

**The Parcel**  
**from Chicken Street**  
and other stories

**Ludmilla Bereshko**  
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## Introduction

IT'S DIFFICULT to put a precise date on when I first met Ludmilla Bereshko. It seems as though I had always known her, ever since I came to Canada, and yet, despite the fact that I saw her frequently enough in the neighborhood, often listened to her, and even read some of the letters she received from home, I can't truthfully say to you that I ever really got to know her, in any personal sort of way. She was tall and not at all fat, and she had a wrinkled face. Though she often expressed her gratitude to Canada for taking her in, she couldn't entirely adopt North American habits of food and dress, and went about summer and winter with a kerchief around her head. Ludmilla often railed against the behaviour of priests and politicians, but never ventured out of the house without a little bottle of 'blessed' water and made sure to vote whenever she had to for it was important to exercise her 'democratic rights,' as she called them. Ludmilla said she couldn't wait to die, yet she refused to travel by metro because she insisted she would be in that dark eternity under the ground soon enough, and so it was better to see as much of the sky and sun while there was still the chance.

When Ludmilla wasn't hard at work, her favourite pastime was talking to anyone who would listen. She spoke about life in Ukraine, life in the new world, and the people she knew, back there, and now here, emigres, exiles, and refugees like herself. Sometimes her stories reached such moments, that in my youth I tended to think what I was hearing was all a touch surreal; however, the fact is that whenever I talked to others, at church bazaars and weddings, similar sorts of things would come out. Eventually, I began to comprehend a little of what they were saying. It should be pointed out though, that whenever Ludmilla told a tale, it was done in a very modest way, with a sense of resignation perhaps, but always with a tone of tolerance and sympathy to others no matter what. But I must admit, what she described often did upset me.

It is Ludmilla Bereshko's anecdotes then, and at times those of other people, that form the basis of these stories. Even though I often got to hear her opinion on world affairs, and hear her express compassion for those living in troubled spots on the globe, the focus here is on a handful of families—parents and children, who arrived in Montreal after World War II, just as Ludmilla Bereshko had and whom she knew in one way or another. Some were Galicians, like Omelko Budka and Tetiana Bahriy. These people had come from Ukrainian lands which had been until the war under Polish rule, and thereafter under Soviet domination. Some of the others, like Semmen Syrovatka and Ludmilla Bereshko herself, had come from the Eastern parts of Ukraine which had been incorporated into the Soviet Empire in earlier days.

Though these are, it's true, Ludmilla's tales, I have had to add to them here and there. So be sure it is I that you blame for the shortcomings you find here and not the wonderful Ludmilla Bereshko or those other venerable souls I mentioned earlier. Also, I recognize myself that many voices in these stories are marred by mistranslation, and, in addition, by my partial understanding of what these people really endured in their lives.

Perhaps a brief biographical sketch about Ludmilla Bereshko would be helpful. She was born on the banks of the Dnipro River, some time around the first revolution, either in 1905 or 1909, into a *khlaborob* family—people who plant and harvest wheat. Circumstances were such that she did receive some schooling. Therefore, she knew both the country and the city. Of course, travelling across half the world during the war taught her more about all that too. She also knew the years of fear and terror—forced collectivization, deportation, and the artificial famine of 1933. Shortly after came more terror with the German occupation of Ukraine, when she was

taken into forced labour in Austria. She never saw her husband or sons again and was never able to find out if they were dead or alive. They seemed to have disappeared without a trace. In Canada she married again, to Mykola Haydchuk, though not legally.

“*Zhyttia hirke, ale treba zhyty,*” Ludmilla often said to me. Life is bitter, but one has to live. She sighed a good deal, that’s true, but I noticed and appreciated quite an interesting quality she had. In admiring the beauty of vegetables, flowers, trees, or a pleasant day, she always managed to find a sunny spot for herself, and though she wasn’t really left with that much more than she came into the world with, she continued to retain an unselfish love for everyone and everything.

I should add that her real name was Bereschenko. That was her first husband’s name. She herself was born Ludmilla Vasylivna Storchak. People with long names, however, will understand her situation immediately. Documents, bills of all kinds, application forms—everything seemed to arrive with a letter missing here, two or three there, and no one could ever pronounce her name correctly. What usually came out was something like Bereshko. What could she do? If this was easier, so be it. That was how she became Ludmilla Bereshko, although her own continued to call her Baba Bereschenko.

I so much enjoyed visiting Ludmilla, at first in her small house in Rosemount and later when she was forced to move to her trailer near Beauharnois. I was always greeted with open arms, a fresh poppy seed cake, and a pot of mint tea. Such a cheerful trailer it was too, with embroidered cushions on her bench, on the wall above her table a huge picture of Taras Shevchenko which she had cut out of a calendar and framed, more plants than you can find in a greenhouse, and always on her little stove a pot of steaming *borscht* or cabbage soup. Nevertheless, she did often say to me that it was so far out of the way, she rarely got to see people any more. Still, Ludmilla had so much to show me whenever I arrived—the state of her garden, photographs from relatives, letters, Easter eggs she was working on, or newspaper articles about the situation at home. And it was while I was examining all these things that she talked to me about *vse i vsia*, as they say, everything under the sun.

But despite all these fine moments, one could not say that Ludmilla Bereshko had been born under a lucky star. Imagine for a moment the shock that must have greeted her when on the day of her husband, Mykola Haydchuk’s funeral she discovered that the title to the house in Rosemount (which was in his name, but which she had paid for too, by cleaning houses) was now going to Haydchuk’s grown children in the USSR. Ludmilla contested this situation, although she did say that only God himself perhaps really knew the extent of anguish and pain that for all these years must have wracked old Haydchuk, unable as he was to help his children properly or ever to return to his native land. In the end, the court decided that she should be entitled to half of the money that came from the sale of the house.

It turned out to be little. The legal costs had to be covered by her. A cheque did go to a Soviet official. Soon after she received a letter from Haydchuk’s sister in Ukraine who indicated dismay at what had happened and stated that for some reason not a great deal had ended up coming their way. Had it been worth it selling a house for such small gain and so much trouble?

One other question you might have for me is why I bothered to write down some of the things Ludmilla told me. I suppose the answer is that I can’t seem to forget the sad eyes and gestures of such people as Ludmilla Bereshko, her humility, and the fact that I never really heard

her complain about her life. Whenever I said to her, and to so many of the others, “You’ve lived through so much,” the answer I always received was, “Others have endured more.”

Unfortunately, there is no way I can guarantee that these stories will entertain you. At most I can only hope that you will find a little bit of something here to amuse you. It would be nice if I could welcome you with bread and salt, as is the custom of my ancestors, but the best I can do is to familiarize you with a saying that is connected with this tradition: *siisia, rodysia, zhyto, pshenytsia ta vsiaka pashnytsia!* Let yourselves be sown, rye, wheat, all kinds of grain! Spring forth!

Fran Ponomarenko  
Montreal, 1989

## The Parcel from Chicken Street

### I

Вот, вот время уплывет!  
Skovoroda

LIFE ON CHICKEN STREET! Who is there left now to describe it? Oh, it's lost forever and only lives on in the memory of a few old people and a handful of ghosts who still haven't found a place to go. Just ask yourself. Where can you get a live chicken nowadays? Why, these days chickens aren't even allowed to lay eggs any more. And it's gotten to the point that everyone has forgotten that a chicken is a complicated being. One is fat and jolly; another one likes to show off her wares; that one is sulky and moody and prone to thinness and looks out at the world with suspicious eyes. And then there are the weepers. They cry all day as though you had the knife to them already. You can be sure that in the history of the world not one has ever clucked quite like another. Each one has her own distinctive pitch—higher, lower, shriller. And there's no more old Tetiana Bahriy either, to go poking her fingers into the chickens, bothering them like that, always checking to see if maybe she could buy one with an egg inside that was about to be laid. She's long gone too.

Those were the days, when everyone, not just chickens had their place. On Thursdays the old collector, who came from Minsk and who knew only three words of English, went up and down the lanes crying for scrap and metal and rags. Mondays the ice-man came. Up the steps he ran holding huge blocks of ice with enormous black tongs. And every day you could see nothing less than an army of factory workers scurrying in all directions, this way, that way, and all just before dawn too. As for the afternoons, well, that's when the children liked to conduct mysterious and bizarre rituals while they waited for their parents to come home from work. And so, while Tetiana was away, her daughter Anna struggled feverishly hard to perfect *Scardy-pants, Afraid of ants* and win the esteem of her chums. How many times didn't she climb up the dirty wooden back steps of tenement houses? And once on the roof she took her turn at the edge. "Look down and spit!" Up here in the clouds the rule of law was that whoever refused to approach the flashing of the building dropped his drawers to a chorus of: "*D.P.! D.P.! Scardy-pants, Afraid of ants!*"

### II

*Good-day dearest Auntie Tetiana and you too, Uncle Bohdan,*

*We send you our warmest greetings and wish you a happy life, but mostly good health because the most important thing in life is one's health. All the best for 1957 and lots of renewed luck. We received your parcel for which we thank you. We are very grateful to you for not forgetting us. There is nothing new here with us except that we have snow as you do. I am studying in Bila Tserkva to be a diesel tractor driver and I will finish the course on the first of March. In the summer I will be working the fields of Ukraine. I only get home on Sundays. Mother now works only in the house because she is not well enough for anything else. Simma is in the first grade in the steppe. Tania goes to school in the village and is in the fourth grade. Not long ago our father visited us and asked us to send you his regards. Father's parents are still*

*alive, but they are very old. Father lives in Oddaypole and works on a tractor. In the parcel there were four jackets, four men's pants, a bolt of material, five pairs of stockings, and one pair of shoes. The shoes are wonderful. They fit everyone. I will try to get a photograph of all of us to send to you. But we have to go to Vynarivka to get photographed. We will send it to you in the summer, but I will send you a picture of myself taken during my classes on the mechanization of village farming. I tried to get Hunchak's address, but the one I was given was from 1941. They don't have a more recent one. To answer your question, Ostap Mekeda, Hnat Bazeliuk, Olexa Dobrodiy, Savva Miroshnychenko, Syoma Torchenko, and Lakhtin Makhno and others have not returned. Many of those who did come back have died of illnesses. There aren't many men in the village. Dearest uncle, write about your life in Canada, your children Anna and Olexander, what grade they are in. Give them our best. I will be ending my short letter which I ask you to reply to as soon as you receive it. We thank you very sincerely for everything. You needn't send us anything else. We don't wish to be a burden on you. We know that you are not overflowing with things yourselves.*

*Sashko, January 22, 1957*

### III

Что тебѣ то помогает,  
Если сердце внутрь рыдает?  
Skovoroda

THIS WAS THE LETTER that awaited Tetiana and Bohdan Bahriy that Friday evening. But Tetiana was home later than usual. After work she rushed to Zahar's for sausage meat. It turned out that he had a very big special on that day. And on marzipan chocolate bars too! The lines were long, and it all took so much more time than she had thought. But oh, how happy her little Olexa would be with the nougat! As for Anna, well, she was getting increasingly harder to please. She didn't like this. She didn't like that. And she was constantly devising strategies for resisting Tetiana's so-called 'emergency food.'

*"Khto khlib nosyt',"* Mrs. Bahriy always insisted, *"toy yisty ne prosyt' ."*

But these words rarely convinced Anna. And so the best approach Mrs. Bahriy had learned was to slip something into her daughter's pockets in the very last moment of her departure for school when she was totally unaware of what her mother was doing. To tell the truth, Tetiana Bahriy was, by almost everyone's estimation, as close to a saint as was humanly possible. In fact, old Savchenko, who had dreamed of being a priest all his life but who actually came from a collective farm around Dnipropetrovsk, always liked to say to her, "Tetiana, you're the only one I can talk to. You're a Galician. You understand me. All those compatriots of mine, they don't believe in God, not really."

Jealous people on the other hand, like Lida Iwanytska, insisted that from the way Mrs. Bahriy doted on her children she was certainly none other than the pampered daughter of some well-to-do villager. But what do people know? Especially those with dishonourable thoughts. Do they ever take much time to observe others? Once Tetiana had slipped on the ice and broken her

leg in three places, and for over a period of a year she had nursed it back to health herself.

“Doctors cost money,” she said, “and we don’t have it. It’s bound to get better on its own anyway.”

Though she was left with a slight limp, she never said a word. And years later when medicare came in, a doctor said to her, “Mrs. Bahriy, I can’t imagine how you could have endured such agony.”

“That was his assessment!” she had said to her family with a proud look on her face.

The truth was that Tetiana was so gentle of spirit that even her husband and children regularly took out their own difficulties on her.

“Home late again!” snapped her husband. “Where were you poking about? Sure you weren’t looking at men, you old fool?”

But she didn’t complain. As her foreman once put it, “You’re an obedient worker, Tetiana. I wish they were all like you. You get along so well with everyone.”

It was true. She never failed to trim the English tweed collars to perfect shape, but even here in the factory, there were many occasions when her loudest protests were the tears that streamed down her face in silence. And in matters of the heart she must have ranked as one of the most faithful of wives, and this even though she simply could not see the world the way her husband did at all. To Tetiana’s perpetual consternation Bohdan had an excessive aversion to every single kind of authority, including God himself it seemed! She had long ago concluded that the reason for this could only be that he came from the *Tarashchansky raion*, and, well, everyone knows that people from there are very outspoken. Why, in some villages it’s the women who smoke pipes. And they even sew boots! So what could she do? More than pray for her husband all the harder, that is. The odd time, however, when he was out, particularly on Saturdays, she liked to sit down with her daughter over a glass of tea (which she always sipped through a sugar cube) and tell the story of how she fell in love at the age of nine with Pylyp Antonovich, a neighbour’s son. Nothing was like that first love, she insisted. It was pure and free.

“If it hadn’t been for the awful war that ruined everything, who knows how things would have turned out?” she said. “I might have had parents like other children. But mine were taken. I might have been at home now, married. Oh, Pylypchyk was a fine lad. Clean and upright and God-fearing. And whenever he had a candy he would run out and say, ‘Tetano, come! I have a sweet.’ Such delicious mints they were too. So cool and refreshing. I’ve never tasted anything like them since. Oh, to be at home! How cheerful everything would have been. How nice! But where he is now, Pylypchyk, only the Holy One knows.”

#### IV

Ах ты, тоска проклята! О докучлива печаль!  
Грызеш мене измлада, как моль платья, как ржа сталь.  
Skovoroda

WHEN THINGS WERE GOING WELL there was nothing that delighted Tetiana’s husband more than fresh snow.



“Ahh!” Bohdan Bahriy used to say smacking his lips. “What’s healthier for the body than a crisp cold winter day? Such a feeling of expanse! How serene and peaceful the world becomes! Just like in the steppe.”

Of course, the shiverers—and there are always plenty of them—never see things this way. They go on and on about the dampness, despite the fact that they just need to be reminded what life is like when the bricks of the buildings and all the asphalt roads get so hot even spit sizzles. That would make them appreciate the winter more! But that Saturday morning the snow, which usually looked so inviting to Bohdan, did not cheer him up one bit. In fact, when he put on his heavy coat at seven o’clock in the morning, all he could mumble was something about how many shovelling jobs there would probably be that week. Then he turned to his wife and said in his gruff manner, “I’m going to Craig Street.”

“Go. Go, if you must,” answered Tetiana. “Did you read Sashko’s letter? They got the parcel.”

She sensed her husband was a little more abrupt than usual that day, though she hardly knew what to do about it.

“What could it be?” she asked herself.

“Here,” he said, pulling out a small brown envelope that had nothing to do with Sashko’s letter and pushing it at her. “It’s the last one.”

As Bohdan Bahriy went out, he slammed the door. Although Tetiana hadn’t eaten yet that day, she suddenly didn’t feel hungry any more and just threw herself into all the housework that needed to be done. So that was it, she thought to herself. Laid off again.

As for her husband, he was well down the hill to Sarah’s Pawnshop, probably the best place for him in the state he was in. Glory be, what there wasn’t in there! Old grammophones, several of them even with a large RCA trumpet ear. Guitars, accordions, xylophones—and an array of books that always prompted Sarah to say to people, “Watch out how you handle those, please. They’re collector’s items.”

And what about the shelves behind the counter? It was probably true what someone had once said. Nowhere else in the entire city could you find so many brands of toasters and radios. And in the glass case? Why, a veritable treasure-chest filled with porcelain plates of all kinds. And in the front window, in the very center, on a little stool, stood a brass Statue of Liberty holding not the familiar torch, but a real light bulb that went off and on all day and night. Here it was impossible to have a dull moment. People were constantly coming and going, buying and selling.

“Nevermind fishing for customers today,” Sarah said to Bohdan. “Come inside. Go look at my furnace.”

“Son-o-ma-gun, I tell you no turn thermostat high,” said Bohdan. “You forness old.”

“Old, shmold. Never mind,” she said. “I don’t want to blow up in here.”

There weren’t many who had the gift with worn out equipment that Bohdan had. The man could fix anything! Why, everyone in the neighbourhood called on him, which of course always helped out when he was laid off—if he got paid that is. He had just managed to empty the water pipes when he heard Sarah’s voice again.

“Bogdan!” she yelled. “Bogdan! Hurry up. Quick!”

When he reached the top of the stairs he saw a tall young man rushing out into the street.

Sarah was struggling up from the floor.

“Right over he shoved me!”

The man just disappeared somewhere, and all of Craig Street was quiet in the white snow. Even the huge skeleton of a building which was being put up across the street was silent. Occasionally a taxi would drive by.

“Call police!” insisted Bohdan. “Fast.”

“Are you crazy?” said Sarah pushing her hair back. “You think I need trouble? I had a presentiment. I knew today wasn’t lucky.”

“Vat he take?”

“The bum! Took the best watch strap in the store.”

“Too bad I no see,” said Bohdan. “I know bandeet. I know ven come real one.”

“Ahh, what do you mean you know?” Sarah asked. “You have some secret?”

“Look in eye. Right away know. Von time I see famous robber Mad Moe Montréal.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Sure! Ooh-h, he have strong kharacter! Tell me he like prison! Lern play dere *shakhmat*. You know *shakhy*? Vat you call em.... Chess!” Then Bohdan said, “Why you not keep importament t’ing in safe place? Good place?”

That was when Sarah showed Bohdan how the wide slats of the floor lifted up, and down there underneath another hatch was where she kept what looked like a safe. Suddenly she began to seem tired and weary.

“What do I need all this for?” she said as she looked around the store.

“Need?” said Bohdan. “Why not need? People need. Need today toaster. Tomorrow maybe nails. Always need somet’ing. But I tell em you somet’ing. Maybe you need marry.”

“Marry? You crazy? I don’t have enough headaches?”

“Some good man,” continued Bohdan. “Help you.”

“Man?” Sarah answered. “That’s a help?”

But Bohdan was curious and wasn’t going to be put off so easily.

“Splain me why you no marry. You smart. Vonce young. Why no husband?”

“So, you don’t think I was pretty once?” She brushed off the dust from her dress and looked embarrassed. “Well, I was. Very pretty. Everybody looked. You think I didn’t have? I had, don’t worry. But I was stupid. I fell in love. His father owned a fruitstore on Pine Avenue. A hard working boy. All day he knocked about in that store. Work and save. Work and save. And such a gentleman! Never came to the house without something. A grapefruit. A pear. Cherries when it was the season. But then with the depression they moved and made him marry somebody else.” She looked at Bohdan and said in a sober way, “You know your girl was in here this week?”

“Anna?”

A look of suspicion crossed Bohdan’s face.

“Yeah,” said Sarah. “She was looking at skis.”

“Son-o-ma-gun.”

“Well, she’s growing up, you know.”

“Never mind,” continued Bohdan. “Not ski she vant. Vant go in montagne for boys. For alkohol. You t’ink ski importament? I vork like hell and she t’ink only ‘bout fun.”

“I know,” said Sarah. “Skis! That’s for the rich who have nothing to do all day. That’s what I told her.”

“Children in America t’ink holiday every day. T’ink everyt’ing com’ easy,” continued Bohdan. “I no have million! Son-o-ma-gun, look vat build em ‘cross street. All aluminium, like white gold. But do wit’ people what like. Ask em if gib me job?”

“For Pete’s sake,” Sarah said. “Shhh. You talk like a communist. I could get into trouble with you here.”

“I see what do,” said Bohdan. “Own eyes. *Partia. Bureaucratia*. Take em all. Not’ing for people. Here new contry. Why not gib chance? O.K. I eat. But why not supposed in life have proportion? Not one everyt’ing un ‘nother not’ing.”

“You’re right,” said Sarah. “All his life my father used to say the same thing. *Kegen alleh tiranen*.

What didn’t he go through? Came here twelve years old. Alone. With a name tag. And went into the shop to work.”

On his way from the pawnshop that evening Bohdan felt a little more satisfied. Not only did he have a couple of dollars in his pocket now, but who else should he run into than his old friend, Oleh Starenky, who also worked at Montreal Iron Works. Maybe they were hiring in his department, Bohdan said to himself. After all, Oleh hadn’t been laid off, and in that section things had looked very good lately. There was even talk of a big contract for steel rails.

“*Pryimaiut’ u vas?*” asked Bohdan.

“*Tade!*” Oleh answered. “*Khloptsiv zvilniaiut’.*”

“And on the grinders?” Bohdan continued hopefully.

“The boys take whatever there is,” said Oleh. “Who can afford to twitch his nose?”

“And for spring? How does it look?”

“Who knows?” Oleh said. “I was told I had eight weeks myself and no more.”

Bohdan waved good-bye to his friend as they got off at Prince Arthur Street.

Now everyone on earth has at least one nasty habit. Some people pick their noses. Others like to wrestle with the food that lodges in their back teeth and often even spend great amounts of time forcing it out. And still others are spitters. This was Bohdan’s particular weakness. Certainly, for the most part, he tried to restrain himself. But for some reason after his chat with Oleh Starenky, Bohdan found that he had an awful lot of saliva coming up into his mouth, and he just didn’t know what to do with it.

“Yuk!” That was what the children always squealed on the street when they saw him. “Look at the ugly old man. He’s spitting all over the place. Yuk!”

## V

Ах, кто мя от сего часа избавит!  
Кто мя исправит?  
Skovoroda

AS IF THERE WEREN’T ENOUGH difficulties, Mrs. Bahriy now found that she had an

added worry—her daughter Anna. The school year was soon ending. Why, the tulips at the florists were all in bloom, and here was her daughter in a daily sulk. She complained about how others had gone to the mountains that winter, how they had gone skiing, and she hadn't. And when she wasn't going on about this, she would walk around looking out at the world with grey distant eyes. It even got to the point that she said she just wanted to get away from Chicken Street once and for all. And her sharpest words, the ones which wounded Tetiana Bahriy most, were when she declared that she had had enough of everything, including those unbearable 'letters from home,' the ones that came in cheap turquoise envelopes with their shaky Cyrillic writing that her mother, who could hardly read, had to struggle with like a school child. Life. Anna told absolutely everyone on the street, could be anything you made of it, especially here in Canada! But then there was that other problem.

"Oh, what's that?" said Tetiana.

"Don't you know? Can't you see? Father!" she declared.

Why couldn't he be like other people? Why was he always without a job? Why couldn't he be like their neighbour, Makhtey Zahar, who had shown everyone that it was possible. Why, look at that store! It was hard to find another window like his anywhere! Lord in heaven, what didn't he have in there? Sauerkraut, pickled eggs, herrings, and every variety of *kovbassa* the mind could possibly imagine. And in the corner always stood an inviting tray of chocolate *halvah*. Sometimes in addition he'd lay out smoked hams and carps, and on Saturday morning when he knew business was brisk, you could be certain there was a long tray of freshly made *kashanky* suspended from the ceiling, swaying ever so slightly, this way and that.

"If only your window could be turned into a fridge," the customers liked to say. "Then you could put everything, absolutely everything, out there."

It's true, Makhtey Zahar worked day and night with his wife and children in the back room, and most of the time he looked like he was about to collapse. Besides, there was always blood under his fingernails. But the more sausages he hung in the window, the more prominent he became in everyone's estimation. Makhtey was enjoying respectability. And before long he even became a leader among men. And so it goes without saying that he supplied his children with what others couldn't.

"Come on over to my house," Zahar's daughter Vera always insisted to Anna. "It'll be fun. We can play records, watch T.V."

And by the end of the tenth grade they had become truly the best of friends. In fact, Vera had introduced Anna not only to modern music, but to beehive hairdoes, as well as nylon crinolines. In addition, all that last year she had been telling Anna everything about the pleasures of the ski slopes.

"It's great!" Vera squealed.

"Oh, I wish I could go," said Anna. "Even a second-hand pair costs twenty dollars."

"If you could just get them somehow," said Vera. "We could have such a ball."

After such conversations was it any wonder Anna was anxious to go to the mountains? It all sounded so exciting. But with five dollars? What hope was there of getting anything? Nevertheless, Anna decided to try again. Perhaps she would be lucky and those old skis she had seen at Sarah's

Pawnshop would still be there. What's more, they might even be on sale now that it was spring.

"Look," said Sarah. "I understand you want them. But did you think this out? Your father won't be thrilled. And believe me, I need trouble like I need a hole in the head."

"I wouldn't go without his permission," said Anna.

"Alright, alright," said Sarah looking Anna straight in the eye. "Take them. Forget about the money. Don't worry, I'll work something out with your father. Maybe you'll change your mind and bring them back."

"Oh, thank you so much!" said Anna.

As she was leaving the store, however, Anna pulled out her five dollars and left them on the counter.

"I'd rather pay for them myself," she said, "if you don't mind."

Sarah just shook her head and muttered something about how hard it was with young people today. But as soon as Anna got home, the first thing she did was to hide the skis. And where else was there in such a small flat but under the bed? By evening however, Bohdan Bahriy had dragged them out.

"You think you're going skiing?" he shouted at Anna in Ukrainian. "I'm laid off and you've got boys in your head!"

"I just want to try it," Anna mumbled in a frightened voice. "I don't know any boys."

"You want to try it!" Bohdan roared. "Try being hungry every day! Like I was all my life!"

"It's Vera who's taking me," Anna said. "Next winter only. Anyway, I worked for the money. It's mine."

"Yours!" He came up close to her, red as a beetroot, his steel-capped teeth glistening. "To squander money! To let boys squeeze you in dark corners! No. I said, no. Understand?"

The neighbours always knew whenever Bohdan Bahriy's dreadful temper was unleashed. And that day was no exception. Hrunia Wantsar who lived downstairs, had no other solution but to bang on the ceiling with a broom, sometimes for over a quarter of an hour too. But to no avail. Nothing stopped him. And he had become particularly bad these past few months. Oh, if only they would call him back to the shop. And then, suddenly, before anyone knew what was happening, Bohdan planted his right foot smack in the middle of one ski, then in the middle of the other, and pulled them up with a crunch. Just like that! Two snaps and that was the end of the skis.

"That's where you're going!" he yelled as he dropped the pieces of wood from his hand. "Aching for boys are you? I'll show you. I'm without work and you're throwing around money!"

## VI

Оставь, о дух мой, вскорѣ всѣ земляным Мѣста!  
Взойди, дух мой, на горы, гдѣ правда живет свята.  
Skovoroda

THERE WAS ONLY ONE major inconvenience about living on Chicken Street, and that

was that in the summer the air became particularly thick and even yellow. You see, that was when the smell of the slaughtered chickens from Louie's Live Poultry would permeate the whole street, especially on hot and humid days. Why, even the residents of the street, who didn't usually notice the smell, held their noses ever so tightly whenever they had to pass by in order to reach the shops on St. Lawrence Street.

"He should do something for July and August," Mrs. Wantsar said. "There's no respect for people these days. It's enough to give you a serious sickness!"

It was a bad time for the chickens too, of course. Many of them lost feathers from being cooped up in those cages in such a heat. And in every compartment there was invariably one lying on her side, and you would be certain she was a goner. And then sometimes their squawking would get so loud, even the butchers looked for escape. That's when you'd see them taking short walks up and down the sidewalk wearing their blood-stained aprons, drinking cokes and wiping off the sweat with their shirt sleeves. Anna told Vera that one more summer with these chickens was more than she could bear. And so it was that in the long columns of Domestic Help Wanted in *The Montreal Star* Anna found herself her first true 'position\*.

"It's like being a governess," said her friend Vera.

Even her father began to treat Anna as an adult.

"You're going into the world now," he would say. "To earn your own bread. It's an important step in a person's life when they can do that."

Yet for some reason the family she was now living with took to calling her Annie instead of Anna. And then she realized that she had better not speak unless she was spoken to. It was just as well. The days were full of cooking meals, washing up, and looking after the children while the Lady of the House played golf and soaked her sore muscles in hot water. The odd time when a few tears threatened to squeeze themselves out of Anna's eyes, she tried to keep them in check. Mostly this occurred, however, when the daughter of the household, who was exactly Anna's age, would be heard referring to Anna as 'The Maid.' So what if she had a beautiful room? She was fat and lazy and always perspiring. In fact, she even walked with a pronounced waddle. It was plain as day! This was from lying around on her eider-down so much.

That winter, Anna would tell herself while she was standing over the stove making soup, she would get to go skiing, no matter what, and she would finally see those magnificent mountains everyone talked about. And things did look promising. There would be enough money for everything, for the tow, the bus. Oh, everything! Why, Vera had even offered to keep the new skis she planned to buy over at her house. And so if anything was true, it was that Anna worked at this job with singular purpose. She pressed the shirts, blouses, and skirts to perfection. She sang songs to the children and regularly made chocolate brownies. Even the Lady of the House took to remarking, "You're always in such good spirits Annie. How do you do it?"

When Anna came back to Chicken Street after Labour Day, all her earnings were intact. And there was even a small bonus! Not a penny had she spent. How proud she was of herself! This, her final year of high school, was off to such a good start. The teachers were kind, all that is except for Bentley Ash, who had recently become the school counsellor after many years as the gym teacher.

"You'd better take more typing," he said to Anna. "And shorthand. University is out of the

question for you. Your people don't have the money."

Fortunately, Vera came to Anna's rescue.

"He's a jerk," she declared. "Forget about him! Why don't you come over to our house? We just got the new Simpson's Sears catalogue. You should see the great ski stuff!"

They spent more hours than there are in a day pouring over those pictures of jackets, pants, and sweaters. Such good quality, to be sure. But the expense! Before long Anna decided that the clothes Tetiana had been making for her so lovingly weren't good enough any more. And when she saw those specials they had on complete sets, which included skis, poles and boots, she started to think she should have something from the catalogue too.

"See that pink outfit, the pants and everything?" Vera said. "My mother promised me that one."

"Gosh, you're lucky," said Anna.

Day in and day out they poured over the photographs and discussed which colours they were really born to wear. And before long, they placed the orders and everything was now just a matter of time.

"It's going to be so much fun," said Vera.

"I can't wait," said Anna. "We're going to be as free as birds. As free as birds!"

And the day when the equipment finally arrived at Vera's house was indeed one of the best in Anna's life. They tried on each others jackets, waxed their skis, conditioned their boots, and waited for that first big snowfall during their Christmas break. And when that day finally came, even Bohdan Bahriy wasn't grumbling so much, although that was partly because he had been coming home late every night quite tired, because of all the storms they'd been having, what with broken down stoves he'd been fixing all over the place, on De Bullion, on Drolet, on Marianne, even as far away as Point St. Charles. Mostly though it was because his wife had managed to hide the fact of the ski-trip their daughter was planning. What was the point of more quarrels? Bohdan would only become upset if he knew, and Tetiana decided she would try to smooth things over once Anna was gone. In the meantime, she helped her daughter organize when he wasn't at home.

"Here. Two marzipan bars. One's for you and one for Vera," said Mrs. Bahriy to Anna as she kissed her goodbye. "Oh, merciful Lord, make sure you look after yourself. One never knows what calamities befall one on the road."

## VII

Дубина, Грабуна, Рябуна, Вербуна,  
Соснуна, Кленуна, Тернуна, Вишнуна,  
Ялуна, Малуна, Калуна, В'язуна,  
Лозуна, Бузина, Бзуна.  
The Monk Klymenty

OF COURSE IT WAS a well-known fact to everyone on Chicken Street that doctors were for the wealthy and therefore, to be consulted only in an absolute emergency. For that reason

avoiding sickness constituted one of the central preoccupations of life. Even ordinary greetings such as hello and good-bye were inevitably couched with wishing the other person good health. *Zdorov! Buvai zdorovy! Trymaisia!* And the worst possible curse anyone could utter was nothing less than the name of a disease. How else can you explain *Kholera!* Or *Khoroba!* Was there a more effective way of expressing frustration? None at all. That's for sure.

So it goes without saying that whenever friends and neighbours ran into each other, it was just a matter of time before the topic of conversation turned to who had come up with what remedy. In these matters, however, no one was quite like Hrunia Wantsar. She was a virtual repository of cures. And a bit of an inventor too.

"There's only one way to get rid of acidity," she insisted year after year. "Potato water! Ahhh, but there's a secret. You have to drink a lot of it, litres and litres a day."

Now since stomach problems seemed to be frequent, who didn't try out her prescriptions? Everyone did at some point or another. After all, desperation will lead to almost anything. But if one considers all the various remedies known to man, one would have to agree that in the final analysis there are only really three basic categories of medicines. There is first of all everything that one calls liquids. And chicken soup leads this list without question. Nothing, but nothing else can give as much protection from all the germs that surround a human being in his daily life. And when the soup is made with a mature hen, even better. Now, some cooks, like Tetiana Bahriy liked to go even further and maintained that the potency of the broth was tremendously increased if a marrow bone happened to be cooked in it.

"This will give strength to the blood," she would say.

In fact, at the Bahriy household the soft marrow center spread on a fresh piece of rye bread and lightly salted ranked as one of the best appetizers there was, next to herrings that is. As for other important liquids, there is of course, mint tea, linden tea, and camomile tea. What can't one cure with these delightful beverages! Why, cramps, fevers, headaches, even swellings are relieved with compresses made from these heavenly infusions!

Then, naturally, there is the aggressive category of medicines. Garlic and horseradish can't be excluded here, particularly when taken raw and in sufficient quantity. It was commonly known that Bohdan Bahriy, for example, was a great believer in the power of these substances and on a weekly basis liked to 'cleanse his system' by chopping up several cloves of garlic directly into his *borscht*.

"This will kill every microbe in the human organism," he liked to say.

"Not to mention all the evil spirits it might keep away," Mrs. Bahriy would always pipe in.

But when he felt in genuine distress, Bohdan always resorted to the third category of treatment—heat. "*Ban'ky stav!*" he would say to Tetiana on such occasions. You see, in his view, neither hot water bottles nor the best ointments in the world ever combined all the necessary elements that would go straight after the pain just the way the jars did. Although this procedure looked terribly complicated, and now no one bothers with it any more, at home even novices mastered it. After all, heating up a few glass jars with an alcohol induced flame is not very difficult. It's the jar that does all the work. All by itself! Just like a hot suction pump directly on a person's naked back. But sometimes, when Bohdan's skin became so red that it was almost blue, even he talked about 'an uncomfortable but necessary burning.'



And on that very Sunday afternoon, as their daughter was up in the mountains, there was Bohdan Bahriy, lying face down on the sofa in the kitchen, while Mrs. Bahriy covered his back with jar after jar, when all at once there was a loud banging at the door.

“Oh, good people!” It was Mrs. Zahar.

“My Vera’s just come back from our girls’ trip to the mountains and tells me your Anna has stayed behind with a certain young man. Goodness! And you’re not well, Bohdan. Oh, Lord in heaven, why do you always work in such mysterious ways?”

“*Kholera!*” Bohdan snapped at his wife. “And you told me everything was looked after. Oh, she’s going to learn, alright, what it means not to listen.

She’ll never pull a stunt like this again!”

Although Bohdan had a bad temper, you couldn’t call him lazy, even when he was sick or angry as he was that day. After Mrs. Zahar left, he went off to the back shed to put order into the coal bins. It grew dark early, but still there was no Anna.

“*Bohdane! Bohdane!*” cried Tetiana after some time had gone by. “Come here!” She motioned to the window.

Before she knew it, Bohdan had grabbed a jacket and was out the front door going towards the rusty old car that had pulled up in front of their house.

“*Bihom! V khatu!*” Bohdan shouted so loudly his voice echoed far and wide.

Anna sat there, paralyzed. Next thing, Bohdan was pulling her out of the car by the scruff of her neck. Then he ran round to the driver’s side.

“Who you?” He shouted and gesticulated at the young man behind the driver’s wheel. “Son-o-ma-gun! Go ‘way!”

What else could he do? Anna’s friend started up the motor. And as if that wasn’t enough, just as the car was about to leave, Bohdan pounded the roof as hard as he could and shouted some more. In the meantime, Anna rushed into the house, her father quick to follow.

“You’ll get it for this,” he went on in Ukrainian. “All you think about is running around! Is that it? And we’re trying to make ends meet here.”

“Anna!” Mrs. Bahriy cried from the top of the steps.

“Shut up!” Bohdan barked as he continued his words to his daughter. “Until you’re eating your own bread, you do as I say! Hear me? And you’ll see boys when I tell you to. Not before that!”

“Father got a terrible chill today,” whimpered Tetiana. “His galoshes were stolen....”

“Will you shut up, you old fool?” Bohdan shouted. “What are you raising here? A whore? And you,” he said pushing Anna against the door, “what do you think? That I have money to look after a cripple? That bum only wants to use you! Who the hell is he anyway? Some Italian? Smarten up. There’s mother’s milk around your lips that hasn’t dried up yet!”

The air in Anna’s room was so hot that night, she just tossed in her bed, this way, that way. Then she found herself getting stomach cramps. Oh, there was no hope of falling asleep at all!

## VIII

Объяли вокруг мя раны смертоносны,

АДОВЫ БЪДЫ ОБОЙШЛИ НЕСНОСНЫ.  
Skovoroda

NOW, AS IF THERE WEREN'T enough bad feelings already, what with Bohdan's perpetual anger and Tetiana's kindly attempts to pretend that nothing at all had happened, that whole week after Anna's return from the mountains, her friend, Vera Zahar took to spreading very unpleasant rumours at school about their skiing week-end. Anna was hurt and troubled that Vera wasn't being more understanding. What was it that had so suddenly changed their former great friendship, she wondered? They had had disagreements before. It was just all too distressing to see their relationship take this turn. But Vera was unapproachable. And to tell the truth, things became even worse, especially when the Zahar Meat Store became a-buzz with the news that Vera had been accepted to McGill University. People seemed to talk about nothing else.

"Maybe she'll become a doctor," they said to Mr. Zahar. "Or a lawyer. One day maybe even a scientist."

"Anything is possible!" Mr. Zahar replied. "Anything."

And when they were paying up at the cash, they never failed to add to Mrs. Zahar, "*Oi, vydno shcho z neyi budut' liudy.* That's for sure. She gonna be a somebody."

Anna felt worse and worse. To be abandoned like this by a close friend is a difficult thing at any age, but especially if you're young. So, when she spotted Vera coming out of Mattie's Snack Bar one January afternoon, Anna decided the best course was a direct hello. But who would have ever dreamt that right there and then, in front of other girlfriends as well, Vera could have been so cruel?

"Well, what's his shack like? Eh?"

"Look, we just went for a walk!" Anna answered.

"And what sane person is going to believe that?" Vera continued. "Jeez! I saw you going off with him!"

"Nothing happened," Anna said. "O.K.?"

"I thought you went up there to learn how to ski?" Vera's voice was shrill. "An Indian! God Almighty! I always knew you were stupid, Anna. But I didn't know you were *that* stupid."

## IX

Весна любя, ах, пришла! Зима люта, ах, пройшла!  
Skovoroda

BUT, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, even after the darkest night, the sun must come up, at least for a while. So, Anna's life changed a little too, and the days of torment gave way to the most heartfelt optimism. You see, her skiing friend had begun to write to her. And what a letter it was! Why, you'd think that overnight the world had become a different place. Back and forth their letters went, from Chicken Street to the Caughanawaga reserve across the St. Lawrence River. Oh, it's a lucky thing that the outside world has a hard time telling when people are in love. Can

you just imagine all the problems that would have suddenly been unleashed for Anna had her condition become visible and obvious to all?

Of course, no one knew about these goings-on in the Bahriy household, least of all her father. Why, he would have punished her in the severest way if he had discovered the truth. That was evident. It was a lucky thing, too, that Anna was always the first one home to collect the mail. Oh, how they wished they had telephones too! Imagine being able to hear each other's voices across such a distance. That would have been heaven on earth for them! As it was, as soon as a letter arrived, Anna memorized it instantly and for days repeated it to herself until another one came.

As for Bohdan, well, believe it or not, his mood also altered, and the future didn't look so grim. Montreal Iron Works were still laying off men, but he didn't think about them any more. Canada Foundry was signing all kinds of contracts, people said. It seemed that Bohdan even got to speak to some big foreman over there. Tetiana breathed a sigh of relief. *Dai Bozhe!* Another storm looked as though it was almost over. You could see it in the way Bohdan bit into a piece of bread. With such relish! In fact, such a feeling of well-being prevailed in the Bahriy family that there was now even talk about how one of these days they might just be able to get a place of their own.

"Ah," Bohdan said in such moments, "I'll plant a sunflower right next to the front door. Just like at home. And watch how it turns its head with the sun. *Pryroda, tse krasota.*"

"Go away with your sunflowers!" Tetiana always answered when he got onto this topic. "How about a few tomatoes!"

Spring fever was evident everywhere, to be sure. Even at Louie's Live Poultry they took to keeping the front doors open. And whenever a waft of cool fresh air came in, all the chickens suddenly became jubilant again. The clucking would begin at such phenomenal speeds and high pitches, it's a wonder the windows didn't shatter from so much ecstasy, though, as Tetiana Bahriy was fond of saying, "*Slichne—ne vichne.*" Spring is truly the shortest season. Misery will find you wherever you are.

## X

Душа наша тѣлесным не может довольна быть,  
Она только небесным горит скуку насытить.  
Skovoroda

LET NO ONE SAY that just because she could hardly read or write, Tetiana Bahriy wasn't an intelligent soul. She knew hundreds of songs for example, from start to finish, and more proverbs than anyone else on Chicken Street, modern ones and ancient ones too, which many had already completely forgotten. Although she was a quiet sort, it's true, people often thought that meant they could fool her and often even tried. But she was a clever one and always had the capacity to understand things. She knew about the letters from Caughanawaga, for example, and regularly found them neatly piled up in Anna's pyjama drawer. Somehow Tetiana had even managed to make out the post mark and determine where they were coming from.

One couldn't say that she really approved of the whole business, and she did worry about whether or not Anna was riding around in that rusty old car, but she was also of the opinion that girls needed to have at least a little bit of a life of their own. She knew her husband would not agree with her on this at all, but since Anna seemed so much happier these days, Tetiana didn't see much harm in getting a few letters. However, after a certain postcard arrived in the same handwriting and from New York City, Tetiana saw a change in her daughter. She was now sad and not talkative at all. And then when Tetiana saw Anna in the act of packing clothing into a carton box, she became truly alarmed.

"*Dytyno, shcho zh ty robysh?*" she cried.

"This is all too small for me," Anna mumbled.

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Don't worry, I'll probably never see him again," said Anna. "He's working in New York."

"*Oi, Anna!*" said Mrs. Bahriy, tears suddenly springing to her eyes. "But I have a sister in Poland. One in Germany and two in Siberia. They have small children too, and live in such misery."

"Well, they have no father now, I'm telling you!"

"*Bida po liudiakh khodyt*" said Tetiana. "I understand you just want to help out. But father's out of work. They promise and promise, and now it turns out there's nothing. You see the way he's been lately. And who knows how long I can hold on."

"We'll survive without this, mama," Anna insisted. "Nobody knows how long the mother is going to live. Let them have it."

At that moment Tetiana must have felt dreadful seeing her own Anna, almost a grown woman but still a child, suffering from so much heartbreak and grasping for any kind of hope. Suddenly she took to rearranging the things Anna had put in the box.

"*Treba tse lipshe poskladaty,*" she said.

## XI

Будь чист хоть на час малый.  
Skovoroda

OF COURSE, if it hadn't been for Hrunia Wantsar no one would have ever found out all the circumstances surrounding this Indian parcel. And it was remembered, oh, many times over, in Zahar's Meat Store. Even at church they talked about it. As for whether or not Bohdan Bahriy ever really learned about what had taken place under his very own roof, who knows? But Hrunia Wantsar testified that she herself had seen Tetiana and Anna rushing down St. Lawrence Street with that very parcel. There was a tremendous air of secrecy about them too, she said. Why, she even followed them, right down to the post office and also managed to hear snatches of their conversation when the breeze blew in her direction.

Then there was also Victor Wasylyshyn. He also knew a great deal. After all, he cleaned floors at that post office. And he said he saw it there with his very own eyes, in a pile with many other parcels going to all corners of the world. He took a good look at it too. Many people liked

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to say that the Bahriys were ‘*chudni liudy*,’ not quite like others. But people do like to gossip about others, don’t they?

No, a parcel is no ordinary thing. It’s not just a collection of used clothing. And the sooner people realize that the better. Why, with the humblest of contents goes the grandest spirit of unselfishness you’re ever likely to see. And the worries! There are so many of them! Will the rope hold out? Are the knots secure? And God forbid, will the parcel get misdirected or lost? Will something get stolen? There is no doubt about it, a parcel has a life of its own. And certainly Tetiana Bahriy would have known that. As Hrunia pointed out several times, it seemed Tetiana asked her daughter if she hadn’t forgotten to send them a list of things inside.

“Mama,” Anna answered every time. “I included it. It’s there. It’s in the box.”

## XII

*Dear Mrs. Catt,*

*I am a friend of Andy’s, and I am sending a few things for your girls. I put in the box two blouses, three pairs of summer shorts, two skirts, one pair of slacks, and a jacket. My mother wants you to have the nylons. She says she’s very sorry about what happened. There is a dollar in the chocolate bar, under the wrapper. I couldn’t deliver this because the bus is very expensive. I’m very sorry for all of you because of what happened to your husband and that you are not well any more. If you could let me know where Andy lives in New York, I would like to write. He said that he is washing windows there, but he forgot to send his address. Please let me know as soon as you receive this parcel. I would like to know if it got to your place.*

*Good luck to everybody, Anna*

## Xenia

YOU REMEMBER OLD MARTA—the one who was always wearing someone else's rags? You know, she was forever pulling that wooden cart behind her and filling it up with scrap. Well, all of a sudden we realized she wasn't making her rounds any more. Disappeared from the neighbourhood streets entirely. Old Osadchuk heard some rumour that she had gone to Florida with a widower who had twenty thousand in the bank, but I never believed it. The men even joked that she was going to find a few thousand herself if she kept looking through garbage cans in Miami. What with all those rich cronies it was a sure thing. Everyone was saying it. But she had her Miami alright. In the hospital. It turned out she had fainted on Sauvé Street and was taken away in an ambulance.

So we began to feel sorry for her. You would too if you saw the way she was brought back home from the hospital. Thin. Yellow. It was terrible. And there was no one to look after her, so Stringbean Olga, Shura Makitra, myself—oh, all the ladies lent her a helping hand. I tried to straighten up the house every once in a while, but that house was even worse than it used to be. Sofas, chairs, and tables crowding every room. And I'd hate to tell you what she used for sheets. Old bedspreads. Picked out of some garbage can, no doubt. I had to run home and bring her some of my own.

Well, about two weeks must have passed and we started noticing a really awful smell in her house. It always smelled a little bad from all the old junk she kept in it, but this was like something rotten. We thought it must be the illness, so no one said a word. But one night it was Nadia Bereziuk's turn to keep vigil. You know Nadia. Has to poke her nose in everywhere. And she was the one who figured out that the smell was coming from somewhere in the front room. Maybe all those jungle plants, she thought. But it wasn't them. She found it soon enough though, behind the sliding doors where no one ever bothered to look. And in there, in that little room, let me tell you, in all my years I have never seen anything like it. It was a museum. Carton boxes from the floor to the ceiling, one piled on top of the other. Broken dolls, old clothes, coats, papers, bottles. Even a sack of sprouting potatoes. That's nothing though. Everybody buys potatoes for the winter. But you should have seen the jars.

Unbelievable! There in the middle stood two huge pickling jars filled with brown stuff. There were patches of mold floating on top. There were bugs— black ones, white ones, everywhere. And the stink! Imagine! She was saving the soups we had been making for her. For what, God only knows.

The next morning Stringbean Olga found Marta bent over on the sofa, dead. How she ever had the strength to get out of bed and walk across the house, I'll never know. Anyhow, Father Archipenko took care of the formalities. A good thing too. What could we have done? She had no family or anyone else. And everything went very well, thank God. Father Archipenko conducted a nice mass, and on the way home from church, some of the neighbours started talking about Marta. Shura said she was so adept with herbs, she could cure almost anything and even knew which ones could get rid of babies. But Stringbean Olga didn't like us talking about her, especially now that she was dead. Well, you know Stringbean Olga. She's not exactly what you'd call completely normal either, keeping that brother of hers in the house all the time like she does. Anyhow, she told us some of her own stories, about a fellow from her village who didn't want to be drafted into the army, so he lived in a dugout in the day and visited his wife at night. That's when he did the chores, you see. The wife in the meantime started going to the gypsies. She took

to dressing like them, reading fortunes around the village, until she finally lost

all her senses. She took to running through the fields naked every time there was a full moon. Oh, all sorts of things happen on this earth. As for Marta, well, she had her pension, you know. God bless her wherever she may be. Mine is not the place to judge the dead.

But wait till you hear about the funeral. We were all quietly standing in church listening to Father Archipenko's final prayers, when all of a sudden, as though from nowhere, I heard this terrible wail. Then there in front of us, a woman was embracing Marta's body, and sobbing. Sobbing in the worst imaginable way. No one knew who she was, but what a sight! Her coat was enormous. Ten sizes too big. Held together with safety pins. And she was a huge woman and very round too. The galoshes on her feet were no better. How can you walk into church with such muddy shoes? Before we know it she's bent right on top of Marta, crying so hard it seemed as though the casket might just slide off the stand from so much weight. Such a fright I had! And what if the body fell to the floor? But just at that moment the pall-bearers came in and she was pulled away.

At the cemetery it was even worse. My God, how she screamed and cried when they lowered the coffin. You know they had one of those machines? And she fell flat on her stomach right beside it, moaning. We all felt so sorry for her. But you'll never guess who she was. Marta's sister! Who would have thought that Marta had a sister here in Canada?

She never once mentioned her. And it wasn't as though we didn't know anything about her life. Shura used to visit her often enough and Marta told her things. How Andrei was taken away, how they came into the house, how she lost her two babies in the famine. But a sister in Canada? You can never tell what secrets people have, that's what I always say.

Her name was Xenia, poor woman. Father Archipenko found that out on the way back to Marta's house where Nellia Ostapivna had been preparing some food for us. Thank God for Nellia. She made everything. *Borscht, varenyky*—with cheese, with potatoes. Everyone was stuffing themselves as if they hadn't seen a loaf of bread in weeks. You'd think Marta had been buried ages ago and not that very morning. I really don't know about people sometimes. And Osadchuk, well, you can put anything in front of him. He'll eat it. Anything and everything. For every cabbage roll he eats, he drinks two shots of whiskey. He'll down a bottle before you can say '*Kamianets Podil'sky*.' I really felt quite funny about Xenia seeing how we had spread ourselves out in her dead sister's house, so I tried to explain some of the circumstances. But she hardly seemed to listen. Wouldn't talk either. She just looked at everything in the house as if she came from a different world and wouldn't touch a thing to eat no matter what I said.

Well, I couldn't pay too much attention to her because after all their eating and drinking the men had started an argument about the mushrooms Nellia had served. Ostapiv refused to believe that Vasyl' Makitra had picked them on Henri-Bourassa Boulevard. I must say, it was hard to believe, what with all those fumes. And they were so good! Beautiful mushrooms! But you ask Makitra today, he'll tell you the same thing. He picks mushrooms on the boulevard. So Maxym Bereziuk started teasing him about it. What can you expect from these men? Right away they start to fight about the best places for picking mushrooms. One says around Highway 9. The other says the Eastern Townships. Ostapiv says the Carpathian mountains.

Of course, Bereziuk sides with him. Hutsuls, Galicians, they're all the same. Soon they're

naming mushrooms and chirping away about how beautiful their forests are. This mushroom smelled of honey. That one was white as snow. Next Bereziuk says that their mushrooms were famous even in European manor houses. Delicacies served on fine porcelain. And Eastern Ukrainians didn't know anything about such matters. Finally Osadchuk had enough. He slammed his fist on the table so hard all the dishes jumped up. "You can all go to devil with your fancy Austrian and Polish mushrooms," he yelled at Ostapiv, Bereziuk, and the others. "We were lucky if we found a mushroom at all! A dead dog was a delicacy. Or maybe you were lucky enough to be dipping mushrooms in cream and licking your fingers while we were swelling up like mushrooms ourselves." He went on like this for a some time,

poor fellow. Couldn't stop once he started. Kept grabbing his head and wiping his eyes. Xenia just sat there, as if she were made of stone.

But just then Nadia Bereziuk's daughter, Myroslava, came in with her baby. She carried him around, kissing and biting his chubby legs. "Oh, my little delicious one," she kept saying. "My little sparrow." He's so adorable. Makitra took him and tossed him around. Then Nellia took him and so on till he was sitting on Bereziuk's lap. You know how it is with children. Everyone wants to play with them. Well, in the meantime, Osadchuk, Nestor, and Father Archipenko were talking so much, they got quite loud. "It was a plan to destroy us completely!" one of them said. "To weaken us forever!" the other yelled. Nestor told about the sausages that were made with human flesh and Osadchuk carried on about some family in his village that he saw eating corpses. You can imagine the rest.

It wasn't but a moment later that we heard screaming from the baby. I don't know exactly how it happened. I guess Bereziuk or someone else must have plopped him into Xenia's arms. He probably started to squirm around so much that when she couldn't control him, he fell backwards and knocked his head against the table. It wasn't anything serious, but it was a good knock. Myroslava, of course, was very worried. Nadia was in tears. Everyone flocked around the baby trying to quieten him, but he just cried louder. I could tell Xenia

felt sorry about dropping the baby, she got so red, but we weren't expecting what happened next. Before we knew it she turned her attention to Osadchuk, Nestor, and Father Archipenko and started saying all kinds of things to them. That they were trying to 'humiliate' her and 'judge' her. But she wasn't going to let them do it. Even Father Archipenko, who was trying so eagerly to find out where she lived so that he could 'torment' her, was not going to get the chance. And it was unpardonably nasty the way they gave her the baby to trick her into a 'confession,' to make her feel 'guilty' for Marta's death. "Maybe you'd all like to see me in jail?" she screamed. "Go ahead! Think I'm a monster. Everyone thinks that anyway. I'm not afraid of any of you." She got up as if to leave, but then she turned around and burst into tears. "All I wanted was to live. Like anyone else. Do you understand? You don't think I suffered watching poor Marta's babies? Day and night I prayed for them. Day and night!"

God only knows what possessed her. At first I thought someone had insulted her for not looking after Marta when she was sick. But when Father Archipenko tried to put his arm around her she just pushed him away, then paced around biting her lips and clasping her hands. "You think that because my older sister, Oleska was hiding a cow in the house while she could that made it easier? It didn't. She had her own brood to look after. I had my share of weeds and dead



rats too, don't

worry!" She cried so badly it was terrible to watch. Then out of all that, some sort of anger or shame took hold of her. She swore at us, yelling all the while that she did nothing to anyone. And then she pushed back the large bowl with the cabbage rolls in it, and it turned right over spilling them out, while she was crying and screaming about the 'taste of blood.' There was nothing we could do. With every word she became worse. "I was hungry!" she yelled. "All my life I was hungry! A dead chicken. A dead baby. What's the difference? Corpses. I say corpses. All of them!" She looked so broken. She finally just hobbled out of the house sobbing.

Well, we haven't heard from her since. Zhelisko thinks she sweeps up in a factory somewhere on St. Lawrence Boulevard. Probably sleeps under a staircase. Poor soul, she should come and live in the neighbourhood. We don't mind. God knows, who didn't live through hard times? Anyhow, I helped Shura board up Marta's house, because you can't just leave it that way. You never know when to expect the devil, I always say. And robbers don't sleep.

## The only Place on Earth

Назад тому лет пять я проезжал чрез город Миргород.  
Gogol

OH WHAT A DAY! A day like this was a godsend. How happy Semmen Syrovatka was! Why, if anybody who didn't know him saw him like this, they might think Semmen was completely mad. But that's not so at all. He just has a very exuberant soul. And when he's particularly happy as he was on this day, he likes to stand up on his chicken shed and sing in a very loud voice to all the fields around:

Glory, freedom, you're alive. Destiny shall smile again. Brothers, liberty will thrive!

Then he can't help taking a short run through the grass, laughing and shouting to himself in joy. And after that he likes to strip off his shirt, take up his sickle, and swing it through the hay as he once did in the wheat fields at home in Poltava all along singing about the grand life on the Kolomak River. He was as happy as in a dream. But this was no dream, to be sure. It was better than anything he could have wished for. It was as though at long last his prayers had been heard and finally answered. He couldn't believe it himself.

Now you would have to know Semmen Syrovatka very well to understand why he was so gleeful that day. But perhaps it would be enough to say that Hector Hibou, his old neighbour from the adjoining farm, had paid Syrovatka an extra-special visit that day. Syrovatka was more than pleased, as he always was whenever he saw Hibou's little overalled form climb the cow fence in the far corner of the field, since, over a period of fifteen years, Semmen Syrovatka and Hector Hibou had developed a fine and mutually profitable friendship—just a small example being the time Syrovatka showed Hector how to build a *yatir*, a cunning sort of fish trap. All very illegal, of course, but they put it in the river at night, and no one ever saw it. And oh, the fish they caught! Carp two feet long. Doré longer than your arm. And all this in the small river that ran through their land. But it was quite clear that Syrovatka had been carried away by rapture over Hector Hibou's visit that day. For in between gasps of breath Hector had told the most wonderful news, the most unexpected and heaven-sent good fortune for which Semmen Syrovatka had hardly dared to hope even in his most optimistic moments.

"*Tabarouette*, Simon, you see the hives *chez Omelko*? Ha! H'all on de ground. H'all smash up. Even de stuff inside, *sacrament*. 'Oney h'all over de place."

Was it any wonder then that Syrovatka was dancing on the ground, waving his sickle in the air and lying around on the rug he liked to set out on the lawn in front of his house? His greatest enemy, Omelko Budka, had finally been defeated—the very man who for the past three months had been engaged in a vile plot, why the plot of a virtual hooligan as everyone on *Le Chemin des Voltigeurs* agreed, a plot to disrupt Semmen Syrovatka's one true joy on earth, the only thing which brought him peace and a heart as happy as a summer's day—his apiary. And what an apiary it was, too. It was the best in the county by everyone's estimation. Where else could you get linden honey, warm and fresh, straight from the comb? And how Semmen cared for his 'little insects' as he called them. How he looked after them! Everyone knew that in the fall he'd often been seen on his hands and knees in front of a hive picking up a bee that seemed not to be as lively as it should, taking it gently in his hands, and blowing his warm breath on it to revive it. "Little bee, wake up. Live a little longer," he would murmur. And when the bee didn't recover he rushed into the house with it and set it in an empty match box on the ledge over the wood stove.

In fact, he often had as many as twenty bees in different boxes, all being warmed up. Sometimes some of them would start flying around the house, and it was then that Mrs. Syrovatka would leap for her fly-swatter and chase after them while her husband ran about pleading.

“They’re divine,” he would say in his impeccable Ukrainian. “Look how they love their queen. And see how they always do everything at the right moment. It’s the order of God I tell you. No other creature lives like that. This little insect works day and night, battering its wings to death to collect a few drops of honey which we, greedy wretches that we are, devour by the spoonful, or as that devil Budka probably does, by the bucketful. Why, honey is medicine. Only a little spoonful a day, it’s more than enough. It’s the order of God, I tell you.”

To tell the truth this speech of Syrovatka’s was a virtual litany in his wife’s ears and didn’t have the least effect. In fact, she disliked bees intensely, and there was very little anyone could do to convince her otherwise. They were always in her garden whenever she wanted to weed it, and this irritated her because if she tried to shoo them away they would get angry and sting her and all the other members of her family (Olenka and Oxana, her two daughters, and Roman Kvitka, her sister’s son), but never her husband, of course. She just couldn’t see what was so wonderful about them. Often she would say that they could be cruel, even treacherous, particularly in early summer when they came spilling out of their hives in huge torrents ready to swarm. That was a time she wouldn’t go in her garden to save her life, even though her husband insisted they were as gentle as doves.

“Now chickens,” she used to say, as she reached into her fridge, “chickens are wonderful. Where do you find such a yellow egg yolk? Not in the store. No store. They all stink from fish, those eggs. But *my* eggs. You should taste them. And the meat from the chickens! Or the soup. I wouldn’t change my chickens for nothing. You can keep your bees. I don’t want them. I have such a better animals.”

Semmen, however, had never worried too much about his wife’s nattering. After all, what did women know? Nothing. Except how to make chicken soup and how to cackle like hens themselves. Syrovatka loved his bees. He’d always kept them. Even as a boy in his village he’d known how to catch swarms and hive them in the hollow of a tree. He’d never told his wife this, but that was the very reason he had wanted to buy a farm as soon as they had come to Quebec. In fact, the first thing he’d set up was this apiary of his. It had prospered through the years too. He’d built himself a huge beehouse filled with all kinds of intricate extractors and strainers, everything he needed. He’d even put out an enormous yellow and blue sign that said: “Eat Simon’s Honey. Simon’s Honey Smells Sweetest.” Things had gone very well. They’d gone wonderfully well—plenty of clients, plenty of praise. Even his wife couldn’t complain about the tidy little sum that came in at the end of every season. Things were just wonderful until that bad day in his life, that evil hour when Omelko Budko had come over and asked for a piece of Syrovatka’s land.

Now Budka was a tall thin sort of man, a hairdresser by profession, with insinuating ways and very polished in his habits, but with a slow calculating manner of speaking that always made Syrovatka jumpy and worried about what he might lose. So it had taken all Semmen’s ingenuity to come up with an answer that would set Omelko straight without ruining their friendship.

“Please be reasonable Budka, in the name of God!” Syrovatka had said. “I don’t begrudge

you land. Plant. Grow. Seed. Whatever you like on my farm! There's room for everybody. But setting up thirty hives! Now that's another matter. My harvest. It'll be ruined. To say nothing about the fact that they'll probably kill each other and I'll lose everything."

"But we're friends, aren't we?" Budka drawled slowly. "We can work together. Get things off the ground. There's big business we can make here if we're smart. You know I have money, Syrovatka. Everything will be half and half. What's mine is yours. I could sell the beauty salon in the city maybe, move out here, build a new bee-shed, expand things. I could even get a few fields of alfalfa sown, or clover. That kind of honey sells very well, I hear. Life could be very pleasant for both of us, Syrovatka, very sweet...."

But all this made Syrovatka more uncomfortable than ever, and he began to look down on the ground and drum his fingers on the table. And when Budka was finished, he paused for a moment of reflection.

"You're right, you're right," he finally said, patting his friend on the shoulder. "That's all fine and well, Omelko, but it's not a question of money. You see with the bees it's a question of conscience. What do you think, that life is so easy for them? Or for me? Or that flowers are so plentiful around here? If there are more bees they'll just have to fly that much further. Poor little things. Instead of having enough from what's under their noses they'll have to fly three miles, five miles, just to get a drop of food. And for what? So I can have more people come to bother me? It's not as easy as you think, Omelko. It's not just one, two, three, and you have yourself an apiary. Bees, you have to be close to them, help them. I'm trying to explain it to you Budka, as a friend, so you understand it."

"How tactful you were with that sneak, Semmenchyku," said Mrs. Syrovatka the next morning. "You didn't get into a fight or even lose your temper once. And it seems that what you said he listened to. We certainly don't need any more trouble from him. It's enough that he tried to drag Olenka out of bed and take her to that park to seduce her last year. 'Prepare for the affair of your life.' Imagine a grown man saying that to a fourteen-year-old girl! And do you think those chocolates and marzipans he brings every week can make me forget what he did? What a shabby behaviour."

"Ah, you talk too much," said Semmen, who was never happy when his wife insisted on picking at old wounds. "You can't even teach your own daughters any manners. I know she was probably walking around in that nightgown of hers. So don't tell me it's not her fault. I know you women. If you acted properly there'd never be any problems. But as it is, as soon as a man walks in here you all start to dance around for him and wave your skirts in his face. Well, what do you expect? And when there's trouble which you've made for yourselves, you squawk your heads off like someone is about to kill you. Stupid bunch of hens!"

"You eat his marzipans!" she yelled as Syrovatka slammed the door. "I don't want them."

But how surprised she had been some days later when she saw Omelko's blue station-wagon (or at least a car that looked just like it) pull up into Madame Hénuset's driveway and a form that looked very much like Omelko Budka himself disappear through her front door. "What could be the meaning of this?" she had said to herself. But when at the end of that week, early in the morning, Semmen came storming into the house almost purple with rage and demanding that she look out the kitchen window that very instant, she soon found out. There in Madame Hénuset's

pasture—the very land Syrovatka had always coveted himself as a fine buckwheat plot for his bees—there stood no less than thirty spanking new hives, their metal tops and bright white paint all glistening defiantly in the sun.

“Bastard! Sticks himself under my nose! What does he think? He can do anything? If he wants war, we’ll have war. The treacherous boor!”

“No, no, Semmenchyku, I’m sure it’s just a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding! You stupid woman. Can’t you see the man’s out to destroy me? It’s mutiny! Insurrection!”

Semmen was so outraged he didn’t know what to do so he collapsed on the couch. Mrs. Syrovatka hovered over him.

“Don’t worry. Everything will be alright,” she said, as she put on her kerchief. “I’m going right over to see the old lady myself.”

“Oh,” he whined from the couch, “and how will that help?” Then he gave himself over to utter hopelessness and cynicism.

But Mrs. Syrovatka knew that she had better do something quickly or else Semmen’s collapse could at any moment turn itself into one of the violent rages that had wreaked so much havoc in her life in the past and which she was always determined to avoid. Poor woman, she raced right over to Madame Hénuset’s, praying that somehow the whole affair could be corrected. But Madame Hénuset was a hard one to persuade, and Mrs. Syrovatka knew that what lay before her was a difficult task. You see, aside from being the most self-righteous old lady on *Le Chemin des Voltigeurs*, she was also the biggest squealer the village of St. Abbé de Jacques had ever known. She spent her days sitting at the window with her binoculars spying on all her neighbours, and on several occasions had reported Hector Hibou to the local dairy authority for selling Syrovatka and his friends unpasteurized milk or to the social welfare bureau for overworking the five foster children the village priest had asked him to take in.

Needless to say, Mrs. Syrovatka didn’t get very far with the old woman. In fact, Madame Hénuset insisted that she had the right to let out her land to anyone she wished. She even seemed to suggest that the proposition Budka had made was far too generous for her even to consider refusing. From what she said, Budka had virtually promised to keep her whole family in honey for one year to say nothing of the monthly rents he paid for the land. Neither did she make any bones about saying that the Syrovatkas hadn’t been as neighbourly as they could have been with their own honey, something Mrs. Syrovatka felt quite insulted at, particularly since she herself had made a point of bringing the old lady a fresh quart from every extraction in the season. But she didn’t dare tell any of this to her husband when she returned home because she knew it would enrage him all the more. So she decided simply to say that Madame Hénuset would feel badly about having given Budka her word, letting him set himself up, and then taking it all back.

“Stupid woman,” said Semmen disgustedly. “What you mean is that she doesn’t want to let go of a single cent that maniac’s giving to her. That’s what you mean.”

Semmen went outside looking quite dejected. First he sat down on the front steps and tried to whistle a tune, but that only made him feel worse. Then he went into his apiary and collapsed under a cherry tree.

“Good-bye, my little friends,” he called to his bees between deep sighs. “Good-bye, I’ve lost

you all forever. Good-bye. What else is there now? Fate has put her black hand on me and there's nothing I can do." In half an hour he was sound asleep, snoring. When Mrs. Syrovatka woke him up it was already dusk.

"Semmen," she said, "wake up. I've thought of a wonderful idea. We'll call up Omelko and just tell him that if he doesn't move those hives, we'll tell his wife about what he tried to do to our Olenka. That'll do it, won't it? You know how scared he is of Lida."

"Oh, you meddler. Leave me alone. Can't a man ever have some peace and quiet? Can't you see that I'm not a beekeeper any more? I'll never be a beekeeper again."

Semmen suddenly felt very tired, and Mrs. Syrovatka had to put him to bed as soon as they reached the house. He was so listless, he wouldn't even let her take his socks off. Nor would he touch the hot milk with honey she brought in a few minutes later. The following day was no different. For the next two weeks or so Semmen could not find the energy to do much of anything except heave forth sighs of despair or else ride his bicycle up and down the road in front of Omelko's hives with a look of dejection on his face. On top of all this, what did he find on the riverbank one day, the very riverbank where he and Hector Hibou had often lowered their *yatir* into the water, that most productive spot that Syrovatka had tried to keep secret ever since he'd first discovered it, but two strangers armed with rifles, fishing determinedly. How upset he was when he told them to get off his land, and they replied that everyone had a right to the riverbank. And when they started to gesticulate threateningly with their rifles, all Semmen Syrovatka could think was that it was best to leave them alone. "In life you don't really own anything," he complained to his wife later that evening. "People can just come and take it away."

Of course, Mrs. Syrovatka had become very worried. She wasn't at all used to seeing her husband waste his time this way. Why, here it was well into the summer—into July even—and Syrovatka was still whiling away his days. So she decided it would be a good thing if someone came over to the farm, and she settled on Ferdinand Fabre.

Now Ferdinand was the village garage mechanic who thought the world of Semmen and would often even call him '*Papa*.' Semmen, in turn, would pat Ferdinand on the shoulder and say, "*Bon garçon*." Semmen especially enjoyed it when Ferdinand came to visit, because he could catch up on all the gossip of the region, and Ferdinand did not disappoint him during this visit either. It seems that, as usual, those no-goods, *Les Anges du Diable*, had come storming into the village the previous Saturday evening. They'd stopped their motorbikes in front of the hotel and harassed the old drunks as they came in and out of the door. After that they'd gone over to Beauchamp's Hardware and lolled about on his lawn chairs, the very ones he had on display out on the sidewalk. They occupied every chair and sat in silence, defying everybody. Needless to say, no one said a word—except every now and again Beauchamp would go out and stand on the street and look off at the horizon pretending they weren't there. If you can believe it, they'd been intimidating the townspeople in this way for almost two years. In fact, it had become especially bad when the province removed the village's one and only policeman due to rising costs. It was a dreadful move. What can people be expected to do on their own? So, the farmers, the shopkeepers, and just about everyone tried very hard to endure this as much as possible.

Before he continued, Ferdinand took a sip of Syrovatka's very best homemade cherry brandy. "*Tabarouette*, you miss somet'ing las' Saturday, Simon," he said. "Dat Fillion—I never

t'ink dat guy 'as so many guts. 'E jus' take dat gang awl alone. I never believe it. 'E say to dem, 'e say, 'Turn down de radio der, my kid's tryin' to sleep.' Not jus' once, *colin*, two t'ree times 'e as' dem. But dey jus' laugh, *calvère*. One girl der, one of de girlfren' she come up to Fillion and tickle 'im under de chin....*Fait couchi-couchi comme ça, là. Pis Fillion—ay, y' est pas mal fâché, eh?* 'E take dat bike an' Bang! 'E push it down. *Ay, chris Simon, là, la bagarre éclate.* I t'ought Fillion is dead for sure. An' de gang 'e jump on 'im, 'e kick 'im, e spit all over 'im, and den dey drive off. An' you t'ink dat's de finish? Den somebody call de police. *C'était une chose à voir, Simon.* You know what dey say, de police? Dey say, *'Arrangez-vous vos affaires vous-mêmes.'*"

"Aw hell," said Syrovatka with a gesture of dismissal. "What you t'ink, bums *porter pistoles? Fillion fou. Pas bon toucher gang comme ça.* In Europe, *discipline. Police aussi pas bon. Gouvernement seulement pour riche. Personne pour protéger peuple. Regard quoi Omelko fait pour moi. Lui besoin gang, pas Fillion.*" And Semmen told Ferdinand the whole sad story of how Omelko Budka had set himself up right in front of Semmen's apiary and there was nothing he could do.

*'T' as raison, Simon. T' as raison,'* said Ferdinand, wishing he could help out his friend somehow.

So the two sat till late at night exchanging stories and hatching plans. And as the evening wore on Semmen Syrovatka had become quite excited just from hearing himself talk, so excited that his wife began to breathe a sigh of relief. Nothing pleased her more than to hear her husband devise schemes, for this was a sure sign that he was beginning to recover his old spirits.

*"Poison, poison!"* cried Syrovatka in glee at one point. *"Mettez partout dans champs! Tous tués! Tous les abeilles."*

Syrovatka bellowed with laughter and poured Ferdinand another glass of cherry brandy. Then suddenly his expression changed.

*"Non, pourquoi tués? Eh, Ferdinand? Comprends moi? Tu sais quoi moi va faire? Moi va ramasser tous les abeilles. Tu sais avec quoi? Avec aspirateur! Ha! Ha! Ha! Bonne idée, eh?"*

At times like this Ferdinand rarely said a word. He would just look at his host with a mixture of suppressed laughter and devout admiration. But as for Syrovatka, he was being propelled to the highest heights. He had finally figured out what to do about that hateful specimen, that enemy of enemies, Omelko Budka.

Oh, what a night that was! When he finally went to bed he virtually sang in between deep sighs of contentment. What bliss! He dreamt he was an important bee inspector sent by the government to expose Budka for trying to hide the fact that all his bees were contaminated. "They have to be destroyed," Semmen declared. "Every colony will have to be burnt!" And as he said these words, one after the other, each of Omelko's hives was seen blazing up into smoke. Not a single colony was left. Meanwhile Budka stood at the sidelines clasping his hands to the skies and shouting apologies.

But the best was yet to come! He had another dream. He dreamt the sky was a bright blue and he, Syrovatka, wearing a white brigadier's uniform, was standing in the middle of his vast field waving the long nozzle of a vacuum cleaner above his head with wide sweeping strokes like a sabre. Beside him on the ground stood his vacuum cleaner humming celestially. One by one, as each bee landed on Syrovatka's clover, he sucked it into the long hose. Here, there, behind him,

in front of him, the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner moved with the grace of a magic wand until Syrovatka was satisfied that all of Omelko Budka's bees had been rounded up and safely housed in a proper beeyard—his own.

Well, when a man has had such a fine night, it's small wonder he wakes up in the morning in a good humour. In fact, Semmen's spirits seemed to last for several days. Mrs. Syrovatka was beside herself. She was convinced he'd finally gotten over his despair and that life would now continue normally. "Thank God," she would say whenever she saw Semmen pattering about the garden or working in the bee-shed. But to have your good humour rewarded, that was more than any human could wish for. To have your dreams actually come true, that was beyond belief.

Yet that was exactly what happened four days later. Semmen was peacefully repairing his rabbit cages when Hector Hibou came over to inform Syrovatka of the great news that had befallen the county the previous night. Omelko Budka had finally been defeated! Was it any wonder that it was already past noon and Semmen still hadn't stopped singing? That he was neither tired nor hungry? That instead of going to his barn after dinner he did something he hadn't done for years? "H' all on de ground! H' all smash up!" Semmen could still hear Hector's wonderful words ringing in his ears as he pulled down a large tome of poetry. "Oh, it was not dust swirling, and it was not fog rising," he bellowed, waving his right hand across his face. His eyes became wet and misty. He began to coo and whistle through the gap in his stainless steel teeth. His red face shone as though it were freshly coated with wax. No peasant saint ever looked more intent than did old Syrovatka at this moment.

"Those were the days, my little mushroom," he declared. "Those were the days. Truth and justice reigned." Then Semmen burst into song:

Glory, freedom, you're alive. Destiny shall smile again. Brothers, liberty will thrive!

It was two days later when they heard the incredible roar. "What in the world can that be?" cried Mrs. Syrovatka as the racket came closer to the house. "Maybe it's an earthquake!"

Syrovatka was silent.

"Semmenchyku, Semmenchyku," the earth is trembling, the house is going to cave in!"

"Shut up, you idiot," screamed Syrovatka, trying to pick himself up. But just as Syrovatka reached the window, the noise stopped. He didn't get to see anything either, because it was dark out. Suddenly they heard a loud thumping at the door.

"Semmen, don't open the door, please."

"Shut up and get my gun," shouted Syrovatka as he flung open the door.

"*Allo, Simon. Ça va là ce soir?*"

Two motorcyclists wearing leather vests studded with metal stood leaning against the verandah. Needless to say, there weren't only two of them, either. There was a yard full of them. Syrovatka could see that, though it was impossible to make out how many. The taller one of the two, a frightening fellow with a scar over his eyebrow, obviously the instigator of the group, grabbed the beer can his friend was holding.

"*Ben tranquil ce soir, eh?*" he said, taking a swig.

Mrs. Syrovatka popped her head out, and seeing who was at the door, she let out a whimper.

"Get inside, you old fool," screamed Syrovatka.

At times like this Semmen Syrovatka would often adopt what his children liked to call his



‘accommodating’ voice, which consisted of speaking with a lisp, a lisp he had managed to perfect over the years.

“Now boysh, *que ce que moi peux faire pour vous?*” he said in a most ceremonious tone.

With a proud grin on his face, the taller fellow pointed across the road to Omelko Budka’s ruined apiary.

“*On a fait un bon job, eh Simon?*”

Semmen was incredulous. For a moment he was sure that all they had come for was praise, so he decided to tell them a thing or two. He had no idea, of course, but how fortunate for him he had presence of mind enough to be very careful about what he said.

“*Très bien, très bien*” he said. “*Mais pas besoin faire ça. Bons garçons comme vous besoin travailler ou faire autre chose.*”

“*Hein??*” said the other fellow, the shorter one, slapping Syrovatka on the shoulder. “*T’ es pas content?*”

“*Eh Shrovka, que ce tu fais avec ça?*” someone yelled. Another one of the bikers started kicking around Semmen’s *yatir* which had been lying on the picnic table. Before Semmen knew what to do, there was his *yatir* smashed and bent beyond recognition—the very *yatir* he was so proud of, the very one he had so carefully constructed out of chicken wire. Semmen’s heart sank as he went to retrieve it.

“You have nice motor,” he motioned toward the motorcycles. “Good. German? American?”

The two hooligans on the verandah laughed like hyenas. From the corner of his eye Semmen saw the flickering light of a fire down by the river. Many of them must already have gone down there. He began to plead with one of the fellows on the verandah.

“*Hey, garçons, s’ il vous plaît, garçons, vous intelligents...*”

Suddenly an oval shape whizzed by him in the darkness and broke with a splat on the tank of one of the machines. “*Ay, chris!*” Some cackling broke out. For no reason in particular, the gang was almost instantly involved in a tomato fight. Then a tomato hit Semmen on the shoulder.

“*Maudit!*” shouted Syrovatka. “*Ici terrain privé*”

If only it were day, Syrovatka would almost certainly have found a way to put an end to all this chaos. Then he remembered Mrs. Syrovatka in the house, but he was rooted to the spot. Suddenly he saw three motorcycles making straight for the garden, the very one that Mrs. Syrovatka had so painstakingly watered and weeded, this garden of hers which was her one and only refuge from her children and husband. The motorcycles ran over the potatoes. They ran over the cabbages. Then he heard Mrs. Syrovatka scream. There came a huge crash of breaking windows. Semmen leapt into the house.

“Semmen, what will happen to us?”

“Into the field,” whispered Semmen. “Come on!” He grabbed his extra rifle from behind the sofa.

“But what about the money in the freezer?” pleaded Mrs. Syrovatka.

Mr. and Mrs. Syrovatka gathered what they could and made for the basement door. When they opened it, all seemed quiet. Then Semmen heard some voices cry, “*Vite, vite Gaston. Dépêche-toi.*”

Semmen could make out a fellow with a large can dousing the hives, and close behind,

several followed with torches. In a matter of minutes the whole apiary was ablaze.

At noon the next day Omelko Budka was at Semmen Syrovatka's house. "Brother, what a tragedy has befallen us. How ill-fated we are," whimpered Budka into Syrovatka's ear. "Why does bad luck always plague our people? Are we not equals before God?" Suddenly Omelko was embracing Syrovatka, and before anyone even anticipated what was about to happen, Omelko Budka fell to his knees near the picnic table and began an incomprehensible apology.

"As I kiss this earth I swear I am sorry. I promised to God on my heart never to do anything like that again. I don't know what happened to me. Some force took hold of me. She was only a child. I know. But my bees didn't really hurt anyone did they? As I kneel here, I vow, may I fall dead, never shall such a thing come to pass again. Forgive me. It was a black sin, an ugly sin, but are we all not weak at certain moments? It was a surprise to me too. But please believe me, I didn't touch her. No, I did not spoil her."

"Well, then what the hell did you scare the life out of the kid for?" barked Syrovatka at him.

In the meantime, Mrs. Syrovatka was standing beside Mrs. Budka, weeping into her coat sleeve.

"Brother, little brother, I just told you. A dark cloud passed over me." He turned to Mrs. Syrovatka. "And to the mother of the child I want to say forgive me, too. Though I am a grown man, I am very sorry that it had to be in our friendship that strength failed me."

Mrs. Syrovatka didn't say a word. She still had her head in her arm.

"You see what you've done to my wife!" shouted Syrovatka angrily. "And what about me? I'm completely ruined. What do you think, people are dogs? As for the girl, well, I can understand, and I personally don't think anything serious has happened. In fact," and here his voice softened "I'm sure that it is really my daughter who is to blame, flouncing her skirts around all over the place. But as you see, it has been unbearable for my wife."

"What?" Mrs. Syrovatka's head bounded up. "What did you say? You don't think it was serious?" she yelled. "He steals your daughter out of bed, threatens her with rape, and you say it is nothing! What kind of a father are you? Oh, misery, misery."

Nellie Syrovatka broke into sobs and ran up the stairs into the house. There she collapsed and moaned for a long time.

"Ah, stupid woman," said Syrovatka.

"Never mind brother, it will all pass," said Budka motioning to the charred ruins of Syrovatka's apiary. Semmen gave Budka a suspicious glance.

"Just tell me, Budka, but honestly. Did you send those bikers over here?"

"Brother, little brother, what are you saying? Me!" Omelko Budka looked stunned. "What do you take me for? I'm a God-fearing man."

"You can fear whoever you want, but just tell me. Did you send them over?" Semmen persisted.

"Look, Syrovatka, I came here like a decent soul, like a sympathetic friend, and now you're accusing me. You know what, Syrovatka? I'll tell you what. I think you're the one who sent them over to my place, you *kham*."

"And you didn't deserve them?" roared Syrovatka. "You've been shitting on me long enough. Look at this place!"

“Now, Semmen, please, calm down. What a thing to say to a friend. All I was saying is that we must stand up to these gypsies. This is your land, your property, *our* home now,” whined Budka. “I’m just saying that you can’t let them treat us like mice. Little brother, we have rights too, you know. This is a moment when we must stand together, be loyal, not fight like dogs.”

“You conniving Galician! I spit on every breath you take.” Semmen could feel the blood rising up to his head. “What do I have now? What kind of beekeeper am I now? I’m sitting on a pile of manure now, like you Budka, and like all the rest of us.”

Semmen walked right up to Budka’s face.

“You talk about rights,” he muttered through his teeth. “Let me tell you where you have rights. Up your wife’s ass! That’s where you have rights! And one more thing, Budka. That’s the only place on earth you’ll ever have them. Understand?”

Poor Semmen Syrovatka. I later heard from Pylyp Myska that he and Hector Hibou were both contemplating selling because the government had plans to put a highway right between their two farms, and that’s not good for the cows. As for Syrovatka’s apiary, well, he has abandoned any hope of restoring it. The insurance authorities refused him restitution, and he doesn’t have enough money to buy new materials. But all winter long he was busy repairing what was left, and maybe he’ll have enough for a couple of colonies. As for Omelko Budka, he sold the hairdressing salon, but it seems Mrs. Budka spends all of her time hiding money so he doesn’t turn it into drink. Last summer, she even tried to patch things up with the Syrovatkas, but not much came of it. And maybe that’s a good thing. *Chekai dobra—iak z kurky moloka!* Expect decency from them like milk from a chicken.

## And with Two Such Husbands

*i. Horpyna Hornofluk remembers the good old days and reveals that Teklya Kawun's first husband was actually no better than the present one.*

OF COURSE I KNEW Teklya's first husband! Ivan Slepokura his name was. A surly fellow if ever I saw one. And not much better than this Ostap. Oh, no one liked him all that much. From the beginning, right from the very beginning we knew he wasn't to be trusted. But when he spotted Teklya, he just started appearing more and more often. He worked on the trucks, you see. Came from somewhere north. Said he didn't have anyone. Imagine! And Teklya decided to marry him after a month or two of courtship. Who marries like that? You have to know who a person is. What are their origins. Good people, bad people? But her mother died long ago. And there was just the old father, and he was a quiet sort. With the second one though, this Ostap Kawun, it turned out the same way.

Anyway, as I was telling you, she was good-looking when she was young. Tall and straight as a poplar. If she wanted to she could have had her pick of boys. I remember very well. We're both from the same year. You know, when she walked through the village everyone stopped to look? Young and old alike. But she was young. Young and stubborn. She didn't want to listen, and that was it. What could you do? Tie the girl? Even the fortune teller told her not to marry Slepokura, but she did. Well, you know what they say. Love is not a potato. You can't throw it out the window. And Ivan, the first husband, he was one of those smart fellows. You know the type. He's always right. And Teklya, she's good hearted. While her father was alive everything somehow still went pretty well. They had their own mill, a few cows, a pig. But when her father died and Ivan took over, I tell you, that's when the troubles began. And she had four small children by then.

First Ivan decided that he wanted to improve on the mill. Oh, my heavens! He brought in some kind of sifts and even a motor. What for? A motor needs oil! And where was he going to get that? But people came to him. From Zaiachy Kholodok, Zoloty Stepok, Tykhy Khutir, from all around. Then stories started. And some said it was best to stand right there and make sure you collected your own flour or he'd switch your grain and give you something worse. And then what could you do? Now Teklya's father, he was honest as the day. An upstanding sort. Known far and wide and respected by all. But Ivan couldn't care less. And that wasn't all. He made even more shame for Teklya.

Just imagine. One night he convinced Volodya Hun'ko to open up the co-operative. And they drank in there, and who knows what else they did? Even the accountant had no trouble spotting a problem when he came to do the books. What decent person does such a thing to his own neighbours? It was our co-operative! That Ivan, he just turned people's heads, and young Volodya, he was such a good boy. But Ivan's holiday ended. That's for sure. One day he came home all black and blue. Said he slipped and fell on the rocks in the river. Died some thirty-six hours after. Anyway, he never revealed who it was he was fighting with. But you can be sure he was up to no good. That was when Teklya was left with everything on her hands, working herself to death to keep the children fed and clean.

Soon after collectivization came. Before we knew what was what, people were being taken away. And you had to give things up. It was hand over your horse or else. I went into the *kolhosp*. So did Teklya. So did my brothers and my mother too. Later, when there was terrible

hunger everywhere, they still came. Took even potato peelings. And people started dying. Yet the pile of grain which they had taken stayed at the station so long it began to rot. In front of our eyes. Do you think you could get near it? Some tried. Some paid heavily. Then it even started to sprout. Because it wasn't covered up, you see, and there were rains. Yes, the crudest beasts are not those walking on four legs.

Oh, life was not all that easy for Teklya when she came over here either. Always running around cleaning places for the rich. Trying to keep everyone clothed. She was the only breadwinner in the family, with no husband. So, when Nadia, the unfortunate one, told her it was better to get married, I guess Teklya give it some thought. With two pay checks it's easier, isn't it? And in those days, there were still a lot of old bachelors. Some of them came over earlier, and some were already born here. Many of them were eager to get a woman from home. Advertising themselves all over the place. Newspapers. Radio. You really had a choice. But I guess Teklya wasn't lucky again. She would have been better off alone than she is now with that scoundrel.

Look at him, that Ostap! Look at what he's done. Created so much scandal. And to a woman with children too. Teklya certainly didn't need that in her old age. Hasn't she suffered enough? Losing her sons in war time and not even knowing where. Why, when she married him she thought, he's not perfect, but he's our own. Sure. One of our own! Going to that Church of All Nations with all those Portuguese and Chinese. Do you know that he doesn't even carry our own newspapers at his news stand? Do you know that? Sells everything else though. German. Russian. Italian. Everything. And do you know why? Because our newspapers either support the church or they're too political, he says. Can you believe that? Now what can you expect from someone like him. Something decent? Oh, I say marriage is a lottery. It's best to watch out. Especially here in America where people are just thrown together like a bad soup.

*ii. How Ostap Kawun justifies himself in Solonyna's Tavern and declares his faith in mankind.*

HEY, SOLONYNA, where did you get these pickles? They're not bad. Not bad at all. Just the right touch of garlic. Who made them? Your wife? Hey, Hilda? Did you make these pickles? Terrific. Really good. None of your sauerkraut in here, eh? How did you manage that?—Which reminds me, Solonyna, your wife isn't none too friendly with me these days. Why's that, eh? I hope she's not listening to all that garbage they're spreading about me. You can tell her from me it's a load of crap.

—Eh, Hilda! Are you sore at me? You know I'm only joking about all that kraut stuff. Everybody's equal in my books, you know that.

Anyhow, like I was saying, these days you don't have to do a damn thing, and the broads are after you themselves. Son of a gun, they're ready to pull their pants down before you know what hit you. I didn't take Wanda by force, you know. We had an arrangement. It was all worked out. Fair and square. Like a business. But now half the goddamn Ukies in the city are on my back, acting like I committed a crime or something. Hey, get me another beer, O.K.? Come on! Jesus, I want to tell you something. Nah, nah, shut up a minute, I want to tell you why these people are like that. You know why they're like that? I'll tell you why. It's because that son of a bitch

Kapusta opened his trap. If that bastard hadn't told my wife, nobody would have known. What you don't know, don't hurt. Isn't that it? Look at Bobchyk. Nobody bothers him. Christ, every time he's on Park Avenue, he jumps into the sack. And that's not all. Did you know that bugger Kapusta tried to get me to sell him a share in my news stand last year? Goddamn nerve! Asking for my bloody news stand. And when he couldn't get that he hounded me for a job all winter. Can you beat that? If he really wanted to he could have had his own stand ages ago. Plenty of chances. Plenty! But he was always too scared. Chicken didn't want to risk his *sa-a-vings*. Serves him right he hasn't got a goddamn nickel. Once a chicken always a chicken, I say. And the worst of it is he's making trouble for me. Stupid bastard! Spreading stories to my wife. She didn't have to know. Now she doesn't want me home no more. What's a little excitement anyway? Don't bother anybody does it? But these people don't understand. They don't know how to relax, how to enjoy life. Not like me, Solonyna. Not like you! Not like us guys, eh?

Hey! Remember that time we went to Vegas? And that blondie that went ape over you? Boy, what a number! Boy, oh boy! Wouldn't you just love to go to Vegas, right now, this minute? Eh? Just think of all those terrific hotels! Christ! Casinos, clubs. The whole bit. And the girls! Gosh, those were the days alright. Boy, oh boy. But you know what it is that I really like about Vegas? I'll tell you. It's that it's always funtime. Always funtime!

Hey, do you think Hilda would like Vegas? Oh, ho! Hey Hilda. You wanna got to Vegas with us next time? Ha! You know Teklya would never go there? Never. After we were married I wanted to show it to her, but you think I could get her to go? Oh, no. Once we went to Atlantic City. You know how nice it is there? The boardwalk and all that? Well, wouldn't you know, she didn't like it. Gave her a headache. After that I said I wasn't going to take her nowhere. Mind you, she doesn't want to go nowhere either. And you know I can't figure that one out? Coming to a new country, not wanting to see it? Says she's tired of travelling because she's been in every country in Europe. Imagine that. Me, I was all ready to show her everything, the States, Niagara Falls, you name it, the grand tour, show her life in North America. But no. All she ever wants to do is sit in that garden of hers. Won't go nowhere at all—not to a restaurant, not even to a movie. Nowhere. Oh yeah, except to church. Yeah. That's supposed to be fun. That's fun! That's her whole problem, you know it? Her whole bloody problem, listening to those priests promising her heaven and Ukraine. And she believes them! Just like they promised my brother Dmytro. Christ, if he'd only listened to the old man he might have been alive today. But what can you expect? He was young, a real dreamer. Well, he got it for that, didn't he? He went back alright. And he wasn't even born there! He was so naive and innocent all he could think about was some girl over there. But don't kid yourself. No one else was going back home. Oh no. Everybody knew there was trouble coming! Well, one thing I want to tell you, Solonyna, one thing. That sort of crap would never happen in *my* church. Never. I don't have to listen to no baloney about the next life or how Jesus walked on water. No sir. None of that. Hey, you want to pass me some of those pickles over there? Jesus, these things are good, you know that?

But look, you take Teklya now, she don't see it that way. No sir. Teklya's got to swallow all the garbage. Saints, icons, holy water. The whole load. Hell, she even fasts? And you know something? She thinks she gets something out it? Yeah! She likes it! I told her that stuff was O.K. in the old country where people didn't have enough to eat, but here, you don't have to fast!

So she starts bawling and goes right over to those priests and tells them what I said. Now everybody's screaming that I'm a disgrace. Do you understand that, Solonyna? What does it matter if Wanda's married? The guy's probably got a soft boiled egg in his pants anyway. As for being a Pole, well, what the hell, it's all the same to me in the dark. She could be Chinese for all I care. What do these people think anyhow? Christ, I'm no D.P. No one shipped me over here. I was born here. I'm a *real* Canadian goddamn it! Multicultural! I speak everything—English, French, Serbian. Whatever you want. Even Italiano if I have to! Look, all I want is to be happy. I can't understand why people have to complain all the time when it's so goddamn easy here. Rich! Lots of everything! Why the hell can't they just shut up and be happy? Eh? Just shut up and be happy.

*iii. Bohdan Kapusta talks about the embarrassing event—the seduction of Wanda Krysiniski.*

WELL, IT SERVES HIM RIGHT. That Wanda was no fool, you know. She knew what she was after. Damn right she did. I'd always see her hanging around the stand talking up Ostap—and she wasn't after free magazines, you know. One time I went down to see Ostap during my lunch break. I arrive, it was just twelve noon, and the stand is all boarded up. Why that's peak hours! He told me himself that's when he sells the most. Those Greeks and Italians, they're so hot on tits he's got to import them from all over—Sweden, Germany, France. Any kind your heart desires. And here he is, all boarded up. But he didn't fool me. He didn't fool me one bit. I knew what he was doing. He was in there with her. Why if anyone stood close enough to the stand they'd hear it all, right in the middle of the day in the middle of Papineau Street. No shame, I tell you. Some people they just have no shame.

Next time I see her, oh la la! She's wearing a fancy coat. Real borg. No joke. What do you think? All that costs money. I'm sure it wasn't her husband who paid for that either. He's just over here recently. Some Austrian. Seems she has three kids too, though how they ever understand each other beats me. That Wanda can't even talk right. Polish, Ukrainian, Slovak, all muddled up. He speaks German—and the kids, well, God only knows. You know I asked her once, "Are you Polish or Ukrainian?" But she just laughed like a hyena. "Where did your parents come from?" I finally ask. Politely. Only because I was curious. I have nothing against any Slavic types. We're all in the same boat. But you know what she says? "Why, they came out of the same place you came from! Ha, ha, ha." I tell you a bitch is a bitch. After that I told Ostap myself, I said, look it's only a matter of time before Teklya finds out. She's not going to put up with something like that. She's just not that kind. She's a decent hard-working sort if I ever saw one. Never hurt a soul in her life and never has a mean word for anyone. Why, if it wasn't for her he would have lost that stand a long time ago. Now he thinks I told her. What does he think? That I'm a blabbermouth?

You know, his brother Dmytro was the same. Woman crazy. One day he comes up to us, we were still working in the mines then—the brother too, and this Dmytro, says just like that, out of the blue, he's going 'back home.' He's got enough money, he's going to buy a farm and set up an apiary. You know what happened? Two days after he arrives in the village, he's dead. All those

years in the mine, five, six years of hard work, all down the drain. Died of a stroke. I told him myself before he left, I said to him, Dmytro, if you know what side your bread is buttered on, stay here. I left from there, I told him. But no. He went back. For what? For some girl who was sending letters to him. What did he think? That politics isn't hooked into everything? I'll tell you what he thought. He thought life was just pickles dipped in honey. And now look at that other one, sitting in Solonyna's tavern every day drinking himself to death. But what can you do? Anyhow, I don't see any of his baptist friends or whatever they call themselves in that church he goes to coming to rescue his soul. Church of All Nations! Why, they don't even believe in the soul! Come to think of it, it was Maxym Kvas who paid for all of Ostap's drinks last week. And Solonyna lets him sleep in the tavern because Teklya doesn't want him in the house. And I don't blame her. Another woman might have started to cry finding a scene like that. But not Teklya. She knows what's right and wrong. He phones her every day and she just hangs up.

You know what she did when she found them? She just picked up the broom and started whacking him over the head. I'm sorry I wasn't there! Oh, what I wouldn't give to have seen that! Kvas told me it was terrific. The old bastard started to plead and beg Teklya to stop. Then he grabbed his coat and tried to make a run for it. But, of course, by this time there were people all around.

Everyone was laughing and cheering Teklya, and she was just giving it to him so that he couldn't get his coat on. I heard he threw it at the crowd and ran down the street in his underwear with her chasing after him. Cars honking. Everyone stopped to watch. Apparently he ran a couple of blocks. I don't know how he ever managed with all that fat of his. Made it to George's tobacco store near Dorchester.

Now Teklya is convinced Ostap will try to get back at her. She's even gone so far as to make funeral arrangements for herself. Yes! I'm telling you. Horpyna Hornofluk told me. And she ought to know. She went with her to the lawyer. Poor Teklya is scared to death something is going to happen to her. She's sure that if she doesn't prepare everything Ostap will get the All Nations people to cremate her just to punish her. And she's determined to have an Orthodox funeral. So she got Lysiak to write down all the details. Where she wanted to be buried, what price the coffin was supposed to be, how she wanted to be dressed. Everything. Paid him in advance. She figures at least she ought to use a little money on herself before Ostap grabs it all. And she's dead right too. That bastard, he doesn't care about anybody. Teklya has nowhere else to go either, what with that daughter of hers. I heard she ran off with some waiter years ago and never bothers about her mother. And you can't trust Ostap. Who knows what he'll do now? Why if I had had that news stand I would have made something decent out of it. I'd have had a bundle by now. But him! He just squanders it. And on what? Some ass.

But would you believe, even though she's sitting in that house trembling, poor Teklya still thinks that it's not really his fault? Or Wanda's either. Can you imagine that? She's even gone so far as to say that it's the All Nations people who are responsible because they don't believe in the holy spirit or in the final judgement. But I don't buy that. This way they can fill up their church with any fool they can get. It's a business. And don't think that they didn't get Ostap to be generous with donations. When it comes to being generous with others he can do it. But ask him if he gave me a job last winter? No sir. All I wanted was to help sell papers. On the street. For a



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couple of dollars until they called me back. I was laid off for Pete's sake. Two kids to feed. But no dice. He got scared. Thought I might get away with something for nothing. And I spent years with his brother in those mines. With his father, too. It's no joke, I tell you.

## Ghosts

Зозуленько, люба пташко,  
Високо літаєш.  
Скажи мені, голубонько  
Де любка видаєш.  
Folksong

JUNE IS NOT ALWAYS WARM in Montreal. Last year at this time hailstones the size of eggs came thundering down on the city. And conferences here, well, they don't always turn out the way they should. You see, the whole thing really began when Nadia came here to give a lecture. She was never like other people, happy with what they had. Oh no. Sure, she was talented. But talent isn't enough. And when she was here, she was mainly to be found in the company of her old school friend, Lastivka Struk, who always had a great deal of news.

"I've fallen in love, Nadiochka!" declared Lastivka with enthusiasm. "But damn it. He's always so aloof. The great Serhiy Marchenko. I just can't get him off his projects. Anyway, he's here. You tell me what you think. The thing is we're all supposed to go to Paris in the fall. Borys has a sabbatical. And I'm going to work on the encyclopedia. Well, why not? I guess I'll just have to put that exquisite man out of my mind. Don't look at me like that! The children will love it. They can practice their French."

Everyone knows that women, and particularly married women, are prone to falling in love. So it should come as no surprise to anyone that Nadia's friend, though a respected scholar in her own right, should venture into this area. Now Borys, her husband, he's a delightful soul. Kind to the children. And what a son! Helps his old mother out every day. Why, she lives in the house next to them. And there's Lastivka getting it into her head that Borys isn't good enough, and she's eyeing some famous professor. To tell the truth, this was not the first such incident. Many years ago, she had become susceptible to the declarations of a celebrated defector, and although the outcome was not peaceful, she carried on with her usual good cheer. In fact, even though she was well into middle age she remained an adventurer, a dreamer. She loved travel, for example. Now some people tire of it, particularly at that time of life, but not Lastivka. And after many years of marriage, her husband, who no doubt found some way of forgetting her youthful transgression, still managed to find her ideas of escapades to foreign capitals exciting. Lastivka was also a generous friend. Why, it was she who had helped Nadia to overcome her shyness in public forums.

"Talk to them as though they're your students," Lastivka would insist. "They don't know anything anyway!" After trying this technique on several occasions, Nadia discovered to her great surprise that she did enjoy an attentive audience.

Now it goes without saying that people envy the life of scholars—the long summer vacations, the excursions to distant lands. But why, oh why does everyone forget the endless lunches in student cafeterias? It's no wonder there are so many stomach complaints. Some do manage to survive though. It's true. Take Pavlo Zhashkiw. He never gets sick. That's because he only eats soup, and he makes a strict point of chopping raw garlic into it. Zhashkiw is nobody's fool! When it comes right down to it, what can one compare to a bowl of bright red *borscht* with bits of crunchy garlic in it? No wonder he's never been ill. Of course, he's never been married either!

Well, there were people from all over at that conference lunch. Professor Zhovtonizhka came from New York. And so did Simma Stukalo. And Professor Kipybida was as usual going on about his obsession—diminutives.

“These nations have depleted gene reserves!” he said loudly. “They demonstrate frequent cretinism, for heaven’s sake!”

At the next table sat Oleh Vilnytski. Although he was already well over fifty and a recent grandfather, he never stopped seeing himself as anything else but an eligible bachelor and continued to wear the same yellow construction boots he wore in his student days. And there he was getting more and more animated as he was chatting to a local beauty less than half his age. Nadia and Lastivka were surveying this scene and discussing their own affairs. But before long a thin balding man with what could only be called piercing blue eyes approached their table.

“Oh!” said Lastivka with some surprise. “You’re here? Meet my dearest friend, Nadia Honchar.”

This was, of course, none other than Lastivka’s great flame! Polite conversation followed as it always does in such circumstances. The food was poor. The lectures well attended. That sort of thing. But quite unexpectedly Lastivka was called away by Professor Zhovtonizhka. You know, in the final analysis, people like Lastivka are really few and far between because they have what many others don’t—boundless energy. And it always seemed as if she knew everyone too, and even had some kind of special relationship with them. Nadia often marvelled at her friend, for she could somehow never be like Lastivka. It took Nadia so much more time to overcome her states of uncertainty and hesitation. But now she found herself sitting with the very man Lastivka had just talked about. And the fact of the matter was that the longer Nadia looked at him the more familiar he became.

“Did you ever live in France right after the war?” began Nadia. “We used to know some Marchenkos a very long time ago. That is, my parents used to know them.”

“Actually,” Serhiy Marchenko replied, “when I heard your name I remembered it too.”

Could it really be? Question and answer followed. Yes. They had known each other as children. Who says fate doesn’t exist? Oh, let it never be said that life becomes duller as we grow older! The unexpected greets the experienced traveller no less often than the unseasoned one. That’s for certain.

“You won’t believe this, Lastivka!” said Nadia to her friend who had returned to the table. “We were both in the same D.P. camp!”

“Really?” exclaimed Lastivka. “Well, you probably have tons of things to talk about.”

But then for some reason which wasn’t all too clear to anyone, the three friends fell silent and became even slightly embarrassed, and all assumed a more formal attitude with each other. Well, life must go on. Once the past has been recalled, what then? After all, countless numbers of people have had encounters with old childhood friends. And since Nadia was to a large degree a restrained person, unexpected encounters generally made her uneasy. After a few more minutes she thought it best to make her excuses and leave Lastivka and Serhiy together. Although it is often said that girls grow up to be like their mothers, this is not altogether true. At least not in Nadia’s case. It should be pointed out that she was not at all like her mother who would decide that if you so much as knew someone from her village, or even from the neighbouring one, you

were one of the family. “*Tse odnoselchan*” she used to say.

## II

Цвіте терен, цвіте терен,  
Листя опадає,  
Хто в любові не знається  
Той горя не знає.  
Folksong

THAT EVENING Dr. Ostap Hrutskowian invited almost everyone to a reception at his house— Professor Zhovtonizhka, Professor Kipybida, even Oleh Vilnytski—oh, everyone was there. Lastivka, naturally. And since Nadia was one of the keynote speakers at the conference, she was of course eagerly expected too. You know, many individuals are often surprised to learn that our people sometimes also live in fashionable parts of town. Why, even our own often acquire a look of disbelief on their faces the odd time they learn that a fellow countryman has in fact settled in one of these highly desirable areas. But they can be found. Not in large numbers, mind you. But here and there. And Dr. Ostap Hrutskowian was just such an example.

It’s often been said that the whole area he lives in, all of Westmount, should be declared a historical treasure! Where else in Canada can you find such unity of architecture, such splendid greenspaces? And Hrutskowian’s house was nothing to sneeze at either. Tucked in between two large mansions, the white roof and yellow awnings over the windows certainly did give a country club charm to the whole place.

As for the party, it was a delight! From the moment you stepped into the gracious hallway, the air was perfumed with freshly baked sausages and breads. Mrs. Hrutskowian certainly outdid herself that evening. Everyone always knew she was an excellent cook, but who knew she was an expert? Just one bite of her magnificent *pyrizhky* and you were transported to heaven. Oh, and the wreaths of *bublychky* she had everywhere! All that can be said is that they were an extraordinary sight! But unfortunately an unkind rumour was being spread at the party that she had actually cooked all these specialties on holy water. Little Cantor Palamarchuk insisted that during the Feast of Jordan Mrs. Hrutskowian gave him no rest and regularly pleaded for water.

“She wanted quarts of it!” the Little Cantor whispered. “And then she would cry at me and insist it was a ‘matter of life and death.’ After I refused her, she called Father Archipenko and told him he needn’t bother to come over and bless her house. He could just do it over the telephone. Imagine! And then she said I could sing the prayers to her that way too.”

Well, who knows? Perhaps she did manage to sprinkle in a drop or two of holy water, and that explained why her rolls were as light and fluffy as clouds. But cantors, and especially little cantors, are also known for making up tales. Good tales there was no shortage of that evening. And gossip too.

“She’s here,” said Lastivka to Nadia. “In all her glory. Or haven’t you seen her yet?”

It turned out that Dora Demchyshyn was also at the party. And she had, with her friends, launched a very nasty campaign in the kitchen against Nadia. After all, Dora could hardly have

been expected not to be invited. She was as close a friend to Mrs. Hrutskowian as any and was also renowned for her excellent cheesecakes which she generously laid out on one of the tables. In fact, the two ladies often spent hours exchanging recipes. So it really was careless of Nadia not to have foreseen all this. The truth of the matter was that old Dora just couldn't bring herself to forgive Nadia. You see, a long time ago, a very long time ago, Nadia had been engaged to Dora's son, Yuri, and had unexpectedly broken off the commitment and married a wealthy American. Now she has the most charming twin boys you would ever want to see. One is just like the other. Of course, the whole Demchyshyn family was heart broken. And worse, Yuri never married. Fortunately for Nadia and everyone else, there was a bit of a reprieve from all Dora's harsh words when Pavlo Zhashkiw rushed into the house huffing and puffing, red as a beetroot.

"Look at this!" he said in his sing-song Bukovynian accent. "Code."

A few people looked at him in disbelief. Most, however, were by now accustomed to Zhashkiw's outbursts because they had become rather frequent.

"That Bezakutenko's got the whole top brass at Radio International fooled," continued Zhashkiw. "That snake in the grass! He can't fool me."

Zhashkiw never went anywhere without his ox-blood coloured briefcase. It had gotten to that point. At night he kept it next to his pillow. And during the day it never left his sight.

"We just can't be sure, Pavlo," said Professor Zhovtonizhka. "Boyko hired him for Pete's sake. He knows what he's doing."

"Damn it!" spluttered Zhashkiw. "Look at these papers. He changes the wording around. Minimizes everything. Every tragedy of our history. He doesn't report anything that's going on around here. Waters everything down. We have books, scholars working on these things and he's still going around whitewashing."

"Come on," said Oleh Vilnytsky. "His Ukrainian is excellent."

"Are you people naive?" said Zhashkiw in a loud voice. "There are bloody agents amongst these arrivals! What's the matter with you?"

"Well then, go to the police," said Professor Zhovtonizhka.

"I did. They're not doing anything!" groaned Zhashkiw. "I haven't had a decent night's sleep for months. He knows I'm onto him." But it was soon apparent that all Zhashkiw's frustrations did were to fuel Mrs. Demchyshyn's.

"You shouldn't be so confident Pavlo," said Dora. "What makes you so sure that you're amongst friends here?"

"That's right," added Shura. She was one of Dora Demchyshyn's oldest and most loyal companions. And before anyone realized it, she and Dora resumed their attacks on Nadia.

"Where's your sense of fairness, Ostapchyku?" Dora whined at Dr. Hrutskowian. "How could you invite her? And us too? Books or no books, she's still a disgrace!"

"Dorochka," answered Hrutskowian. "Calm yourself. Your blood pressure."

It goes without saying that the more important you are, the more people get to know your private affairs, including your medical history. And so it was with Dora's heart problems. Everyone knew the minutest details, even so eminent a professor as Dr. Hrutskowian. But then she also told everyone she met about the open heart surgery she had had. Even including the plastic valves they put in. And sometimes she even went so far as to show parts of her scar.

“Can’t we get back to serious matters?” said Zhashkiw with an agitated voice. “Don’t we have enough without you ladies creating problems?”

“Ostapchyku, did you hear that?” shouted Mrs. Demchyshyn. “She jilts my one and only son and he says *I’m* creating problems! Do something!”

“Now, now Dorochka,” said Dr. Hrutschowian trying to calm her.

This was the wrong thing to say though. Dora just pushed Hrutschowian aside and marched out of the house, her large body shaking like jelly. It was hard for everyone to act cheerful after that, and there was not much point in trying. Soon Nadia left, and then slowly so did everyone else. To be sure all of this was quite embarrassing. But later that night Nadia decided that since she had created so much commotion, she would fly home the next day. After all, the conference was coming to an end, and she could speak to Lastivka next month in Boston. Lastivka was busy with Serhiy anyway.

All in all, Nadia slept poorly that night and for some reason found herself thinking of Lastivka’s friend. It is of course impossible to say what really goes on in a person’s soul, but Nadia’s meeting with Serhiy must have stirred something in her. What? It’s hard to tell. Perhaps more memories of childhood. Who knows? And the more she thought of him the more upset she became at the thought that she would probably never have another opportunity to talk to him.

But wishes do come true sometimes. And not only in books. For who should be outside the university gates as she was passing by next morning? None other than the very Serhiy Marchenko she had spent the entire night thinking about. And yes, he too had been thinking of her. Although this kind of thing doesn’t happen very often, everyone is aware it’s been known to occur from time immemorial, and each time it takes place there is always a fresh amazement that such a thing is possible. And of course, in sweet moments like these, who thinks of the consequences?

### III

Ой поїдем в чисте поле,  
Чи не знайдеш щастя й долі.  
В чистім полі погуляєм  
Щастя й долі пошукаєм.  
Folksong

THAT NADIA HONCHAR! Such a dignified lady she always was. So refined. So well mannered. And what a fine husband! It’s true no one knew him very well, but everyone knew the boys. Beautiful boys. Tall and strong as oaks! So what could have crossed her mind when she was first given the proposal? Could she not have immediately thought of her children? Oh, this modern generation! Why, even Little Cantor Palamarchuk, try as he may, couldn’t till this day come up with an answer. And Lord knows he has discussed it with Father Archipenko and with Dora Demchyshyn, whenever she would listen. As the Little Cantor likes to say, “Stray from the church and the darkness gets deeper.” So succinct he is! Such pithy sayings. And so appropriate too.

As for Serhiy, well, it's even harder to understand. It's true his wife was Scottish, but his parents soon got over that. Why, she herself was often seen bringing the three children to Ukrainian school on Saturdays. And who embroidered their shirts? Roslyn did. Serhiy's mother has been dead for years! Ah, who really knows? There's no shortage of temptations out there. Perhaps they will be forgiven. No doubt they saw that moment in a special way, even though Serhiy wasn't what you'd call a young man any more and had even had his share of health problems besides. But then responsible people have been known to throw caution to the winds. And when the whirlwind of love appears, you lose your hat! That's for sure.

Or perhaps it was just the spring time. Is one explanation better than another in such matters? After all, what's more delightful than the Quebec countryside on a fine morning in June? Oh, there's nothing quite like the winding roads, the small villages where the houses press close together and sit on the very edge of the highway, charming the skies with their sloping roofs. They're dream villages. And this was where Serhiy and Nadia went on that morning they met.

They left the city and drove off to the old farm Serhiy's father willed to his son when he died. It had been unused for years. Serhiy never had time for it. And as they drove they found a thousand things to remember. They talked endlessly about old friends and past events. How can one describe how they must have felt? Perhaps it would be best simply to say that Serhiy seemed relieved of a heavy weight from his shoulders and Nadia was freed from some rigid harness that she always felt around her. They were at home with each other, you might say. And nothing could interfere with their well-being that day.

"I'll never forget how you and Sashko used to scare me by lighting matches and throwing them around," exclaimed Nadia. "What ever happened to him? I once heard he got sick on the boat over and died."

Oh, they talked about giving up their jobs, leaving their families, and even living out their days on that farm far away from everyone. They told each other things they'd never uttered to any other living soul. And they no doubt wept at times too. All of this must have been quite extraordinary for Serhiy. He was a self-controlled sort of person. Disciplined. Almost in the extreme. This was also something altogether new for Nadia, accustomed as she was to presenting herself in a very tailored way. All in all, what more can be said about how they must have felt? It was pure happiness! Two hearts ablaze. Two kindred souls that finally met. You know, many people live out their entire lives and never have a chance at this. Not even once.

"What ever happened then?" asked Serhiy. "Why didn't you leave France with us?"

"The Soviets grabbed my father," said Nadia. "That very morning. Right there on Avenue du Général Leclerc. Ready to send him back. But if you can believe it, he returned a few weeks later. Some of them jumped off the truck and he didn't get shot."

Who can describe all the details of their magnificent romance? For hours they talked. And the damp air in the farmhouse had no effect on them. It was pure ecstasy! They hardly knew they were two people. And with every kiss they drew their souls into each other's. With each breath every past pain was eased. What more is there to add? It was as complete a passion as anyone can imagine. But suddenly there was a loud clattering sound, and for a moment they thought they had visitors, though it turned out it was only Archilles Desautels driving his tractor along the road.

“My father used to pick mushrooms with him,” said Serhiy. “Blueberries. Raspberries.”

Actually it was Achilles’ going home for supper that made them realize they were also hungry and that they hadn’t eaten since morning. But then this is customary with lovers isn’t it? Now they began to feel the cold too, and Serhiy complained of a sudden headache and urged Nadia to drive into the village for food while he found some wood and got the old stove going and warmed up the place.

As Nadia approached St. Abbé de Jacques, there was not a sign of life anywhere. Just wide flat silent fields. Not a cow, not a bird in the sky. And in the village no one was to be seen either. Where did they all go? It was like some deserted world. Some world of the dead. Her fears disappeared though, as soon as she stepped into the *Dépanneur Chantecler* and saw row upon row of bright sweets—pink *Vachon* cakes, Swiss Chocolate Rolls, and boxes of home-made *tartes au sucre*. What a craving for sugar one always finds in these remote villages!

“*Vous êtes déjà au camping?*” the young girl behind the counter asked Nadia. “*Je ne savais pas que c’ était ouvert.*”

“*Non, non,*” replied Nadia. “*Je suis chez des amis.*”

When the girl was adding up the prices Nadia noticed the black earth under her nails. She hardly looked more than ten or eleven. Already her face showed the strain of hard work mixed with bewilderment. The land is extremely rich in these parts, and it goes without saying that even the children are sent out to do their share. At that moment a kind of shame gripped Nadia. It occurred to her that neither her parents nor Serhiy’s had ever had the luxury to while away a whole day the way she and Serhiy had. There had never been a single self-indulgence on their parts, ever. This was a dark betrayal. Her parents would surely think that. A sin, an evil sin. Oh, what were they doing, this younger generation? But one more thing became clear to Nadia, and that was that if the real truth were to be known, it was their parents who had made this affinity between herself and Serhiy really possible. All of it, the affection and the joy were in fact propelled by memories of suffering and degradation that both she and Serhiy had witnessed their families endure. Nadia became angry with herself for indulging in foolish fantasies about living out her days on the farm. But as she was driving back she still couldn’t help thinking that even though they had to return, she would do her utmost to see Serhiy whenever possible.

In the dark the drive back seemed longer, although Nadia enjoyed it in a kind of melancholic way. And as she made her way around the sharp bend she saw bright lights in the night sky. Somewhere there was obviously a festival. Of course! It was the end of June. A magic time in these parts. Brotherhood and human fellowship were everywhere restored. And in every village far and wide there were parades and firecrackers. That’s where everybody was. At the St. Jean Baptiste celebrations!

She stopped at the roadside briefly and watched the spectacular colours. And with every explosion of red and gold the human cries of wonder became louder and louder. There must have been hundreds of people there. Nadia began to miss Serhiy and drove quickly past the wooded area near the river until she reached the farmhouse. But just think of the shock and horror that awaited her when she came into the house. There he was, lying on the floor on his back right near the old Franklin stove, his eyes wide-open, staring at the ceiling.

“Serhiy!” Nadia sobbed at him as she shook his body. “Serhiy!”



But he was dead. Completely dead. She threw herself at his feet like Mary Magdalene herself and embraced his legs. She moaned into his body and could hardly pull herself away.

There you have it. Just like that! Oh, human life hangs by one thread. That's the truth. One minute you're alive and the next you're gone.

#### IV

Надлетів орел з чорної хмари,  
Розбив, розігнав голуби із пари.  
Folksong

WELL, YOU CAN IMAGINE the state that Nadia was in when she ran to Archilles Desautels' place across the road to get help.

"*Aidez-moi*" she cried. "*Serhiy est mort!*"

"*Hein?*"

"*Serhiy Marchenko. Serhiy Marchenko ton voisin.*"

"*Comment ça? Ou est Roslyn?*" Archilles asked in his gruffy voice.

This was of course the hardest part for Nadia when she was asked where Serhiy's wife was. But although she was upset, she wasn't so upset that she couldn't think fast.

"*A Montréal!*" she said. "*Je suis la cousine.*"

She told Archilles and his wife that when she'd got back from the village, she had found him dead. Just like that. Dead. Giselle rushed to the telephone for an ambulance.

"*B' en téléphone donc à Roslyn,*" she cried.

"*Non, non,*" Nadia answered. And she told them that as soon as Serhiy was looked after, she was going to drive straight into town to get her.

Well, you can also imagine how amazing it was that although Nadia felt more and more numb with each passing minute and although all she really wanted in life was to stay with Serhiy's body, she was nevertheless able to drive correctly. She stopped at all the lights despite the fact that the country roads were empty at this hour, and you could say she even kept to just a touch below the speed limit. But as she approached the city she realized that her alternatives had evaporated. Lastivka? No, Lastivka would never forgive her. As for Serhiy's wife, Nadia was terrified at the thought. What was

Nadia supposed to do? Naturally she might have thought of this before she agreed to her preposterous adventure. What did they think? That God didn't see their actions? That he doesn't interfere when he feels he has to?

Really Nadia had no other choice but to go to the rectory that evening. So she decided that Father Archipenko was the only one to help in this nightmare. After all, even though Nadia wasn't religious, he was a priest and she recalled that he had recently written on the divine Skovoroda. Surely a man of God and especially one who took an interest in poetry would understand the sins and struggles of the human soul and know what to do in such an unbelievable situation.

But Father Archipenko was off in Covey Hill. By the way, it must be mentioned that old

Kateryna Holoborodko never calls Covey Hill anything else but ‘Heaven’s Doorstep.’ That’s how beautiful she says it is around there. In an amazing coincidence, just at that time her husband, Mykhalko, happened to be hovering between life and death himself. It seems he had taken a very bad fall from his pear tree which he insisted on pruning in order to improve the harvest. His condition was so bad she had called Father Archipenko who had rushed immediately out there. And that was why the job of telling Serhiy’s wife about her husband’s death fell to none other than Little Cantor Palamarchuk, although it must be remembered that before the Little Cantor made the fateful telephone call to unsuspecting Mrs. Marchenko, he must have spent well over an hour talking to a by now hysterical Nadia Honchar. It was all her fault she kept saying. She was lost forever. Then she would sob and cry out saying that life was impossible without Serhiy, that he wasn’t dead at all, and that what had happened was really just a terrible dream. All this was, of course, too much for one man to deal with, even a cantor—infidelity, death, and what’s more, the heavy responsibility of informing the poor man’s wife of these tragic events.

Was it any surprise then that it was only at the last minute, when he was actually dialing the number, that the Little Cantor was able to decide on a course of action?

“A terrible accident has taken place, Mrs. Marchenko.... At your farm. Yes... I’m afraid so.”

Mrs. Marchenko could hardly speak when the Little Cantor finally told her that Serhiy was no more. She began to stammer and became quite confused.

“It really would be best if you came first to the rectory, Mrs. Marchenko. I’ll send someone right away to pick you up.”

But oh, how true it is! Misery never walks alone. Why, just as they were waiting for Serhiy’s wife to arrive, what should occur but a furious ringing at the doorbell.

“Where’s Father Archipenko?” It was Dora Demchyshyn. “A catastrophe!”

“Yes. Yes. We’ve notified her, Dora,” said the Little Cantor. “She’s on her way. Calm yourself.”

“Who’s on her way?” she snapped at him. “What are you prattling about? Haven’t you heard what’s going on? Where’s Father Archipenko?”

“At Holoborodko’s. What in the world has happened?”

“Tell me, Lord in heaven, why are we not like other people!” Mrs. Demchyshyn sighed. “Zhashkiw’s about to break into Bezkutenko’s apartment and no one knows how to stop him!”

Impossible as this was to believe, it turned out that Pavlo Zhashkiw had all kinds of complicated electrical listening devices—oh, microphones, tape-recorders, things no normal person would know where to get—all over his kitchen table, and he was preparing that very night to plant them all in Bezkutenko’s apartment.

“Poor Pavlo. You know what he says?” Dora declared. “The police aren’t doing anything. And what’s worse, he’s scared to death. He’s sure some agent is going to kill him. Bezkutenko knows Pavlo suspects him. Oh, for heaven’s sake, when’s Father Archipenko coming back?”

The Little Cantor was beside himself.

“The devil’s never napping. Oh, the devil’s never napping,” he muttered to himself.

There was Nadia walking about as though she were haunted, tears streaming from her silent face. And now, who was adding to all this confusion but Dora Demchyshyn, sighing and puffing and moaning about how the whole community was about to be destroyed. But you know what

they say. When there's a fox at the door, who's interested in a mouse? All of a sudden, as soon as Dora found out just why Nadia was at the rectory that night, she forgot all about Pavlo Zhashkiw and his listening devices. Just like that.

"And what kind of a mess have you gone and made this time?" Dora snapped at Nadia.

"Please Dora!" pleaded the Little Cantor. "Can't you see she's barely alive herself?"

"She's brought all this on herself, hasn't she!" continued Mrs. Demchyshyn. "Turned happy children into orphans. And who's about to forgive that? Surely you yourself Little Cantor couldn't overlook such hatefulness."

But the Little Cantor had the situation completely in hand.

"The Lord will help us out of this," he said as he tried to usher Dora Demchyshyn out of the room.

"Never you mind, Little Cantor," said Dora freeing her arm. "She's done it this time, hasn't she? Gone too far. What did she think? That life was one long wedding? Oh, this is going to be known. This can't be hidden in some dark corner."

Somehow the Little Cantor managed to convince Dora that she would be of invaluable assistance to him if she tried to reach Father Archipenko again in Covey Hill, although, after Dora learned that in fact the dear Father was well on his way home, she began to make one call after another informing everyone about the complicated events of that evening. The Little Cantor wasn't quite sure of all the things Dora Demchyshyn was talking about; however he decided that if it weren't for the telephone, he wouldn't have been able to manage her at all. And when the doorbell finally rang, she was the first to jump up.

"He's here!" she exclaimed. "Our saviour."

In the meantime Nadia worried about how she was supposed to greet Serhiy Marchenko's wife.

But to everyone's surprise it turned out to be neither the wife nor Father Archipenko.

## V

Ой зле в світі, зле чувати,  
Бо вже правди не видати.  
Folksong

"LASTIVKA!" said the Little Cantor with some surprise as he opened the door. Nadia promptly rushed to one of the bedrooms and locked herself in.

"Christ Nadia!" Lastivka pounded on the door. "I'll kick it in if I have to."

Oh there's a lot of gypsy temperament in that family. They're all Hutsuls, you know! Carpathians. Why, Lastivka's father had the blackest hair you'd ever want to see. Black as coal. Just like his daughter's. And the eyes? When he looked at you he pierced you with them. And when he twisted his moustache in addition, your spine shivered. But he was a magnificent violinist. You could just feel the mountains when he played. Oh yes. Many hearts would burst when he played at those parties.

"He's got three kids," pleaded Nadia. "And now I have to explain it all to his wife. Leave me

alone. Don't you think I've got enough?"

"You little rat!" shouted Lastivka. "Just because you were both in some bloody D.P. camp suddenly you decide you're going to run off together. You stinking hypocrite."

"Look, I knew him from before," said Nadia.

"You knew nothing!" interrupted Lastivka.

"Leave me alone," answered Nadia. "He told me absolutely everything."

"Terrific! Now I suppose you're the only one who has ever understood him," Lastivka continued. "What else is new? You fool!"

Who knows what might have happened had the two friends carried on much longer? Suffice it to say that interruptions are a godsend, despite what some people maintain. All their recriminations were put to a stop when Mrs. Marchenko, the real victim, finally arrived looking bleary eyed and quite confused. Fortunately, Father Archipenko was right on her heels, and in a few moments so were the police. Suddenly it seemed that chaos was dispersed and everything would be clarified. Nadia came out of the bedroom. Dora Demchyshyn dropped the telephone. And Lastivka even rushed to take off Mrs. Marchenko's coat. There were declarations to be signed. Achilles Desautels had to be contacted. An autopsy had to be authorized. But before all this could even be begun, Nadia Honchar was obliged once again to describe the unfortunate events of that evening.

Poor Mrs. Marchenko was in a state of shock, and so Nadia spared her the additional details about the personal connection she had to her husband. The Little Cantor, though he knew the truth, went along with the white lie. As for Lastivka, from her kind and compassionate behaviour towards Serhiy's wife, who would ever have guessed that at one time she herself had had designs on the woman's husband? Throughout all this Mrs. Marchenko maintained what could only be called a genuine Scottish reserve, though if you looked into her eyes carefully you could see the growing grief and the tormented heart. And several times she said, "I just don't understand why he would go out there." Then she looked at Nadia questioningly. There was, it's true, more than just a hint of accusation in these words. Should she have been told? It's hard to say. As it was, her life was sure to be filled with difficulties. Was it really necessary to rub salt into open wounds? But that's exactly what Dora Demchyshyn tried to do.

"It's an evil night, Mrs. Marchenko. One tragedy after the next," she declared. "This kind of thing only happens when people are sinning."

"Please Dora," said the Little Cantor in Ukrainian so that Mrs. Marchenko would not understand. "If you carry on like this, your soul won't find any rest in the next world."

"My soul? Lord! What are you saying? She's responsible for everything!" said Dora looking askance at Nadia. "What more do you need? She concocts spells the like of which make our hair stand on end. First my Yuri. Humiliated and destroyed. And now, Serhiy. Dead."

But from looking at her it didn't seem as though Mrs. Marchenko understood what Dora was saying. And luckily in a few minutes the police escorted Serhiy's wife to the hospital where her husband's body lay.

When Roslyn Marchenko left, Nadia collapsed into an armchair. Father Archipenko paced back and forth a few times before deciding how he had to proceed with Zhashkiw's case, and shortly he and Mrs. Demchyshyn prepared to leave too. Lastivka was also putting on her coat.

“Now what are we supposed to do about Oxana?” said Nadia to the Little Cantor.

“Oxana?” asked the Little Cantor, looking a touch perplexed. “Oh, of course. Of course.”

“How could I tell her?” Nadia went on.

“There’s a lot you didn’t tell her!” shouted Mrs. Demchyshyn from the vestibule. “Don’t worry though. It’ll all come out. Sooner or later.”

“It’s true no one talks about Oxana any more,” said the Little Cantor, ignoring Dora. “And it seems she doesn’t recognize people at all.”

“Serhiy said that he somehow just couldn’t tell his wife about her,” added Nadia.

“Oh, what a world!” cried Dora coming right back into the house and standing at the door to the living room. “Lunatics live and my Yuri is destroyed. Who worries about him? God in heaven! Is it true that you’re there?”

“Oxana’s not a lunatic,” said Nadia in a surprisingly firm tone. “She survived hell itself.”

“Yes,” said the Little Cantor. “All the devils came out in those days. They were the rulers.”

“Sooner or later his wife will have to find out,” added Nadia.

“There’s no end to misery, dear people,” said the Little Cantor. “No end.”

“You know, my older sister died a few years ago,” continued Nadia. “And she also became totally demented. I don’t know how my parents managed.”

“It’s no wonder,” snapped Dora. “In your family everyone’s deranged!”

“No need Nadiochka,” said the Little Cantor. He saw that Nadia was starting to get upset again.

“No, there’s no need,” continued Nadia through tears. “There’s no need.”

Mrs. Demchyshyn ransacked through her purse.

“Ah, you’re all crazy, you left-bankers. Too much of that bark tea. Nobody should ever get mixed up with you.”

“Please Mrs. Demchyshyn,” said Father Archipenko coming back into the hallway. “We’ll be off now and see to Zhashkiw before it’s too late. You’re very upset yourself and you don’t mean what you’re saying. Let’s go then. Everyone’s gone through too much.”

## VI

Ой не спиться й не лежиться  
 I сон мене не бере.  
 Folksong

SO IT’S NOT HARD to imagine that there wasn’t much resting that night, what with all the comings and goings. Let no one say that a priest’s life, or even a cantor’s, is an easy one. Trouble never sleeps. And everyone’s worries and sins have to be taken on. Well, it was barely dawn before Nadia herself began to prepare for the long journey home. And the Little Cantor gave her whatever advice he could think of at that hour.

“I tried to free myself,” explained Nadia, “of all my ghosts. But now, look what I’ve done.”

“Pray to the Holy Father, Nadiochka,” said the Little Cantor. “Some say that love is a homesickness, I know. But when children are involved, it’s not right any way you look at it.”

“I never had any intention of destroying anything,” added Nadia.

“Then why did you go off with him alone?”

“I’ve really made a mess, haven’t I? And frankly, I don’t know any way out of it.”

“Couldn’t you just sit and talk together like normal people?” continued the Little Cantor.

“You know the devil is always dragging mankind into perdition.”

“I suppose so,” muttered Nadia.

“Pray hard daughter. You need the Lord on your side. Otherwise you just can’t hope to come out of this dark night.”

Nadia rose to depart.

“Please let me know what happens with Oxana,” she said.

The Little Cantor got up too.

“Nadiochka,” he said. “Don’t think about all that so much. We’ll look after it. Go on your way. I’ll tell her. In our village it was very bad too. Sometimes they’d take the half-living ones and toss them in with the dead. And my older aunt ate her very own children. So help me God. Go on your way. And put all this out of your head. God be with you.”

## VII

Ой чого ти почорніло,  
Зеленеє поле?  
Taras Shevchenko

THERE WAS A NICE and proper funeral for him. Poor Serhiy. Whenever he could, he had always helped out, even though he was a famous professor. He never shyed away from his origins. It was a real loss though. When people die like that, cut down like stalks of wheat, it’s a sad thing. When they’re old everyone says at least they lived for a goodly time. But that’s the way things go.

After some weeks Mrs. Marchenko no longer looked so forlorn, and it seemed she began to accept the whole thing. That was when the Little Cantor decided he had better inform her about a certain responsibility she now had, one that she was totally unaware of—Oxana, her dead husband’s sister, the one she knew nothing about.

“Famine. War. They do terrible things, Mrs. Marchenko,” said the Little Cantor.

But he was clearly worried when a look of betrayal and injury came across Mrs. Marchenko’s face again. Nevertheless, soon after they both went to the hospital where Oxana lived.

“*Oui, Monsieur Marchenko est mort,*” said the Little Cantor to the nun at the information desk. “*Subitement.*”

Through the window they saw Oxana.

“*Parfois elle devient agitée*” said the nun. “*Mais d’habitude elle est tranquille et tout va bien.*”

It was apparent that Oxana sat in her chair for days on end. When they looked at her it was hard to tell if she was dead or alive. Her face was a strange brownish hue, and she looked like

some kind of Egyptian mummy. Only her eyes betrayed life. They had a curious quizzical expression. Her hair was terribly sparse and what there was of it was dishevelled. Her limbs were as thin as sticks, and she looked very emaciated. The nun explained to Mrs. Marchenko and to the Little Cantor that Oxana generally refused to eat, and on several occasions they found themselves force-feeding her.

“*Serhiya vzhe nema,*” said the Little Cantor to her. “Serhiy is gone.”

But it was obvious to everyone that Oxana just didn’t seem to understand what was going on around her. And then with a queer grimace, for no reason whatsoever, she began to recite.

*Pechu, pechu khlibchyk*

*Mami na obidchyk*

*Shust’ u pich*

*Shust’ u pich*

I bake buns with butter  
For my mummy’s supper  
Pop! in the oven  
Pop! in the oven

Roslyn Marchenko began to cry at the sight of her. You see, in addition to all this Oxana’s arms were tied in such a way so that she couldn’t lift them to her mouth. Mrs. Marchenko gazed at the partly missing fingers.

“*Tse Serhiya zhinka,*” continued the Little Cantor. He turned to Roslyn. “I told her you were his wife.”

Oxana seemed to grin even more, and before anyone knew what to expect she became quite talkative, but the problem was she was completely incomprehensible.

“*Otse vchora tak meni bulo,*” she said. “*Davai, davai.* Tie em bunches. Night. Water go, go. River. Bodies on top one other. But when Dmytro Koshedub come, he dead. Bodies lie em in water. In Dnipro. Coats. Many coats.”

She became quite red from all the excitement of speaking so swiftly. The nun decided to usher everyone out of the room. But as they were leaving the Little Cantor said that Oxana uttered some more words that no one could make out, and finally her throat gave out into loud hiccups.

“Serhiy was terrified of the dark. All the time,” said Mrs. Marchenko to the Little Cantor when they were finally out on the street. “A grown man. Oh, he would try to hide it. But then he’d go on about ghosts coming to get him.”

“People saw too much, Mrs. Marchenko. Too much,” said the Little Cantor.

“His father’s pockets, you know,” she continued, “were always lined with bread! I was sure he kept it there for the pigeons. I thought it was for the pigeons.”

## VIII

Давно те мунуло, як мала дитина,

Сирота в ряднині я колись блукав  
Без свити, без хліба по тій Україні.  
Taras Shevchenko

THERE YOU HAVE IT. The whole thing. Everything that happened here last spring. Things are much quieter this year. Mrs. Marchenko has found someone for herself. A refined English gentleman. And maybe this time it will all work out for her. As for Mrs. Demchyshyn, well, she's had several bouts of illness, in fact serious operations too. But she keeps up her good humour most of the time and says it was all nothing but "pelvic cleaning." Lastivka has published a book on the Trypillian era and continues to live with her family in Paris. And she's told Dr. Zhovtonizhka that she's never been happier. Pavlo Zhashkiw was stopped by Father Archipenko from using those listening devices, and now he has submitted a huge brief to the RCMP documenting his suspicions. He's still waiting to hear from them. And surprise of surprises, no one will guess what happened to the Little Cantor. Maria Wynnykiw proposed marriage to him. That's right. It seems she made an appointment to see him and set out the whole proposition on the table.

"I'm a widow," she said. "And it's time you tried out marriage. My *borscht* is excellent. You can count on that. And my *varenyky* are nothing to sneeze at either." The Little Cantor hasn't given her a final answer yet, but everyone at the church says he's considering her offer very seriously.

As for Nadia Honchar, well, her husband left her. Took up with an American woman. Nadia doesn't go anywhere too much, it seems. And according to reliable reports she has aged a great deal and become withdrawn, and has lost all her elegance. "Looks just like a little old lady now," says Father Archipenko. "All dried up and looking very sad." Well, what did they think, those two? That it was love that made the world go round? Oh, if only it were so. She had apparently even told the Little Cantor that they *had* to go off together, that they had no choice. Serhiy helped her get rid of her ghosts, she said. Imagine that. Why, that's a job for a priest! She even said that in her opinion they both saw the world through the same eyes or something like that. No one doubts that theirs was indeed a grand love. But just look at where it's got them. You know, perhaps the truth is that love is really an evil curse. Why, people have been known to sell their souls to the devil for it, haven't they? As the Little Cantor put it, "Are they better off now? One's dead and the other is half-dead!" As for those ghosts, well, what can we do, any of us? Try to live with them somehow. Just try to live with them.



## Pale Beaks

### I

BLESSED ARE THOSE who can move about from one corner of the earth to another. They don't know how lucky they are! They are like birds flying through the heavens. And because of their good fortune they've taken to such casual attitudes about their personal documents, leaving them lying around in any old drawer, easy prey for thieves and black marketeers. As for the customs officials, they're no better. Have you looked at their behaviour recently? Is it from laziness or what? They hardly even glance at your name any more, never mind stamping your passport. Why, at some of the border crossings, if you're scrambling for your papers too long, the official treats you like a downright fool, and sometimes you can tell he feels you've been taking up too much of his time. Just try and say something! You'll be told your head is filled with ridiculous notions. He'll ask you a few short questions alright, like where are you going and for how long, but that's it. If you have no trace of a foreign accent in your speech, he'll wave you by so fast you won't even remember you were at a border. Off you go, up and down America, to your heart's content. Even Europe if you like. And if you've got a pocketful of money, well, what's there to say? A bird in paradise. But it's not like that for everyone, is it? Or everywhere. No, this isn't the situation in many parts of the globe. And this Arkady Tokar affair, well, that's what it all eventually boiled down to.

From the Ukrainian radio program, all of Montreal had already heard about Arkady, because every Saturday at one p.m. that's where you can be sure to find all the older people, listening. On that show they transmitted a lot that was very interesting. They described his paintings, his life. But it was only when Domka Bazeliuk came back from France that all the other details came out. Her brother lives in Reims, you see, so she goes there often, spends time with her son Ihor in Paris, too. That's how she knew. It's true, at first she didn't want to say much. If a thing like that gets widely known it can only bring shame to her family name. Already too many people know. And they're all very fine those Bazeliuks. Intelligent people. Of course, Domka is a very clever woman. She was accepted for medicine in Kiev University. Then the war broke out, and when the Germans came, that was the end of everything.

Yes, Domka's a cultured lady. Always in her place. Her sister Kateryna too, though not long ago there was a bit of unhappiness with the children. They've grown up differently, haven't they? Never short of anything—food, clothes. They haven't seen a day of real hardship in their entire lives, so they don't know themselves what they want any more. What do they know about cleaning toilets for the rich? Or going up to the factory foreman with a present in your hand pleading not to be laid off? Or listening to the bosses call you an animal? You'd think the younger generation would make more of itself. After all, they know the language. But take Domka's son, that Ihor Bazeliuk. He has become so tangled up in politics, there's no talking reason to him. If he was married there'd be no time for such things, what with children and other obligations. But no. He leaves Montreal and goes off to Paris to do God knows what. Now he's even preparing to go to Ukraine!

Well, on that Sunday, when Domka came over to visit, it was as though someone had cut off her tongue. She just stood there looking out my window. Under most circumstances she's very lively and likes to laugh, but even embroideries didn't spark too much from her when I showed them, and usually she has a word or two to say. "How I love those Poltava designs!" Or "Ah!

There's nothing like a Lemko pattern!" The best solution, I said to myself, was to pour her a glass of linden tea. It's very soothing for the soul, you know, especially when it's well-steeped and a beautiful deep red colour. People here don't know about it. And these leaves I gathered myself, from Vasyl' Ivashchuk's tree—a really lovely one. After Domka sat there for a few moments sipping her tea, she finally found the strength to speak, and that was when she told me everything.

"All kinds gathered at my son Ihor's house," Domka began in a half-whisper. "Whoever arrived in Paris from Ukraine, my boy always welcomed them. I understand for the younger generation meeting dissidents and exiles is interesting. They want to find out what's going on over there, and they want to help out...."

"We all want to help out!" I said to Domka. "Dear God, each and every one of us. My cousin is still in Siberia. And when I send her something they slap on such a high duty, she can't afford to collect the parcel!"

"Who of us doesn't have relatives scattered all over?" Domka said. "Alright, they've been letting a few more people out these days to visit families. But this happened when Stefania came to Paris. At that time there were just a handful of Ukrainians who had squeezed themselves out to the West."

"Stefania?" I interrupted. "Your niece? The dancer?"

"That very one," Domka replied. "Oh, why didn't she stay here in Montreal? One evening when I was staying there, several of Ihor's friends came over to his flat in Aubervilliers. And you know, when I think of it, that was when they must have come up with the idea, because I remember there was some discussion about passports. This painter, Arkady Tokar, who everyone is exhibiting now, he was there. I had already met him by then, since he used to come over often. My sister's daughter, Stefania, she also knew him. Orest Malashenko was there with his wife. He's that professor of mathematics from Odessa they talk about. A very respectable gentleman. A woman sculptor also arrived, a certain Manya Chrunchiw. She's a bit odd the way those artists are, but people say she's talented and has works in all kinds of places. She sat beside Arkady the whole night. Even Ruslan Zhuk came over, the very one the whole world knows about because he has spent most of his life in labour camps. Poor fellow, he still can't eat anything but boiled potatoes. That's how bad his stomach is.

"Now, I can't say that it wasn't a pleasant gathering. There was lots of talk about life at home, but frankly, where are the changes in all these years? They still don't have running water coming into the houses in the villages. There's no sewerage, and everyone's lips still tremble. Of course, Ihor's guests were nice. Very nice. They were mostly city people. But can I vouch for absolutely everyone? Tell me, how do you recognize a devil? He could be kneeling in church beside you and you might think he's a friend."

Fortunately I remembered in time that Domka usually likes to crunch on something with her tea. Oh, how could I have forgotten? I didn't want to stop her just as she was about to start on interesting facts, but I had fresh *khursty* in my cupboard! So I rushed to bring them out and I said to her, "Domka, they haven't destroyed everything. There are people who know the old songs."

"It's true," Domka answered. "That Malashenko, the professor, he had a *bandura* with him that night, and everyone was after him to play. 'Come on Orest! Singers and dancers are the salt

of the earth,' they were saying. I tell you, when he touched those strings, every face was transformed. Not a single eye was left dry in the room. One *duma* after another he sang, and 'Marusia Bohuslavka' he sang especially well. But my niece Stefania, do you think she was listening to the music? She was like the bee that found honey. She spent the whole time cooing up to some fellow, slapping him on the knee, and bringing him one drink after another. Why, she'd only just arrived in Paris barely two months before!

Young people think that because we're grey haired, we don't see what they're up to. Well, they're making a big mistake. We don't have to look very hard. Weren't we young ourselves once? One glance from the side of our eye and the picture is crystal clear. I asked my son, "Who in the world is that?"

"A celebrated acrobat from Kiev," Ihor said. "A specialist in pantomime working in *Le Cirque*

*Magique* as a clown. Dennys Lefortchenko is his name."

Don't worry though. You could see right off he was a shrewd one. A regular *panok*. Wouldn't let anyone spit into his porridge! And there was Stefania, furiously trying to hypnotize him with love charms.

And they seemed to work! From the very next day, where do you think she was going? To the circus! With this Lefortchenko. Oh, she's been giving my sister Kateryna trouble from early years. It's my sister's fault though, always giving her money. The only thing Stefania ever had in her head was ballet and being beautiful. What didn't she try out? Tightrope walking, acrobatics, every idiocy that doesn't bring anything of substance. It's true she taught in that school they have here, but as soon as summer came, off she went to Italy and Greece to have a good time. She said she was going to look at 'architecture and art.' I want to see my relatives, my family, but I can't, and she wants to wander around Europe looking at stones.

And fussy! With every boyfriend it was 'maybe.' I've lost count already. Because she was pretty she thought she could pick and choose, but she forgot that time was doing its own. I say what's true is true. Time does do its own. It's very hard to recognize the old woman I see every day in the mirror, too. But it's me!

Well, my son Ihor had no other choice but to be very straightforward with Stefania.

"Don't get involved with him!" he said to her. "He's unreliable, otherworldly."

Those were his exact words. That Lefortchenko was absolutely not like other people. Not at all. Of course, it's no secret that Stefania has only butterflies in her head also. I know it's a sin to speak badly of a niece, but I tell you, once she set her eyes on that clown, that was it. And how she quarrelled with us over him!

"You haven't the slightest understanding of higher love," she declared to us.

Can you imagine a grown woman talking in such a way? Some sixteen-year-old maybe. But at least here my Ihor tried to talk sense to her.

"Lefortchenko has a wife in Kiev," he said.

"Liar," she answered. "He does not! He got married with an American just to get out."

"*Stefantsiu*," I said trying to keep peace. "It's for your sake, not ours. What future is there with a jester? Ask yourself, but seriously. You're a pretty woman. Today it doesn't matter if you're thirty. You look young. You have a presentable figure, and Dr. Huk, he's interested in

finding a wife, and he's a kidney specialist for heaven's sake, not some painted up *kukla* like this Lefortchenko."

"Auntie, can't you ever leave me alone?" she said. "You and mother are always driving me into the grave with your talk. Security's a monster. For God's sake, I'm an artist!"

"Monster?" I asked her. "A few dollars in the bank and food on the table, this is a monster?"

Lord in heaven, what is it with you young people that you can't live properly? We couldn't because we never had the chance. As long as your mother isn't here, I replace her, and I am responsible for you...."

"Oh, mama! Stop!" Ihor said to me. "Leave her alone. Can't you just go into the kitchen!"

So what was I supposed to tell my sister Kateryna, I ask you? *Liubov—pozhar, zaimet'sia—ne pohasysh*. Here was her daughter, my niece, living in a tent with a performer? Oh, Ihor's my son, but is he any better than Stefania? I soon learned what they were up to. Mind you I had to piece it together myself, from telephone conversations I overheard and other remarks. Were they going to tell me anything? 'Activist,' Ihor likes to call himself. Activist!—Dumbell, not activist! God in heaven, all men sin. But the righteous jump quickly to their feet from a fall.

## II

THE TRUTH IS, when I saw the state Domka Bazeliuk was in, I tried to comfort her a little. I said to her, "Small children, small problems. Big children, big ones. You lose sleep for them. You give them your last crust, and they heap humiliation on your head. Do they listen to their mother?"

Domka shook her head at me, and I said,

"You know about the one mother who had time for thirteen children, but when she got old, thirteen children couldn't find time to listen to one mother? Who invented this world? How I want to make an appointment with him!"

You see, I have known the Bazeliuks for a very long time. We were in the same *lager* together, but I must say that when Domka finally started to reveal to me what it was that those young people had cooked up, she was so short of breath and looked so sad and crumpled I said to myself, I hope she doesn't get some kind of attack from all this. Anything could happen. A vessel could burst.

"Believe it or not," Domka said, "but please keep this entirely to yourself—Ihor and Stefania got themselves mixed up in a scheme. Yes. A very illegal scheme. They promised to go deep behind the iron curtain, to East Berlin and bring out— or should I say *smuggle* out—Arkady Tokar's sweetheart, a teacher from Odessa, who happened to be over there at a conference. Of course, Arkady himself was behind all this, but at the time I have to admit I wondered if that sneaky Lefortchenko-clown wasn't behind it just as much. Or maybe more so. He was a close friend of Arkady's and not the sort who wouldn't add his word. As for dimwitted Stefania, can she ever say no? And what about my Ihor? Tell me, did I not bear him under God's grace?"

At any rate, it seemed that this Zirka, Arkady's teacher-sweetheart, was to get away from her conference group in East Berlin. How, I don't know, but then she was to go straight to the Ratskeller Restaurant on Unter den Linden Strasse, and there hide in the toilet. That was their

meeting place. A bathroom! Then my Ihor—once Zirka had changed into Stefania’s clothes, if you please—my Ihor was to drive back to the West with her. And guess whose papers this Zirka was going to show at the border? Yes. Stefania’s. Stefania Veretelnyk’s! Because she has two passports, a French one and a Canadian one. The luckier she is, the stupider she becomes. And Stefania was supposed to get out at another border, if you can believe it! Tell me. Wouldn’t it be obvious to any sane person that a plan like this could only have been dreamt up by a pack of fools? Not only was it dangerous, it was completely unworkable! Why, all over the world now, they have computers. And enough military men as only the devil himself can count. Was it love that led her to this? Oh, I don’t know. But what bit my Ihor? *Oi, starist’ ne radist’*.

“I will never wonder about people here any more,” I told my Ihor, trying to make him see the light. “You, my own child, and you don’t understand that world over there either.”

“Mama, will you cut it out?” he answered. “It’s fool-proof! Zirka speaks excellent French.”

“Fool-proof?” I said. “And if you get caught? Or Stefania? It’s prison. Siberia!”

“Nonsense. They can’t touch us. I’m Canadian *and* French. They couldn’t detain us.”

Ihor is my dear son, but he doesn’t know what planet he lives on. We are flies. They can do anything they like. And here he was playing at hero. Who was going to come to their rescue? Who? The Poles at least have a Pope. The whole world knows they’re a people. But us? Look what America did with that sailor when he jumped from the ship. Sent him right back! And he wasn’t more than a lad! It says right on the back of the Canadian passport not to go there looking for trouble!

“Mama, it’s our moral duty to help,” Ihor said. “There’s no alternative. Zirka’s ready. If we don’t take this chance, Arkady will probably never see her again.”

So I said, “I don’t care about other people’s business. What chances did I have to see my family? Anyhow, why didn’t he marry her if everyone is so moral?”

You can’t imagine his reply.

“Mama,” he says, “stop interfering in my life, will you?”

Stop interfering in my life! Would you believe a son speaking like that to his old mother? *Syn miy, a rozum u n’oho sviy*. The son is mine, but the brain is his own. I forbade him to get involved in this criminality. Think, I said, how many people on this earth would give their eye teeth to have what you have—France, Canada—you can pick! Even the European Community! Think what I had to endure to give you a decent start. I told him: stay low to the ground and mind your own business. That’s the way you’ll be able to live some kind of a decent life.

“Quit sitting on me like a hen,” he says. “I don’t need a watchman. Why don’t you go visit Uncle Ivan for a while.”

You see the gratitude? I make him *pyrizhky, pampushky*. I work and work, and he practically throws me out of the house, tells me when a bird grows up it flies out of the nest.

“Fly,” I said. “Fly all you like. But go like a tourist. Do you want to get all of us in trouble? Us here and all our family over there too?”

### III

I DON’T KNOW. Truly, I don’t know. I tell you, if that Ihor had been my boy and Stefania

my niece, I would have told them even if it was Queen Elizabeth herself who was waiting in East Berlin, they weren't going to be the saviours. At home a parent's word was holy. Here their beaks are still pale, and already they're telling their parents how to live!

"Why didn't you speak to them more?" I asked. "Surely they could have been made to understand."

Domka glanced at me and said, "Who was there to talk to? My son? The only topic he discussed with me was food. And even then I had to make sure to look at him in exactly the way he wanted, or else. With Arkady, that wonderful painter, it wasn't any easier. Whenever he came over it was. *'Tade, Pani Bazeliuk.* That's just silly talk.' He denied everything. Painted icons and church bells like a saint, but lied better than a serpent. And Stefania? The last time I saw her, her eyes were so shiny I'm sure that clown was giving her some kind of powders or tablets.

But don't think I didn't try. I've lived on this earth long enough to know what's what. "Alright," I said to myself. "If my own son is bent on destruction, I'll just have to deal with the matter in my own way, won't I?"

Stefania was my first hope. I know everything isn't always at home upstairs in her head, but did I have a choice? It was a Thursday morning, and I took the bus to Sainte-Geneviève des Bois. That's where the circus was spread out. And what a piece of road I had to cover too! All the way past the Russian cemetery, the one that Dychko's brother, old Myron looks after, where the aristocrats are buried, the ones who came in the Revolution. When I arrived, I didn't know where to turn. Everywhere you looked, tents and trailers, more tents, animal cages, the whole field wet from the rain. In one tent a monkey on a trapeze, in another some kind of jugglers standing on their heads, on one side dirt, on the other side straw! Dirt and smell! And my shoes completely wet from walking in that mud.

"Aha!" I said to myself. "So now I've come to 'otherworldly.'"

But whoever I asked, not one could tell me where to find my niece. Then finally I saw a blue and white striped trailer. And in there the Director of the circus himself, fat as a tractor tire, short, squat too, one of those white people that are called albinos.

"*C'est très dangereux ce que Lefortchenko veut faire avec ma nièce,*" I told him. "*Où est-elle? Où est Lefortchenko?*"

So he starts to roll his eyes around like they were marbles. "*Mais, Madame,*" he said. "*Vous parlez d'un genie colossal!*"

Imagine? A colossal genius! That's what he said about that jester! And then do you know what he did? He had a large jar of pickled goose eggs on the table, so he pushed them toward me, reached right into the vinegar, pulled out an extra large one, and held it on the palm of his hand.

"*S'il vous plaît, Madame,*" he said. "*C'est très bon pour les nerfs.*"

Needless to say, I wasn't interested in a pickled egg when I had a crisis on my hands. "*C'est très urgent, Monsieur,*" I repeated. "*Je veux parler avec Stefania Veretelnyk. Où est ma nièce? Où est Lefortchenko?*"

But did he answer me? No. He just looked at me and began some nonsense I will never understand—how Lefortchenko had discovered *'la vérité,*' how I should have sympathy for *'un grand artiste,*' how that clown lived only *'entre les espaces.*' I have trouble living here and now, and that devious clown lives in the spaces in between? Well, I quickly saw I wasn't going to get

anywhere with him, so I asked someone else, then another person and another. “Where is Stefania?”

No one had seen her. My feet were as big as yeast buns by then, so swollen from all that walking, but just as I was about to leave I spotted an orange tent, and I said to myself, “I’ll just look in here.” Oh, I found Lefortchenko, alright. Right in the middle of his practice, dressed in white. One summersault, then another. Then he threw his body into the air. Flew into the air like a bird. I wanted to go in there. I wanted to stop that clown right in the middle of what he was doing and tell him exactly what I thought, but something prevented me. I tell you, the devil’s force itself drives that place! When I saw a strange fat lady carrying a parrot coming my way, all my perspiration jumped out. And then suddenly a voice from behind me said, “*Shh! Sortez!*” and I was pulled by that albino himself. “*Stefania n’est pas ici!*”

What could I do? On the way home, the whole time I kept repeating to myself, “Thank God, my sister Kateryna is far away in Canada!” Those who think that old age is for bouncing grandchildren on their knee had better wake up. At home, a girl of nine or ten knows how to cook a meal and bring it out to the fields for the workers. *Oi, hore dole!* And when I got back to Paris, as if all this lunacy wasn’t enough, that’s when I heard the news about the reactor.

#### IV

CHORNOBYL.... That’s what my dear friend Domka Bazeliuk was referring to. Chornobyl. And after listening to her, pouring her some more tea, and watching her munch a few *khrusty*, I couldn’t help thinking how fortunate is the person who can still find a spot where he can breathe a little fresh air and enjoy a ripening tomato or even a fresh young onion coming up in a garden from which he is not afraid to eat. That is the truest paradise. But Domka was right. Who is there to complain to? Go to a government official, and you’ll be told that all over the world now the fish are sick and the waters brown. If mother earth herself lives in uncertainty, tell me, what country will there be to escape to?

That last week in April, when Chornobyl was burning, I will never forget it. Here in Montreal, we listened to the radio all day, sat on pins and needles as they announced which way the winds were blowing, how the evacuation was going. And today, three years after, we still don’t know everything except that the dust settled on so many unfortunate nations—Poland, Bielorrussia, and the land of the reindeer people too. Even in Germany and France, and as far away as America they found it. What then can one say about the fate of Ukraine? There on May Day young Kiev girls were sent out to dance in costumes. *Oi, Hospody pomyluy!* What will we have to get used to? Roosters with three eyes? Children born with frightening heads like beasts? Oh, Lord have mercy. How long will it be before the water and the soil are clean again? Will it be within our memory?

As if this terrible catastrophe didn’t provide enough worry, fate marked out another path of anguish for my dear friend Domka Bazeliuk. With some embarrassment she revealed to me that her Ihor had no intention of changing his plans. Chornobyl or no Chornobyl, he was going to East Berlin to smuggle out Arkady Tokar’s fiancée.

“*Bozhe!*” I said to her hardly believing my ears. “Why, I remember when your Ihor was still

an altar boy in the Pokrova church. So shy, he turned beet red if you just glanced at him.”

“It’s those politics of his!” Domka muttered. “Politics, politics! He thinks of nothing else. Why, when my brother, Ivan, received a letter from home at that time he was so scared to touch it, he picked it up with gloves. Wouldn’t let his Hanya near it. Everyone was taking trains South to get away from the winds. And my Ihor? East. East! To hell itself. You know, Ihor’s character is more like my husband’s family, the Bazeliuks. They’re like those rabbits, always jumping at anything. And stubborn! God forbid you try to change their mind.

But believe it or not, early next morning who should be at our door? Stefania. She and Ihor stood there whispering in the front hallway for the longest time. “Lord,” I said to myself. “What are they up to?” So I tip-toed behind the dining room doors as fast as I could. There was Stefania herself trying to talk Ihor out of it. Was it possible? Finally she had begun to think?

“Look Ihor, nobody knows what the reactor is going to do. Can’t you see that?” she said.

“My God!” Ihor said. “What am I hearing? You’re going to Berlin, not Chornobyl!”

“Ihor, I didn’t come to Europe for this,” replied Stefania. “I’ve thought about it, and it’s not what I want to do, alright? I have other priorities. It’s as simple as that.”

“I see that stupid clown has gotten a hold of you,” said Ihor.

“Listen, I’m an artist. Your mother doesn’t understand that and neither do you. I’m an artist and I need my freedom.”

Oh, my boy wasn’t pleased at all. He said all kinds of things to his cousin. Did she think that Arkady would just be able to go on painting as though nothing had happened if Zirka wasn’t brought out? Didn’t she know art was tied to politics whether she liked it or not? Oh, such nonsense he told her! And Stefania was no better. She was sick to death of his pressures all the time. How could she express herself if he was waving a whip at her and telling her when to jump?

“Ah, you and your freedom,” Ihor said. “What do you think, life is an air puff?”

“You’re just like my father!” she yelled. “Always organizing conferences. You think that’s going to save Ukraine? What if I get sick? What about my dancing? I have my own rules, Ihor. And these are the only ones I’m going to follow!”

Well, my Ihor, he just exploded. He grabbed her by the shoulders, shook her hard, called her a selfish coward. I saw everything from the crack in the door.

“You talk of serving art and humanity!” he said. “World sympathy will be on our side!”

“Oh, stop it, Ihor!” she said. “Stop it!”

“You’re going to go through with it,” Ihor said, practically spitting between his teeth. “You *must* go through with it!”

Was this my own son? This voice of a stranger? No, I couldn’t stand behind the door any longer. Why, Ihor’s big! He might have choked her if he’d kept on the way he was.

“I’ve had enough of you two!” I said as I burst into the room. “I don’t need any more explosions. Ihor, look at the way you live! You with your useless politics. What do they give you? And you Stefania. At least you see reason about this idiotic scheme. But that filthy circus! It’s a scandal!”

Then do you know what my boy said?

“Get out!” he said.



To his own mother! He twisted me by the arm and tried to push me right out of the room. I said to him, "Who nursed you? Who got up nights for you?" But he just yelled some more.

"Mama, stay out of my business! You old people, you just live in the past. I can't be afraid all my life!"

He should have been ashamed shouting like that, not showing any understanding for his mother. Anyway, I told him he wasn't going anywhere. Neither was Stefania. And if he so much as made a move to go to Berlin, I would report him to the police myself. "*Schluss!*" I said. "*Chuiesh?*"

## V

AFTER I SAID THAT, Stefania left the house. An hour later Ihor came out of his room in a sulk and left also. So be it, I thought. He'll go to some bistro and when he's talked himself out, he'll come back and realize who's right. So I decided to make him a surprise, his favourite dish—*kholodets*. Then he'll feel better. He prefers it with veal meat, and that was how I made it. Even his refrigerator I didn't get mad at. I don't know. Here he is a professor and he says an important activist, and he can't fix a fridge door. Tied a black rubber elastic around it and held it shut with a huge hook. Yes, believe me! And I was supposed to work with that? Still, when lunch time came, there was no sign of him. Back and forth I walked, from one window to the next. No Ihor. He always ate lunch at home. Ruslan Zhuk I telephoned also, because Ihor goes over there often. But no one had seen him. By early evening, when I had no news, my body went numb from my lips to my toes. Could they actually have been so foolish? After all Stefania had said? That was when I called the taxi. I've seen enough in my life, and I wasn't going to be quiet when I had a chance to do something.

Six flights of stairs I climbed before I found that place. And I knocked on two doors. "*Montez Madame,*" they kept saying. Right at the top he lived, all the way under the roof—like a pigeon. "For sure he'll try to weave something," I thought to myself. But truth stands on two legs, and a lie on only one.

"Arkady," I said, when he opened the door. "Where's my Ihor?"

And as soon as I stepped into that room, what did I spot standing in the middle of the floor? A suitcase! All strapped up and ready to go. And what a room too! An old plank for a table, and some kind of cot he had. That's all. Except for pictures. Everywhere pictures.

"How could you deceive me, Arkady, in such a cruel way?" I said, pointing to the valise. "Remember your words to me? Surely you also have a mother who worries?"

"Mrs. Bazeliuk, it was at Ihor's insistence," he said. "Believe me."

Believe him! What else? And him just standing there white as chalk. Mute. *Ni be, ni me*. Then it occurred to me that maybe this meant that they *hadn't* left for Berlin yet.

"Arkady, you tell me exactly where they are and when they're going to be here."

"Mrs. Bazeliuk," he said. "I don't know."

"You don't know? Well, I know! I'm going downstairs, and nobody comes up those stairs unless I see them!"

So, I waited and waited. No sight of Ihor's car. Twice I telephoned from the vegetable store across the street. *Slava Bohu!* Finally, he answered.

## VI

How true, I thought looking at my friend Domka. A mother's job never ends. But where is a person supposed to get all the necessary strength? Look how poor Domka had to run around Paris! Why, children should be happy to have such a mother. But then, just like that, Domka Bazeliuk got up from the table, went over to the sofa where her purse was lying, and pulled out a folded up paper. Then she sat down again and laid it beside her glass.

"At least," I said trying to brighten things up, "Stefania came to her senses."

"Her senses?" Domka replied. "*V neyi iak ne odna durnytsia to druha.* True, my Ihor didn't go to Berlin. That's a blessing for sure. But it wasn't because reason came back to Stefania."

Domka laid her hand on the paper she had brought to the table and sighed. Those three weeks in May, she continued, I asked myself every day, "Is the world coming to an end?" And here it was Easter. *Nu vse na kupu.* One thing after another. I didn't bake anything, not one *paska*. Remember the whole time we didn't know where Stefania was. No trace of her anywhere in Paris. Or that diabolical clown of hers. And Ihor? He got himself so deep into all the Chernobyl politics, I thought, "God forbid something should happen to him." The telephone. Then again the telephone! Radio interviews, press conferences he organized. Even a big demonstration. The Poles came out, with their red *Solidarność* banners. Others had signs saying, "*Nous sommes tous des Ukrainiens.*" When I saw my boy, which wasn't often, he had nothing but harsh words for his cousin.

"Mama, face it," he said. "She's flown the coup."

"But Ihor," I said. "What if something terrible has happened to her and we don't know?"

"I don't care what happens to her! That self-absorbed idiot!" Ihor replied. "What the hell am I supposed to do with Zirka? Eh? Tell me that!"

How do you think Arkady feels?"

"We all feel pity," I said to him trying to smooth everything. "But Zirka will manage. She grew up there. She's used to it. Patience son. Maybe one day, who knows, the situation will improve."

Every day, I tell you, my bones just ached more and more. I couldn't find a place for myself. Was it Chernobyl that was changing the climate? I don't know. Usually nothing hurts me in France. Night time I could have earned money as a watchman, my eyes would not stay shut. I listened to every sound, week after week. And one night, I said to myself, "It can't be. In the center of Paris? The sound of an owl?" No wonder I couldn't sleep! That bird predicts sadness. And you know, the day after we heard the news about Arkady. And the day after that, my niece, Stefania Veretelnik turned up on our doorstep. I had to keep my Ihor far away from her, because when he saw her I thought he would eat her.

"You're to blame," he yelled at her. "You miserable rat. Couldn't you leave one passport behind?"

"Be quiet Ihor," I said.

“Mama, get her out of this house!” he shouted at me.

I told him, “Stop blaming her. Can’t you see she’s not her former self?”

Miserable she looked too. All black and blue, as if she just came off the cross herself. After she rested up a bit, I sat down with her.

“*Stefantsiu*,” I said, “now please brace yourself. There is something I must tell you. Arkady Tokar is no longer with us.”

Then I explained everything. How Ihor was the one to find the body, how the police intentionally confused things by saying it wasn’t clear if his death had been the result of taking too many tablets or from natural causes. Now I ask you. Would he leave a letter with requests if it was a natural death? ‘Scatter my dust on the Dnipro River.’ ‘Return my works to mother and Zirka.’ Really, the answer was obvious. Here. You can look at it yourself. But I know what they thought. He’s a foreigner. Why waste good money on an autopsy? He was dead anyway.

Though I kept telling her not to listen to Ihor, Stefania took the news very badly. He’s my son, but he’s an ungrateful fool. She saved his life. And responsible for Arkady she was not!

“Auntie,” she said. “I don’t know myself what I was to do. Arkady’s eyes I will never forget. I knew he needed help, but with Chernobyl, with everything.... I was so nervous. I kept falling off the rope and Dennys was so mad when I ruined the act. I can’t save the whole world. And my work. My work comes first.”

Her work comes first! Do you hear that? Alright, I’ll give her credit. She didn’t go to Berlin. Instead she went to the Riviera! Oh, I know the weather is nice there. But is it nice to wander from place to place and perform on the streets? Like beggars? Obviously her smart clown found himself better prospects, because in broad daylight, no goodbye, nothing, he disappeared. Later on, whenever Stefania had the chance, she always inquired about him. Yes. But no one knew much. *Ta to buv chudak!* What did she expect?

Now ask yourself if I didn’t have a real circus on my hands? *Smikh, hore, i plach!* With tragedy mixed in. I tell you, teach them, feed and you’ll never know what children are going to do. And think! These are supposed to be educated people. Artists. Intellectuals. And Arkady? Arkady’s life didn’t turn out to be bread with butter. It was all a great sorrow.

Once, after everything was over, Manya Chrunchiw, Malashenko, and Ruslan Zhuk, they all came over, and, of course, everyone had something different to say. My Ihor said that Arkady told him he couldn’t live without having his need for a woman satisfied. Imagine saying something like that! Fine. Everyone needs a husband or a wife. This is completely normal, but not in the way these young people think. Tell me, what did that so-called love of Stefania’s give her anyway?

But the way Manya put it, at home Arkady’s pockets were filled with rubles. And she should know because she knew him from way back. His status was semi-official it seemed, and he even moved to Moscow to be near the diplomats. They took anything and everything he produced, and for a while his works sold very well in the West. But once he was here in the flesh, forget it. He didn’t understand what made people buy. He thought all those fancy coloured brochures and posters of his would make him famous. But what did they bring him? People looked at them and then threw them away. And that cost! He was paying everything himself. It reached a point where they even cut his telephone. And I must say I agreed with this. First things first, I say, in the

normal way. First you work and save a little. Then if you have time left, you paint. Otherwise how can you manage? But Ruslan Zhuk said he couldn't agree with Manya at all. Of course, a person has only one chance to live and that's a precious gift, to walk, to look around God's earth. But, in his view, Arkady Tokar had a very delicate and fragile constitution—like a saint's. And when Chernobyl exploded, the world turned black for him overnight. You know, he said, Arkady's old mother lived on the Prypiat River somewhere too.

## VII

Well, that was the story Domka Bazeliuk told me. What more is there to say? *Zhalko, oi duzhe zhalko*. We all felt very sorry that Arkady came to such a state that he destroyed himself. God rest his soul, he was so young, and all he wanted was to see a bit of the world. Apparently his Zirka is back home in Vinnytsia, but to tell the truth, we don't know much else.

As for Stefania, Domka has confirmed the rumour that her niece hasn't even bothered to renew her passports. She's totally lost her desire for travel and is now living on her parents' farm in Hemmingford. She says it's very convenient. She goes across the border any time she needs to do shopping. Julia Hruniak, who also lives in Hemmingford, said that Stefania started teaching dancing classes in the community center there, and organized such a lovely recital, everyone was after her to put another one on next year. According to Domka, the only problem Stefania has been having is that she still dreams of Arkady. He appears to her all dressed in white, but you know, I wonder if she sometimes doesn't also dream of that Lefortchenko. She received two postcards from him, from Kiev. They're on her mantelpiece.

Probably Stefania will get more news in September when Manya Chrunchiw will be in Canada. Ah, she's world famous now, they say! Her sculptures are in New York, California, Paris. I've never seen her statues, but people say when you look at them, it's like a soul wants to jump out at you. Yes, it seems there will be a big reunion too, because Professor Malashenko is also here, in Saskatchewan. He says he loves the prairies.

As for Domka's Ihor, where hasn't he been? He goes everywhere. Last year he was in Harbin taking pictures of what remains of Ukrainian life in Manchuria. Produced a very nice album too. Well, let the world see that we also lived there. Now he's preparing for another long journey. He's going to Lviv for a whole year to work in the archives, and Domka is trembling. He's told her that since it's an official exchange the government has to guarantee his welfare, but his mother says you never know what someone will drag him into. She's so worried she even told me that she's about to join the Golden Club at church to forget about him. They go on bus tours to Niagara Falls, to St. Catharines, to pass the time. But I don't believe her. She's only talking. And Ihor keeps telling her that she should visit home now. He says he'll even pay for her.

Not too long ago I had the chance to have a few words with Domka's son myself, when he was in Canada giving a talk. You wouldn't recognize him if you saw him. So dignified. Wearing glasses. In five years, he said he doesn't think there will be a wall in Berlin.

"Ihor," I said to him, "I don't know. I wish it were so. What next? No passports I suppose?"

*Budemo zhyvi, budemo bachyty*. In this world all I know is one thing—what I know and what I saw.



## Letters from Home

**Note from the compiler:** The Soviet-American Repatriation Agreement signed on 11 February 1945 at the conclusion of the Yalta Conference guaranteed the return of displaced Allied nationals on a reciprocal basis. The Soviet position, however, was that POWs, DPs, and former Soviet forced labourers who had been brought out by the Germans to Western Europe, should not be free to decide whether or not they wished to return home, and as a result the USSR insisted on forced repatriation. Realizing what her fate might be, Ludmilla Bereshko fell upon a way of leaving the DP camp she was in, and eventually she found work on a farm in France. Too frightened to write to Ukraine herself lest her whereabouts become known, in 1946, four years before her arrival in Canada, Ludmilla found a Frenchwoman who had a relative in Poland, and she asked this person to write to her Polish relative with her request, which was that they indicate to her family in Soviet Ukraine that she had survived the war. This system of intermediary mailing was successful. Some time in 1946 Ludmilla's mother, Oksana, received the notification that her daughter was still alive and living in Western Europe. The following is Ludmilla's mother's response to this Polish intermediary.

Dear unknown Maria,

We have just received your letter about our daughter. We, her mother, sisters and brother thank you very much, and we are so deeply touched and moved by it. Thank you most sincerely for letting us know that she is still alive.

She isn't at home now and hasn't been, and we can't help her in any way because we don't know where she is or how she is. We ourselves have had no news of her. We will be eternally grateful to you if you would let us know anything at all about her. If you do get this letter, please write to us about our daughter, please.

This is her mother writing, and sisters Natalia and Marusia, and her brother Ivan.

With all the very best regards to you, her mother, Oksana.

10. VIII. 1946

Please write to us. We want so much to hear about our daughter.

**Note from the compiler:** The following is the first letter that Ludmilla Bereshko received in Canada from her family in Ukraine. It was written by her fifteen year old nephew, her sister Natalia's son.

Good day or evening our dear Auntie?

First of all I would like to let you know that we have been receiving all your letters for which we thank you, but we couldn't answer any of them because there wasn't anyone who could translate your address into Russian, and the address of where the letter is going must be in Russian. We found a man who said he could help us, but the letters he addressed all came back.

Now I will tell you something about past events and about who remains alive. After the war

Auntie Marusia came back from Germany where she was taken to work, and then she went and lived with Granny. In 1946 she married, but in 1947 her husband went to Kiev to try and earn a living because in 1947 there wasn't enough food at all. After that we received a few letters from him from Siberia. Then the letters stopped. In 1948 Auntie Marusia had little Serhiy. Then she died in 1949. In 1953 Granny died, but she knew you were alive because your letters through Poland, and from France and Canada did get here though they arrived opened, but we couldn't answer them. After Granny's death, we went to live in her house because ours had fallen apart. Who remains are mother, who is too sick to write, my sisters and Serhiy, the son of Auntie Marusia, and me, Marko. If you reply we'll write much more. We send you kisses and embraces.

Marko, your nephew  
26. III. 1954

**Note from the Compiler:** By the 1960's Ludmilla Bereshko was able to receive news of some other relatives. The following letter was written by her cousin, Ol'ya.

Good day dearest cousin,

I am sending you our very warmest greetings and best wishes for a happy life, and most of all, we wish you good health. My dear one, I am writing these few words because we want to find out about your life in Canada, and you will learn about ours. Prokip told us your great tragedy, that you have lost Stepan, and Hryhory, and your Yukhym too. What terrible sadness you live with, little sister, not knowing what has become of them. We now find ourselves in farthest Asia, in Magadan. We have been here for 15 years. Our daughter Sveta was born here. She is nine years old. Our son Tolya we had to leave behind at home with my husband's sister. There's such an enormous heaviness in my soul that we are so far from them, and when father died I was not able to be there to bury him. Little sister, I feel such deep sorrow that I did not see father before his death. He wasn't old yet and he could have lived, but with such an illness that couldn't be cured and the wound on his arm that never healed since the war, well, what can be done? May he rest with God.

When you receive this letter answer right away now that you know where we are, and write about your life, your health, where you work, and we beg you to send us a photograph of yourself and also please send our address to Uncle Matviy. He used to write to us earlier when we were still at home. I will end my few words. We are waiting for your reply. We wish you much good luck, good health, and we kiss you.

Ol'ya, Afanas, and Sveta  
September 12, 1962  
Magadan oblast

**Note from the Compiler:** Ludmilla Bereshko's nephew, Marko, regularly kept his aunt informed about various family members and about events at home. Several times Ludmilla invited him to visit her in Canada.

Good day to you from your relatives in Ukraine!

I ask you to please forgive me for not answering your letter sooner. I understand that you wait for news from us. I wanted to write back when I knew whether it would be possible for me to visit you, but I have already gone several times to beg our authorities for permission, and I still don't know if I will be able to visit you in Canada. Such a thing would be a great good fortune indeed. I went to the Militia and obtained the necessary papers. If I were a pensioner the matter would be more straightforward for me. But I don't know what could prevent my visit, because I don't know any secrets that could be passed on from my profession. What do I know? How to sow, how to till the soil, and how to turn a wrench. Recently in fact a rocket was launched into space with our cosmonauts and French ones, so after this I think that there can't be any more secrets. Well, never mind, let's hope for the best.

It's June now, and in May there weren't many rains when they were needed. When harvest time comes we won't be asking for rains. Now, however, it's been raining every day and weeds are shooting up, and they're creating all kinds of problems. Some of the machinery has to work in difficult conditions, and it often breaks down. So this means that work has to go on in the day and repairs in the night. This year we will be growing sugar beets in our *kolhosp* and no wheat at all, not even a *tsentner*, because last year in the fall there were no rains at all and nothing came up. Over the past few years in our country we've been sowing very little wheat. A great deal of attention has gone to corn, peas, and beets, and the year before there was only enough wheat for a year, and what there was in the fields didn't sprout. There was nothing in reserve, and it became necessary to buy wheat from other countries for gold, but it's better to have no gold than to have famine. This last fall more wheat was planted, but not here, and if the weather is good we'll have large reserves.

Meat has become twice as expensive as ten years ago. I don't know the reason or why there is this disorder in our agriculture. We have a lot of work. I can't imagine how in capitalist countries there isn't work for people. Here there will always be work. I have never been in a country where there is unemployment, but the reason must be because they have many workers. Here there are many directors and all kinds of propagandists. Of course, we have a large country so there's place for everyone.

In our *kolhosp* there are 8 combines and many tractors and other machines. Here progress is growing. Many *véhicules* are being built, of all kinds, and ordinary ones for agriculture too. The sales of our tractors is really up. Maybe they are cheap, and that is why they are bought in places where technology is developed. And maybe there is another reason. I don't know. The truth is we can't think about a car, because only those who have a large bank account can think about it. Here whoever has a car people say they have a "golden fleece." A car is a sign of comfort, although even someone who has money can't necessarily obtain a car because he hasn't the possibility. I myself understand only too well that it's not enough to have money. You need to



have a good salary to buy benzine and parts. It would be easy to drive in our area because the roads are almost empty. I'm tired of all this walking to and from work all the time, and maybe I'll think about a motorcycle. They're going to start laying an asphalt road in July from where we live to the village, and it's promised for the fall. How nice it will be in bad weather like today. Until now when it rains you're up to your knees in mud.

How I wish that I could get to visit you. You've been in many countries, and we're proud that a relative of ours has seen so much, so many different political systems such as capitalism and socialism. The way I understand it, in capitalism everything is owned privately by the owners, and in socialism, everything is owned by the people and no one has a right to anything except the state. You have seen the differences, but our country is different from all the countries of the world, and that difference you know very well. There isn't a person at this time like Taras Shevchenko who could describe the fate of the Ukrainian people. Auntie, write what I should buy for you. I'm sure that in the Soviet Union there must be something that would interest the citizens of your country. I will do my best to try and obtain it. Thank you again for all the trouble you have gone to on our behalf and for sending me the invitation. I would like very much to visit you while there is some measure of peace on earth. We all send you our best, my wife Nina, Lena, and Ostap.

Goodbye,  
Marko,  
25 June, 1979

**Note from the Compiler:** It was only by the 1980's that Ludmilla Bereshko was finally able to locate her cousin Katia, her father's brother's daughter who had been deported to Siberia with his family in the 1930's. The following is a letter of thanks from Katia to Ludmilla for a parcel.

Good health to you my dearest,

I received the parcel from you on the 8th of January, for which I thank you and thank you. God grant you health and a long life for going to so much difficulty and worrying about me like a mother. The coat is so nice and warm. It's a little bit too long for me because in size I'm short and round like a loaf, but I took it to the sewing *artel* and she cut it and now it's absolutely perfect. When I went to get the parcel at the post office and they told me it was necessary to pay 259 rubles duty to claim it, I became frightened. Here I am without any money. So I went to that woman who asked me to ask you for boots for her daughter, and she lent me money and I paid the duty for the parcel. There was a price on the paper about how much they wanted for each item you sent. For the coat they asked 200 rubles, the boots 30 rubles, and the sweater 25 rubles, but I am also very grateful to her for lending me the money. She lives well, and I will slowly pay her back. The sweater I gave her outright, and the boots too, because I am indebted to her. Now I have a coat until my death. Thank you very much for your kindness. Write me and tell me how much you paid for the coat, the boots and sweater. Here in Siberia the frosts can be strong, but

now I will be warm. My own coat didn't keep me warm any more. It's not new, and as I get 60 rubles a month pension how can I buy something?

There is a family here, our people, from your second husband's area. There are many here from Halychyna. Whenever the wife comes to see me, she brings milk. They're wealthy. She's from Stanislav oblast' and he's from Lviv oblast'. They also get parcels. She has a brother in Canada, and four years ago she went there and stayed for a month and brought back ceramic dishes and coffee, and mint candies, but ceramic dishes are of no use to me. Now coffee I really like, but here there isn't any to be found.

From our old auntie I had a very nice postcard for Christmas. Tell me my dear, does our Ol'ya write to you since she returned home from Magadan? Give her my heartfelt good wishes and ask her to write to me. How is her health? She is no longer young, and Afanas died, and Sveta has her own grown children now. Does anyone write to you from home, because no one writes to me now, and I don't know if my brother Fed'yo is still alive or not. It's been 15 years since I've had a letter from Ukraine, maybe longer. Everyone has forgotten about me, and now I don't wait any more.

But now I will definitely go to the photographer in the coat, and then send you a picture, and from you I ask, please send me one of you. How do you look? Is it also cold in Canada? I don't need any more clothes. What there is will surely suffice, however, from earliest years there wasn't luck, and the years have gone by and now nothing seems dear, and I've gotten tired of living on this white earth. All around there are people with families. How joyful! They sing carols, and I'm continually alone. What's to be done? Soon spring will come, and if I have my health I'll dig too and plant something, and the little sun will warm my back.

Now if you'd only come to visit me here in Siberia and saw how I lived. Oh, come visit me! How I thank you for having found me after so many years. When I heard from you first and read your letter, I couldn't help covering it with tears. Often I think of how we used to live in Snizhkiw and now fate has scattered us all over, and we are so far from each other. I'll never hear your voice again, except on paper. You'll never natter and babble to me as you did at home. You are so far away, even a nightingale couldn't fly that distance, and now your homeland, your family, everything is memory. How nice if we could be together with our dear ones.

Katia  
Kemerov oblast'  
10. I. 1989