and my spirit, brooding over the hours that had just passed and over those that soon would come

foresaw no evil. All was peace. I had a perfect rest.

»—«

Katherine and Anton had a long conversation discussing, I suppose, the value of all earthly goods. They talked in a half tone so as not to disturb me. Then saying they would be back soon, they left the house for a short time and returned with another man, Katherina's brother, as I learned later. The discussion began all over again. Finally they shook hands with one another and Katherina came up to me.

"I hate to disturb you," she said seating herself on the edge of the bed, "but the men think that it would be wiser to take Krasavka to your home by night. Highway patrols are watching the roads during the day and you may get yourselves into trouble. My brother will take Krasavka in his sledge and you and Anton should follow right after. In this way there will be two men to protect you and two horses to drive in different directions if necessary."

"Are they already preparing to start?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "they want to be sure to reach Vasilievo before the sun gets up. Driving slowly you'll just about make it, if you leave now."

"Then I'd better put on my furs," I sighed.

"Yes, but I can dress you so that you won't suffer as you did coming here."

And she helped me into about half the wraps I had brought with me. Then we went into the yard. By the light of two lanterns men were loading Krasavka into the sledge of Katherina's brother. They covered her with rugs and tied them about her. Katherina tried not to look at her dear pet and busied herself with me. She made a nest-like hole in the hay of Anton's sledge, lined it with the fur robe and told me to get in. The way she covered me with all the rest of the furs was really remarkable. I felt free to move and yet was all packed in soft coats like some frail object for long transportation.

"God be with you!" at last she blessed me and made the sign of the cross over the other sledge.

"Come! Let's push on!" called Anton.

The runners gave a starting squeak, then smoothly glided over the snowy road, polished to a glitter by the many sledges that passed there through the winter. I was again seated with my back to the horses and for some time could see the dark figure, with a lantern in her hand, standing at the open gate. Katherina! Sweet, joyous Katherina now was bereft. Her yard was empty. What need to close the gate?

»—«

We were on the road all the rest of the night. Slowly

and silently our party moved over the lustrous waves of snow, under the cover of the crystal vault, aglow with stars. The air diamond-sharp cut every attempt of speech quite short. It was too cold to open one's mouth. Without precaution one could freeze one's lungs just by a careless breath.

About six o'clock in the morning, still dark, we arrived at Vasilievo. Anton insisted on our stopping at his house for a final settlement of accounts and to release the other man who had to hurry home because of his job. They first got me out of my nest, then released Krasavka from her bondage. For a few steps she was uncertain on her pretty legs but, called by Anton she slowly walked to the stable to be fed.

"Come to the house, you're in safety now," Anton's wife greeted me. "My husband wants to settle the business with you before driving you home."

"Does it have to be done right now?" I grumbled, but walked into the house.

There was a roaring fire in the open Russian stove. Large logs aflame crackled and sent out a mass of flying sparks, falling like blazing insects upon the bricks in front of the hearth.

"What could I make for your breakfast?" the woman asked.

"Nothing," I thanked "her, I'd like to eat at home with my daughter."

"Then I'll make a cup of hot tea to warm you up," and she busied herself by the fire.

Anton entered, tugged at his beard, which was covered by frost and ice, then, after wiping his whole face with a towel he took off his coat and asked me why I did not do the same.

"Our deal has passed its danger zone," he grinned self-satisfied, "we may consider it closed and I want to put before you all my accounts."

"I suppose you didn't have enough money?"

"It isn't that, he said, "I even have some money left. Katherina is a good woman, she wouldn't rob you, but neither did I think you'd want to deprive her of what was due her, so we settled on eight and a half million rubles for Krasavka's head delivered to my house alive and in good health. Don't you think that was smart?"

"Very smart!" I said.

"Now you have a million and a half coming back to you," he continued swaying from foot to foot in a rather uncertain way.

"Never mind!" I said, "keep it for your smartness."

"Oh, no!" he frowned, "that won't do, you need it."

"What for?"

"How about hay? What are you planning to feed your cow with? Scraps from the table? Sharing your own portion with her? Eh?"

"Why not?" I laughed, "maybe she'll get fat on that!"

"Don't take it so lightly, lady," Anton preached to me, "a cow isn't a cat, remember that. She needs a lot of feed and it seems to me you don't worry very much over food either for yourself or for your cow."

"Why should I?" I laughed again at him. "The world is full of nice people and they'll provide for me. Where are the villains that would leave me and my cow to starve to death?"

Anton threw a reproachful glance at me, nodded his head and said: "Well, what's the use of preaching? To be straight, I didn't plan to charge you for my help, it should be a deed of mercy, for God's sake. Who knows, it may be that my soul will need some help after I'm dead?"

"Why look so far ahead?" I said. "Let's finish our accounts now."

"Well, I can bring you a couple of loads of hay, how would that be?"

"Just right! Now you and I know that we owe each other nothing, neither here nor beyond the grave."

"All right!" he said, but smiled sadly. I thought he was disappointed losing a chance to collect a debt after death. Good old Russian folk always tried to provide themselves with something to hold onto, for their last journey.

"Now," Anton said after a time of silence, "Krasavka should recover herself from the hard trip. From here to your place I can lead her on foot. Give her an hour or so for rest and in the meantime let's break bread once more between us and have another meal together."

"But Anton!" I exclaimed, "I'm worrying about my daughter and all the things at home. Something might have happened there, during my absence.!"

"Nothing bad could happen to your daughter, and if it had, my wife would have heard of it. Just think, when will there be another opportunity for us to meet and join our interests in one aim? You'll go your way, and I'll go mine. Roads don't cross so very often. Not yours and mine. Agatha will make some pancakes for us and let that be our parting feast!" And before I had time to answer he said something to his wife and both went out.

As I was sitting there alone, with my thoughts already brooding over Eya and my home, all of a sudden I remembered the promise I had given her to bring two little lambs. How could I be so light-headed as to forget it? What should I do about it now? When Anton came back he immediately noticed my worry.

"What's weighing upon your mind? If you really can't stay another minute away from home I'll take you there. There's no need to suffer."

"It isn't that," I said, "I made a promise before we left and I'd forgotten all about it." And I told him the story of the lambs.

"This riddle is easy to solve," he laughed, "there are younglings in almost every hut this time of the year. I believe I saw some at my neighbors the other day. Stay here, I'll go and see what can be done."

Soon he returned holding a lamb under each arm.

"There." He placed them on the floor, "What now? Can you eat the pan-cakes or is there something else to do before we get to it?"

"You're a wizard!" I exclaimed. "Lets eat the cakes. The skies are clear, there isn't a cloud to dim the glory of our feasting!"

"Your talk is very pleasing, lady!" Anton tried to be a gallant. And we had another joyous meal.

»—«

That cold, brillant morning when we at last started for the Pine Grove will be imprinted forever in my memory.

The sun was just rising and for a time glowed over the horizon. The earth, covered with snow reflected that glow flaming with countless sparks and the road that lay before us caught in its tracks the play of all their glints.

It truly seemed to me that we were moving on the sharp edge of a rainbow. First Anton, grave and solemn, leading Krasavka on foot, then myself following him in the sledge, reins in my hands, two little lambs warming my feet beneath the robe. Slowly we crossed the field between the village and the Grove and entered the forest. The branches of the tall pine trees gently swayed far over our heads and sent their rustling, like a morning prayer, into the azure of the sky. Down below, the snow lay thick and white with long blue shadows running across it and all about us was the clear aromatic air.

Oh, what a great delight it is to feel the welcome of home! I saw the trees, the fence, the gate—my garden, and finally the entrance to my house and all the east windows shining in the glow of the rising sun and my heart began to sing.

How I met Eya, what we said and how I showed her my purchases I can hardly remember; I only know that that day brought an entirely new element into our lives and the routine of our every day existence became enriched by the presence of the three dumb creatures in our midst.

While it continued cold, most of the time the lambs stayed in the house as play-mates to my daughter. The cow was installed in her own quarters and soon, on learning each other's ways and habits, she

and I became the best of friends. Only the first few days were quite hectic: I discovered that to take care of the cow, of the milk and everything that had to do with it wasn't such an easy task. It took much skill to do it right. But Darya, Aunt Martha, Marina and other women friends from the village came to my aid. Even Amphissa the *speculant's* wife sailed in to see how I was getting along and each of them brought a little present, some object for dairy use. They made a regular "Shower of Welcome."

Philip *The Speculant*, although I sent word to him announcing the cow's arrival, never showed up. Later, when I went to pay him the first part of my debt and asked why he had cheated himself out of the fun he could have at my expense, he only laughed and said: "I was too late! My wife and the 'other aunts' rushed to your place ahead of me and after that I didn't wish to go. Who wants to join a flock of old females and listen to their cackling? Much fun I'd have among them! Perhaps it would be *you* who'd enjoy seeing them picking feathers out of my tail! No, my sweet lady, no! Dear God has saved me my tail! I still have all my feathers and someday yet I'll have *my* fun!"

My husband spent a couple of weeks in town. He never knew about my purchase until late one afternoon, quite unexpectedly he came to visit us. I open-

ed the door, and on entering the hall he heard the tapping of the lambs' hooves, on the bare inlaid floor of the drawing room. For a moment he stood listening and looked at me inquiringly.

"Who's in there?" he finally exclaimed with disgust, "Goats? So! That's the kind of a cow you are going to have? Congratulations! What a joke! And I was trying to raise the money!"

But before I had time to take offense at his reproach Eya ran in with both her pets and laughing and chattering poured out all our news.

Her father had plenty of cream for his soup that evening and, well satisfied, gave me three million rubles he had saved for the cow.

»—«

Interlude

»—«

THUS WAS ESTABLISHED OUR BOND WITH Krasavka. Every day it grew stronger and in a month or two our dependence on the cow became so great that there was no question of living without her. Krasavka in those days was a link that held us bound solidly to life. Not the life of politics, but that which comes from sun to earth and flows in many streams through all live things.

Looking back I am quite certain that had it not been for the cow we probably would not have survived. For times were bad. The blazing revolutionary spirit ceaselessly swayed over Russia. It whirled here and there. And boring into people's minds it set aflame many a soul. Fights sprang up in all parts of the country and like great fires sweeping on their courses, destroyed all things before them. Fields, trampled and neglected ceased to produce their crops. The very air, disturbed by conflict, caused queer changes, turning summer into winter, autumn into spring.

Poor harvests. Starvation. Disease began to creep upon the banks of the Volga and some districts were cleared of everything: plants, animals, and men.

Kazan and its vicinity fared no better than the rest of Russia. Strange happenings occurred there. People, among them some dear to me, suffered agonies and many met death with open arms, as a relief from all their cares.

All this I heard and some of it I saw. There were times when I myself was ready to give up. But then! There was Eya clinging to my skirt, her head a little above my knee—and her two pets happily prancing about our feet. And in the yard stood Krasavka, calm, self-assured, her huge black eyes gazing at me.

"Hold on!" she almost said. "Hold on to me, we will pull through."

And I would gather all my strength and look around. As ever the tall pine-trees stood straight, unbending. The sun still shone over their heads and poured an abundance of warm rays into my garden, and as before the air flowed, bathing all things, including me, in its keen, vivifying substance.

"Why," I used to think, "can't I stand as straight as a tree? Why should I allow myself to bend and break, while I'm still rooted in the earth?"

In thinking so I used to fall into a dreamlike state and felt as though I were on an island, floating in a

stormy sea. Near and far ships were buffeting through the fury of the gale and many of them were sinking. What could I do? My island was drifting with the current. The tempest howled. The waters trembled. But my feet stood on solid ground and my little kingdom still needed me. I had to keep on struggling! And the gods were good to me. My floating island safely passed through all the storms, beyond the realm of the raging sea.

»—«

However, passing through the storm took us three long and strenuous years. Until the time we left Russia our well being depended a great deal on the little fields in the Pine Grove and on Krasavka. And those last years at home form in my memory and entirely separate part in my life, very unlike what it had been before, very unlike what it was later.

Never before—nor since—have I experienced such tension in fighting for my own life and the life of those near me. Caught between the fearful waves of loosened human passions and the unconcern of nature, we had to turn ourselves to nature and pray for mercy. Dealing with the elements I found great encouragement, great support in the dumb creatures we had adopted into our household.

Now, when it all has passed into the years, musing

about it I often wonder: "To what Good Grace am I indebted for the fortunate idea of acquiring at the right time the place in The Pine Grove and later on the cow? Whose kind hand led me, on that cold, winter Sunday to Anton? To Philip The Rat? And who guarded us at night while passing across the frozen river, over the snowy fields to Katherina and back?

Truly the ways of destiny are little known to us! Often a casual word or thought sets us in motion and causes us to take action, which may prove later on to be of great importance in our lives. So it happened then; before we clearly knew why and what for, there were the fields in the Pine Grove and later Krasavka.

And be it The Good Spirits, or Almighty God, who impelled us on that road, I bend my head before them and humbly offer my gratitude.

We all know the struggle our forefathers had in wresting from nature the simple privilege of existtence. But carried by the glamorous progress of civilization we have long since forgotten the primary sources of our sustenance. It seems almost legendary in our century to live in close relationship with the earth, the elements of nature and the animals.

Nevertheless, in this century, by the sharp shifts of that very civilization, many Russians were overwhelmed in meeting the primitive difficulties of their predecessors, tasting the sorrows of the pioneer man.

For suddenly the understanding of all values changed. Money, so highly esteemed before, lost then in Russia all significance. There was nothing to buy. Objects of luxury became in our eyes ridiculous and useless toys. Who could be interested in adorning themselves or their homes, while suffering from cold, darkness and hunger?

Water! Bread! A little milk, a little honey! Wood for the stove, something to light the room with! That was all one could wish for and lucky were those who had plenty of these things. Any surplus could be exchanged for something else one needed.

My cow gave us so much milk that not only was there enough for our own use, but also for trade. And so we managed to live on.

Many a day, through those three years, was gloomy, oppressed by grief. But time has cleared the atmosphere that then seemed to us so suffocating and my memory holds many bright pictures of Eya, her little lambs, Krasavka, and myself, living in seclusion, under the shelter of the Pine Grove.

Perhaps in some deep space of the heart I still have bitter sediment left over from those days, but why stir it? It is not of grief that I want to speak, but of the joy of living, under all circumstances and thus bring to its height the image of Krasavka.

»—«

Two

»—«

EARLY SPRING MORNING. I AM AWAKE, YET somehow not quite ready to move and leave my bed. From the distance comes the sound of the church bells softly chiming their old, well known tune, suggesting to the village folk that they meet the day with prayer. Many sunrays are trying to penetrate into my room through the cracks in the shutters, shielding my open windows. I hear and see, but my mind is half asleep—it cannot yet register.

Finally shaking off the last mist of a dream I rise, walk to the window, lift the fastener and the shutter swings wide, over the garden. Spring unfolds before my eyes and fresh morning air flows in. It drifts by me and I sense the fragrance of the pines, the lilies of the valley, forget-me-nots and damp forest brush. One deep breath of this aroma and I am filled with courage, ready to step out into the torrent of my daily tasks. Although with faint regret, turning myself away from the sweet scene, I hasten to the dressing room,

then to the kitchen and from there into the yard. Krasavka is my first concern.

Across the grass-grown yard there runs a narrow path from the back porch to the barn. I follow it and hear my cow pacing behind the latticed door. Expecting me for some time, she has now grown impatient. The moment I touch the latch she pushes the door open and rushes by me with an air of great disgust. From the tips of her ears to the end of her tail her appearance expresses indignation.

I step aside and wait until her temper cools down. She looks around, sniffs the air, then turns her head to me and our eyes meet. Slowly she lowers her tensely erect ears, loosens her muscles and in another instant her pliant body stands close to me, willing to give me the very essence of its life.

I pick up the tub of water that I brought with me, and give her a partial bath, then dry her with a towel. As I do so the fleshy vessel under my hands grows full and warm and by the time I am settled with the famous milking pail that Aunt Martha had given me for good luck, the milk begins to drip, falling like white pearls on the bottom of my pail.

Hastening to finish the preparations I butter the palms of my hands and begin the ritual. At my first touch two streams of milk run down, sparkling with the sun and ringing in the empty pail as in a bell,

two high, gay tunes. As I go on the froth rises and the ringing lessens; growing lower, it gradually becomes a mere buzz, while the pearly foam tosses in the blue bucket, like a fragment of cloud hovering in the spring sky.

All this time Krasavka stands radiant and very, very still. She is afraid to move even her head and only now and then throws a warm glance at me from the corner of her dark eye. She is happy to give me the overflowing wealth of her streaming life and I accept it thankfully. Both of us are happy and for a time dwell in harmony, until the sound of the shepherd's horn reaches us from the meadow below our hill.

Krasavka's ears quickly rise, her tail begins to wag and her whole body stiffens from the strain of attention.

I hurry. A few more strokes and the ritual is done. Carefully putting aside the pail, brimming with my good fortune, I turn myself to open another door, to let the little lambs, now big sheep, pass by. Bleating, they run after the cow, who is already in the lane heading for the gate. I rush to let them all out and for a moment stand watching their direction. It usually is right. Thus my first daily task is well accomplished.

I return to the milk and with this treasure in my hands cautiously walk along the narrow path back to

the kitchen. Moving slowly I feel the touch of the sun, caressing my head; and upon my feet, clad only in soft slippers, I feel the drops of dew, shaken from the grasses. Father Sun and Mother Earth are greeting me, wishing a Good Morning.

In the kitchen Eya is waiting. She sits on a bench rubbing her sleepy eyes with her small fists. A mass of tangled curls crowns her childish head and, carelessly slipping off on one side, her night dress shows a lovely naked shoulder.

Through a strainer I pour a cupful of the still warm milk for her and as she sips it, I see the rosy hue of life rise to her cheeks, then lighten all her features. It brings high lustre into her eyes, touches with a shiny dot the end of her snub-nose and scatters in many laughing dimples over her face.

"One more," she says, handing me the emptied cup.

Finishing, she jumps to her feet and drawing me down, throws her arms around my neck. Twittering like a bird my child gives me many a happy kiss and runs back to her room to dress.

I wipe off the milky spots she has left on my cheeks, listen to the jolly patter of her small feet and go about my work with a heart full of delight. It seems so good to be alive.

»—«

And now it is mid-summer noon.

Eya and I have just finished our lunch and linger for a time on the veranda. We sit on the stairs leading to the garden and talk.

"Isn't it warm?" my child says, stretching her arm from the shade into the sunlight. "Ugh! Like a big stove! Red hot! How can all these butterflies and bees stand it? Why don't they try to go into the shade and stay there until the sun goes down?"

"Perhaps they like it. Heat brings out many things they're fond of."

"Hum! You mean the gum? Or do you call it resin, the stuff that melts and drips from the trees? Is that what you mean heat brings?"

"Resin and other things."

"You see," Eya says, wiping her brow, "here's resin, coming out of me too. Only it isn't much good. Too thin and it tastes bad. See?" she licks her finger, "No, no good! Tell me, why a tree's sweat is sweet and people's isn't?"

"Oh! I don't know. I never looked at it that way."

"You never look at things the way *I* do and you always say you're tired when I question you. Are you tired now?"

"Yes, I am."

She moves closer to me, softly puts her plump hand on my arm and bending her head tries to catch my eye.

"Yes, you are. Well, shall I be quiet then, so you can rest?"

"Krasavka will come soon and again I'll have plenty to do," I state apologetically.

"All right," she says, "I won't bother you." And stretching herself, her stomach on the floor, her head lifted towards the garden, she watches the butterflies and bees, and I, leaning against the post, doze.

It really is warm. The blended scent of pitch and honey weights the air. There is not enough breeze to move even a leaf and the trees, the grasses and the shrubs, stand still, as though in an enchanted dream.

The flowers fully opened yield themselves to the sun in mute gratification, while the clever bees probe their open hearts, stealing their sweetness.

Blue, red and yellow butterflies hover here and there and the melodious cooing of the pigeons, in the eaves above our heads, soothes my mind, like a lullaby, to rest. Then, the hot richness of it all carries me into a deeper swoom.

"Mou-ou-ou!" Krasavka's plaintive call comes from the gate.

"Come! Quick! Krasavka wants you!" Eya springs to her feet and pulls me by the sleeve.

Dazedly I follow my daughter down the stairs, across the garden and into the lane toward the gate.

My cow seems almost exhausted. In northern

Russia the summer days are very long. She cannot carry the burden of her milk throughout the long, hot hours and has to be relieved of it at noon. So in the middle of the day my friend forsakes her pasture and hastens home in a business-like way, not paying attention to anyone or anything. When we open the gate she rushes by us, heading for the shade in the back yard, and waits for me there puffing and making little plaintive moans.

After the usual preparations once again I milk. Only my mind, stupefied by the heat is not as alert as it was in the coolness of the morning. At noon my senses seem to be confused. Drowsy thoughts, sluggish, weigh upon my head and I have to force myself to hold it up; the effort makes red spots dance before my eyes. I can hardly distinguish the white streams of milk from the erect sun's rays, piercing the roof. And this continuous buzz? Is it the humming of bees beyond the house in the raspberry bushes? Or is it the gurgling of the spring breaking its way through the dry brush down the hill? Or maybe it is simply a ringing in my ears? How should I know? I am too tired to think.

Krasavka stands with half closed eyes, lazily munching her cud until I finish; then carefully swinging her body over the full bucket she turns to me, licks my shoulder and my hands, trying to express her grati-

tude. Apparently she feels much better now and her posture shows it.

Moved by her touch I rise from the low milking bench and put my arm about her neck. What bountiful health there is in her large body! What a great power streams out of her black eyes and how remarkably this power is blended with kindness and warm understanding. Oh, my dear cow's eyes! I could look into the depth of their dark pools forever. How thrilling it is to receive their answering gaze full of encouragement!

As I stand there, my hand about her neck, I feel that part of her strength is flowing into me. Like a a fluid, highly charged with electricity it drifts all around me and rouses my senses and my thoughts.

"Why! Of course it's hot, but what of it? It's only a bit of discomfort. We can get used to it. I'd better hurry back to my work. The day might not be long enough to accomplish all there is for me to do."

"Are you still tired?" Eya asks, appearing at my side, "Let me help you," and she makes a move toward the milk.

"You'll spill it!" I hurry to lift the pail putting my arm through the handle, which cuts deep into my flesh.

"Heavy!" Eya pities me.

"Think of Krasavka," I reply, "she has to carry this

burden throughout the long day." And so conversing we go into the house.

The day goes on. There is so much to do: butter to churn, cheese to make and then the garden to attend to, where everything grows and ripens in the summer sun so rapidly.

In northern Russia the summer days are long, but there are not so very many of them. One cannot afford to let the hours slip by unnoticed. In working we must catch the tempo of the bee that rushes out of her hive, into the flower's heart; then, heavily laden hurries to fill one tiny partition of the many-celled comb. Or of the fruit that grows and ripens, without losing a moment, while the summer sun is hot.

Make haste, make haste! The summer days are long, but there are not so many of them. At summer's close one must not find one's work half done. In the hope that life will last through the cold winter we must make haste while summer days last, gathering and storing our wealth before the winter frost arrives! Make haste! Make haste!

»—«

The next clear picture, emerging out of the past and moving across my present musing, is the slow approach of an autumn evening.

The Russian plains and the Russian skies are full of melancholy, although far in the west there are a few clear patches in the sky through which the setting sun sends its last fiery rays and the crimson glow blazes over the clouds, and over the woods, and spills onto the plains; the earth attired in varied colours of dry herbs, receives the sun's caress without exuberance. Beneath the crimson and the gold there is deep sorrow in it all.

Alone I walk along the road connecting the village and the grove.

This afternoon I spent in the village figuring out with Anton how much hay we need for our live stock, how much wood there should be stowed away to keep my house warm through the winter and how I can provide a full store of it.

Now, returning home, I try to shake away the anxious thoughts.

My feet, stepping from the road into the field seek for the feel of loosened warm earth, to give me hope that summer's growth is not yet over. Alas! A cold crust envelops the soil and the warm radiance that came from it only a few weeks ago, now seems to be turned inward and sinks deeper and deeper into the heart of the earth.

In vain my eyes search the skies for the promise of more hot, sunny days. Beneath the crimson blaze

there is layer after layer of tawny clouds heaping up as far as my eyes can see. Rain or snow is the only promise that these skies can give me.

A cold wind is blowing, snatching away the last left-over leaves and for a time it plays at tossing them up and down, then throws them into a heap and, hissing, rolls it onto the road. As I walk a flock of wild geese crosses the sky, filling my ears with their shrill cries.

No, my anxious thoughts will not leave me. Everything I feel, see and hear is a poignant reminder of summer's departure. I know that after a few last sweet sighs of farewell the warmth will pass away and finally the harsh hand of the frost will draw over the still smiling, but melancholy earth, a white blanket of snow. It will lie there for many months, gleaming in its aloof virginity. The earth will rest. And we poor human beings? How are we going to keep on living?

Nevertheless I walk on and reach the Pine Grove. All of a sudden my body, that was so tense in the open, withstanding the furious blasts of wind, is relaxed. Amidst the trees there is only a breeze that smooths the shaggy branches of the old pine trees. Beneath them it is almost still. With a heart much lighter now, I pass through the gate into my plot.

"Oh, look!" Eya moves from a garden bench to meet me, "how do you like my dress?"

She has a most fantastic costume: a cape of golden leaves, pinned together by their stems is hanging off her shoulders, a bonnet of the same kind, adorned with clusters of red berries of mountain ash, sits on the top of her blond head and a pair of dried, hollow pumpkins, the narrow ends turned up, embellish her feet.

"I'm a brownie now," she sings, "and did you see the wild geese passing so low that I could hear them screaming a good-bye to me? They were flapping their wings so that the pretty leaves I'd prepared for a skirt flew all over the place!"

"They couldn't have flown that low," I laugh "and haven't they invited you to follow them?"

"Oh yes, they did, but I said *no*. I like the snow and I'll stay here for winter! Tell me why they flew so low?"

"It must be too cold higher up. Don't you see they are late?"

"Yes! And were they not in a hurry too? Working with their wings so that feathers were falling like flakes of snow. Is winter coming soon, do you know?"

"No, I don't know, but I guess it wont be long now." And another anxious thought is passing through my mind: "My daughter likes the snow. I must look into the trunk and see if there are warm things for her to wear. Probably she has outgrown

all her clothes. Then what? Where will I get her new winter garments?"

"Moussia," she clings to me, "it's getting dark and cold. Let's go into the house and make a fire. Wouldn't it be nice to sit by it and build castles out of the cards or turrets of painted blocks, the way we did last winter? Will you play with me? Oh, promise me you will! Please!"

"I might. Only first I have some other things to do."

"Why don't you ever let me help you? I've grown big and strong. See!" She proudly marches in front of me. "I can carry wood now."

"All right, you carry wood," I say, annoyed with her fussing under my feet, "and I'll tend the cow." And for the last time during the day I go to spend a while with Krasavka.

By now she and I have grown to be the very best of friends. We have learned to understand each other at a glance. Hence, this evening, when I enter her stable, she senses my anxiety and tries the best she can to show her sympathy. The milk runs at my touch faster than usual and is warmer and richer in its consistency. And every drop, falling into my pail seems to whisper consoling words to me: "Soon the Earth will go to rest and it's true that a thick blanket of snow will cover its face. But even then I will not fail you. The full bucket of milk will be yours thrice

a day. With it, perhaps, you will manage to get most of the things your child needs." And deep in my heart I know it will be so, for milk, butter and cheese are very precious in days of revolution.

By the time I finish my work Eya has carried enough wood into the hall to last us for a week. We build a fire in the drawing room and after our supper we play before it with the wooden blocks, cards and other things until my daughter's little head droops from fatigue. I lead her to her room, help her to undress and as soon as she is asleep I hurry to my own room and there sink into my bed.

Fragments of thoughts are still troubling my mind. Boldly I chase them all away.

Tomorrow is another day! Next year will come another spring! Why worry over the leaves that have already been torn off their branches and now lie under our feet like golden stars scattered from heaven.

Stars beneath our feet! Stars above our heads! What is there more beautiful to hold our fate?

So, be silent my mind! Keep still my heart! Allow me a time for rest.

»—«

Through those three difficult years, in which Krasavka stood by me so faithfully, there were, to be

sure, many other hours and days that are clearly imprinted in my memory.

But I must not sing the praises of my cow forever. There were also other interests and incidents that bore no relation to her. Of them I will speak later. Now I only wish to stress the infinite affection that some dumb creatures bestow on us, and how remarkably their devotion develops in time of deprivation into a real support of us.

Domestic pets in the ordinary course of life, spoiled by comfort, often grow indifferent to their masters and care little for what goes on about them. But a dog, a horse or a cow, truly taking part in the life and achievements of its master, learns to cooperate in everything and is eager to share in all its master's trials. There is really no limit to the fervency they are capable of displaying.

To be frank and just, one has to admit that nowadays we seldom meet human beings capable of the devotion and gratitude that we occasionally find in animals.

Mankind is inclined to take the service of his fellows for granted, while an animal never forgets the slightest act of kindness. This I know from my own experience, for my cow always repaid an hundred fold. And the tenderness and the elemental goodness with which she did so, seemed to me superior to the

crafty and clever way in which oftentimes humans accept and return favors.

Even now, when I think of Krasavka my heart softens; but *then* whenever I saw this big, strong creature obediently responding to my faintest mood, I used to think that a *cow* is the most desirable and faithful friend one can have on earth, without one exception.

She knew my voice from a distance and by its intonation could determine my state of mind and whether I were in good humor or not. Sometimes I called her from her pasture far away and, as the cowherd told me later, the moment she heard my call, she ceased grazing and started for home.

Once, when I had a group of friends visiting me, after an argument regarding the sensitivity of animals, at night we all went into the yard and someone chased the sleepy cow out of her shed. We scattered in different directions without a sound. After a moment of hesitation Krasavka came straight to me.

Whenever I was ill, or for any reason could not milk her myself, the milk was less abundant and much thinner. And if I did not appear for several days, she lost her appetite and made herself ill.

In other words her mistress was to her the center of her life. And believe me, it is a wonderful thing, especially during a revolution, to feel oneself a queen

at least to one's cow! So Krasavka granted me many moments of consolation and during the whole three years, betrayed me but once.

It happened in a rather amusing way and I think it will be well to close my story by describing that entire day.

»—«

It was the middle of the month of May.

The glory of the early summer reigned over the land. The sun shone brightly from the unclouded sky and its brilliance was reflected in the young leaves, throbbing on their branches, in the flowers widely open, sending forth their perfume, and in every sharp blade of grass, in every clear drop of water.

I finished my early morning's work, but then had to change the usual routine of my day, for I had received a letter from my husband, saying that he planned to bring four guest that day.

"Three of them are foreigners," he had written, "and I hope you'll receive them in the proper fashion."

"Hum!" I thought, "proper fashion! Is he joking? Where are the means to receive nowadays even the nearest friend in the proper fashion? Three foreigners! Mercy! What am I going to do about it?"

However, I had risen very early that morning and

cleaned the house with special care. Then, after Krasavka and the sheep went off to pasture, I went to look over my wardrobe.

Since the beginning of the revolution I had worn very simple clothes; a skirt, a blouse, soft slippers and a head-dress somewhat like a red-cross nurse. That day, though, to honor the foreign guests, I decided to change my costume and was anxiously looking for something interesting.

Alas! There were only remnants of the old elegance. After much hesitation, I picked up a white silk dress, altered it a little, then pressed it. It seemed to regain its freshness. When at length I put it on and arranged my hair in braids about my head, my own reflection in the mirror seemed quite good to me. It was a real delight to see oneself once again a lady of pre-revolutionary days. Smiling happily with self-satisfaction I almost danced about my room.

"Moussia! My sweet, my darling Moussia!" Eya chanted, as she appeared at the door and looked at me a while with dancing eyes.

"You!" I tried to impress her by my sternness, "Come here! I'll fix your hair! We're going to have guests by noon!"

"I know! I see! We'll have com-pa-ny-y!" She kept on chanting.

"Now, stop your nonsense and remember that I

want you to be a nice girl," I cautioned her. "Don't annoy anyone, keep your hair and your clothes in order and behave like a lady."

"Yes!" she said, "I'll watch my mamma and do everything the way she does."

"Heavens above!" I thought, taken aback, "how often children say shrewd things without realizing their own sarcasm.

"Don't you ever do that," I finally managed to say, "I don't want you to grow into a monkey. Be yourself and watch your own step."

"Yes, dear!" She caught my hand, placed a kiss in its palm and ran away.

I stood disarmed. What can one do with such a bit of fluff? She knows so many tricks to soften one's heart.

Feeling happier than ever I walked into the garden and from there into the yard. Just as I turned to take a look up the long road, which led into my plot, I saw a small boy coming toward me. He came down the path between the hedges of mock-orange and yellow roses, both in full blossom now, holding his hat under his arm, advancing with great solemnity. Full of curiosity I waited for him to approach. He bowed, greeting me and said, very seriously: "My father sends me here to tell you that he caught your cow in his field. Now she's under his arrest until you pay the fine."

"Oh, really?" I laughed. "It must be a mistake, for my cow never does shameful things like that."

"Maybe she hasn't done it before, but today she did. A whole bunch of them ran away from the meadows and yours was found in my father's field!"

"What nonsense!" I cried incredulously, "What makes you think it's *my* cow?"

"Well!" he grinned surveying me, "because she looks like you. Shiny!"

I was amused.

"You mean my nose is shiny?"

"No," he glanced once more at me, "the whole of you."

"That's remarkable!" I exclaimed, "a cow looking exactly like me is under your father's arrest! Let's go and see!"

He put his hat on with a gesture of final agreement.

I told Eya to wait for me at home and off we went through the blossoming hedge, along the clearing in the wood, into the open field. As we were crossing it, I looked at the young growth and said: "This green is so good that I feel that I myself would like to run through it."

"And you'd be arrested, too." The boy grinned again.

"What for? I wouldn't eat the springing wheat!"

"You might not eat but you'd trample a great deal.

That's what cows do. It isn't what they eat, but what they spoil under their feet."

Talking so we reached the village; then the boy's father's house. In the yard, sure enough, was my sweet Krasavka. A couple of men, several women and a crowd of children surrounded her. On seeing me she expressed so much joy that I had no heart to say even one word of reproach.

"How much do you want for fine?" I asked the people.

"We don't want money," a man spoke, snuffling through his nose. "What good is there nowadays in money? But this seems to be a goodly cow! We want milk."

"How much!"

"One whole milking."

"All right," I said, "get me something to milk into."

"But wouldn't it be right to wait until the evening, so we have a *full* milking!" a woman complained.

"You'll have more than you expect, as it is!" I shouted, "do get me a pail."

They rushed about and brought me a bowl, not larger than a coffee can.

"Too small!" I said.

They rushed again and brought a little pail, the size of a lard container.

"Still this isn't large enough!"

A woman emptied water out of a large enamel bucket and sneering handed it to me.

"Would that be large enough for your excellency?"

"I doubt it!" I retorted but settled myself to work.

The sneers and jeers I overheard around me when I started soon died away. Instead, whispers of admiration began to grow louder and louder, as the milk rose in the bucket.

I was certain that my cow would not betray my pride in her. But I did not know, was it because of the joy seeing me again, or, more likely, because of the young oats she had tasted that morning, that the froth ran over the edge when I finished milking?

"Holy Mary! Sweet Child of God! A woman crossed herself, and all the children smacked their lips watching me with shining eyes.

"There! May we go now?"

"Why yes! It's a wonderful cow and kind is her mistress!" The woman who sneered the most came to me. "Tell me, have you milked her already this morning?"

"That only my cow and I know," I joked. "Sorry but I'm in a hurry! Will you please open the gate and let us out!"

"Just a moment! I'll give you a strong rope to lead her home," the snuffling man whined through his nose.

"No thanks. We're on friendly terms and don't need that."

I saluted, and as the boy, who came for me, opened the gate, Krasavka and I marched out.

Many curious faces appeared behind the window panes, as we walked along the grassy street, side by side as though on promenade. Everyone wanted to see the fancily dressed lady and her "shiny" cow. When we were in the field Krasavka turned and glanced at me inquiringly.

"Oh, keep right on going!" I waved my hand at her.

She kept on, but her expression showed little remorse for her recent behavior; and to tell the truth I did not feel unhappy either. The day was so exquisite! And the adventure had only amused me. On reaching home I felt a little tired and sank down on the porch step to rest. My cow stood by, looking into my eyes, this time guiltily.

"Oh Krasavka," I exclaimed, "too bad you can't speak!"

"Oh yes! If only you could speak! Your mistress would never part with you, neither day, nor night!" The voice of my husband came from behind me.

Only then did I remember the expected guests who evidently had arrived during my absence. Abruptly jumping to my feet and turning round I nearly fell into the arms of Kostya Lvoff, poet friend of ours.

"Well," he laughed. "Good day. Can you leave your Krasavka and grant us a few moments of your attention?"

"How are you?" I mumbled and embarrassed stepped away.

"Very well, thank you." He bowed. "We brought three Americans with us to have a visit with you. Only it seems as though you prefer the cow's company to ours!"

"Sorry," I said, "I've been ready to receive you since early morning, but then Krasavka had to be rescued from being arrested and look what's happened to my dress!" We looked at my clothes. "Mercy! I'm not fit to appear before the eyes of foreign guests."

"Never mind," Kostya grinned, "let them see our Russian women, as we Russian men like them best. Slightly wind blown, powdered with the fruit-trees' pollen, perfumed with the scent of the forest's brush!"

"I'm afraid," I said, "it's only your extremely poetic nose that senses all this beauty. American eyes may be more sensitive than Russian noses."

However, we entered the big living room. My daughter, affectedly seated in a large arm chair was the first to catch my eye. She made a surprised face and shook her head disapprovingly. Ignoring her I turned my back and Kostya introduced me to the

three foreigners, representatives of the American Relief Administration, working in Kazan.

None of them could speak Russian, one spoke French. None of us could speak English, I alone spoke French. We exchanged polite French greetings and formally seated ourselves.

"You know," Kostya said, trying to relieve the awkwardness of the moment, "they just arrived last Sunday. Haven't you seen them passing here on the railroad from Moscow to Kazan?"

"No," I said. "Sorry, but I have no time to sit by the railroad tracks watching the trains go by."

"Too bad," drawled Kostya, "you made a big mistake. This time you should have watched the Moscow Express."

"And how would I know who was in it?"

"That's the whole point," he laughed. "It was so obvious that one would have to be an imbecile not to notice them. You would certainly have seen that the especially powerful engine was pulling the very special open flat cars. On them the famous Americans were sitting, enthroned in their own automoblies, reading their very own New York Times!"

We giggled. The Americans, understanding "New York Times," became enlivened.

"*Que ce que monsieur Lvoff dit?*" The one who spoke French asked.

"*Oh, il se fait drole*," I answered still laughing.

"*Mais á propos de quoi?*" he insisted.

"*A propos des Americains profondement engagès en ètudiant le New York Times, tandis que leur train passait içi á travers de mon paradis.*"

He understood our joke, blushed slightly and mumbled something in French which I could not exactly get, but it sounded like:

"Be it paradise or be it hell we Americans have to read our newspaper before anything else."

He laughed, said a few words to his companions, they laughed too. After that we all felt as though by now we were well acquainted and the conversation, partly in French, English and Russian, partly simply in pantomine, grew more and more animated.

But to me the room, gradually filling with tobacco smoke, ashes and cigarette stubs grew increasingly oppressive and made me long for the freshness of the fields and woods. And although I was apparently with my guests, my spirit, held captive by the fragrant breath of spring, was still spinning through the lucent air, companioned by the larks.

»—«

Years have passed since I left Russia, the Pine Grove, and my friends there. And since I parted

forever with the mute companion of those difficult revolutionary days, my faithful cow.

I know Krasavka could not live this long—she must have died. But even now, when I pass a meadow with cows grazing, some strange emotion rises in me and stopping involuntarily, I watch them.

They usually feel the intensity of my gaze and, lifting their heads from the grass, throw me glances that strike me as being much too warm for cows to give to a stranger.

And then an odd thought comes to my mind: "perhaps by my look they sense the friendship which exsited long ago between one of their kind and me."

Thus reflecting, I stand in the open amid the grasses, watching the cows under the glow of the sun. And the old feelings once again pass over me.

Once more I feel as though I am a queen—the very core of creation. And yet, I know, I am but a tiny string on one of the many instruments under Nature's wise hand, eternally playing its wonderful melody. The continuity of living.

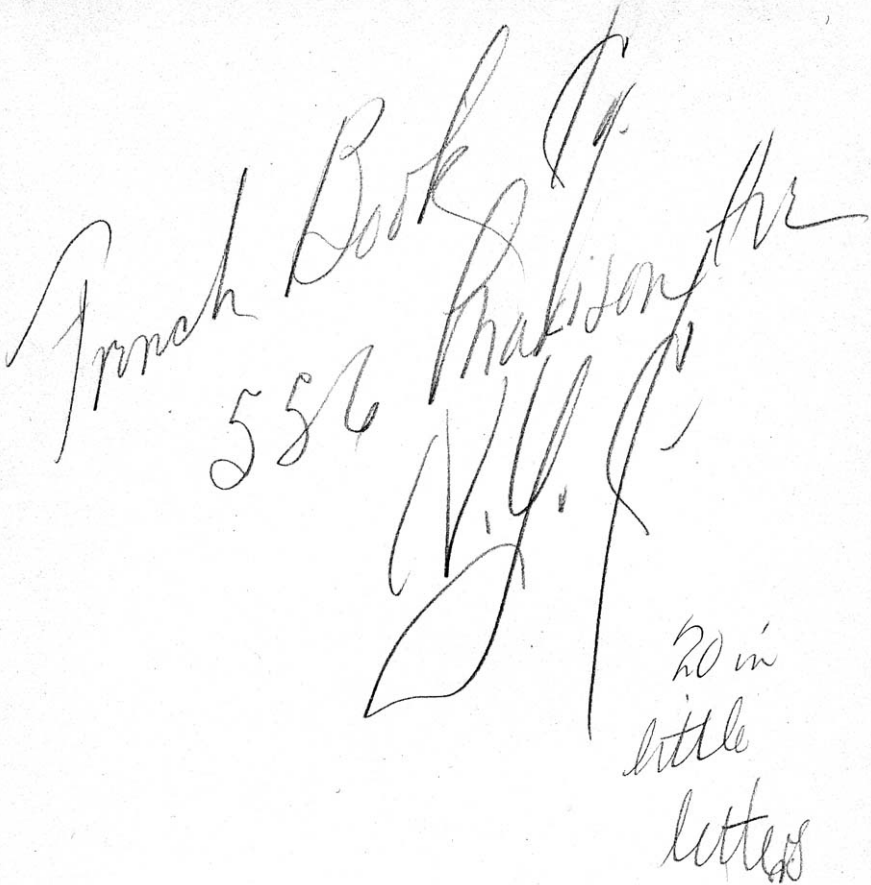
»—«

THE END

MARCH OF THE PAST

by Alexandra Fechin

HAS BEEN DESIGNED BY
WALTER L. GOODWIN, JR.
SET IN MONOTYPE PERPETUA
AND PRINTED AT THE RYDAL
PRESS SANTA FE NEW MEXICO
1937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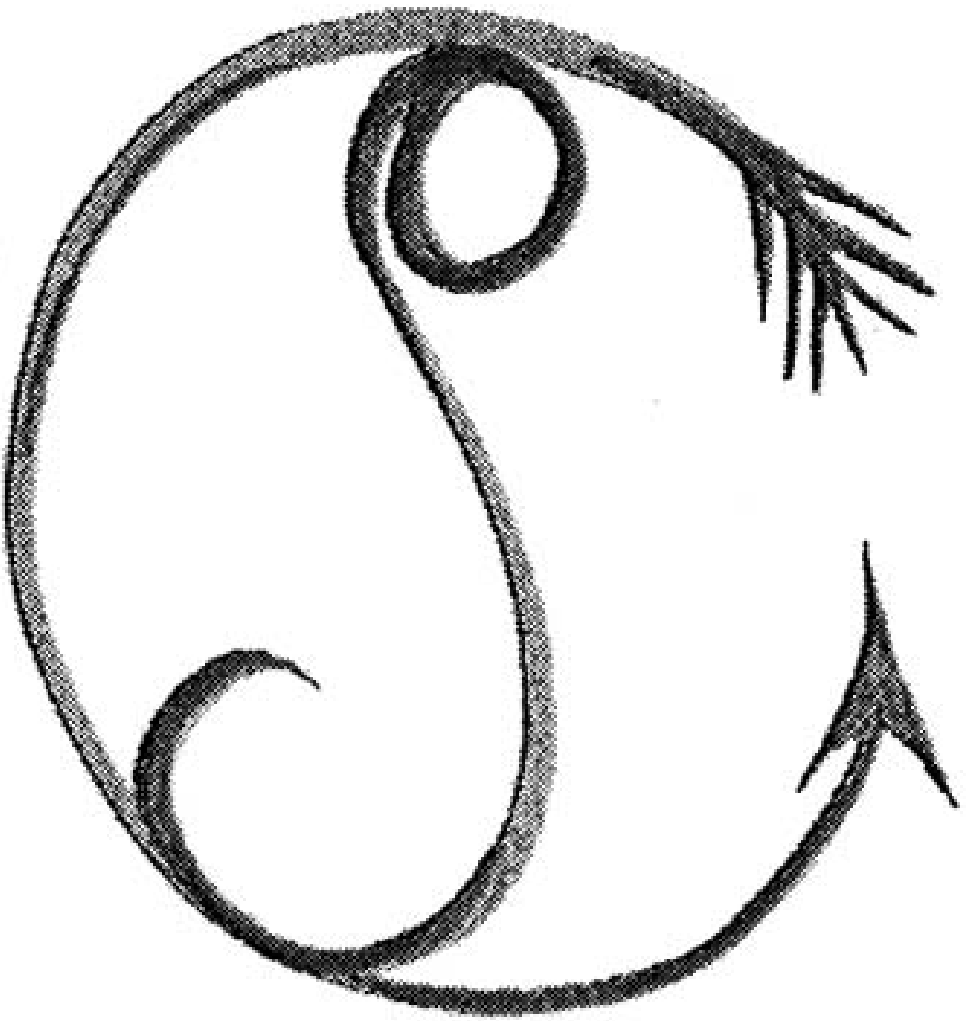

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