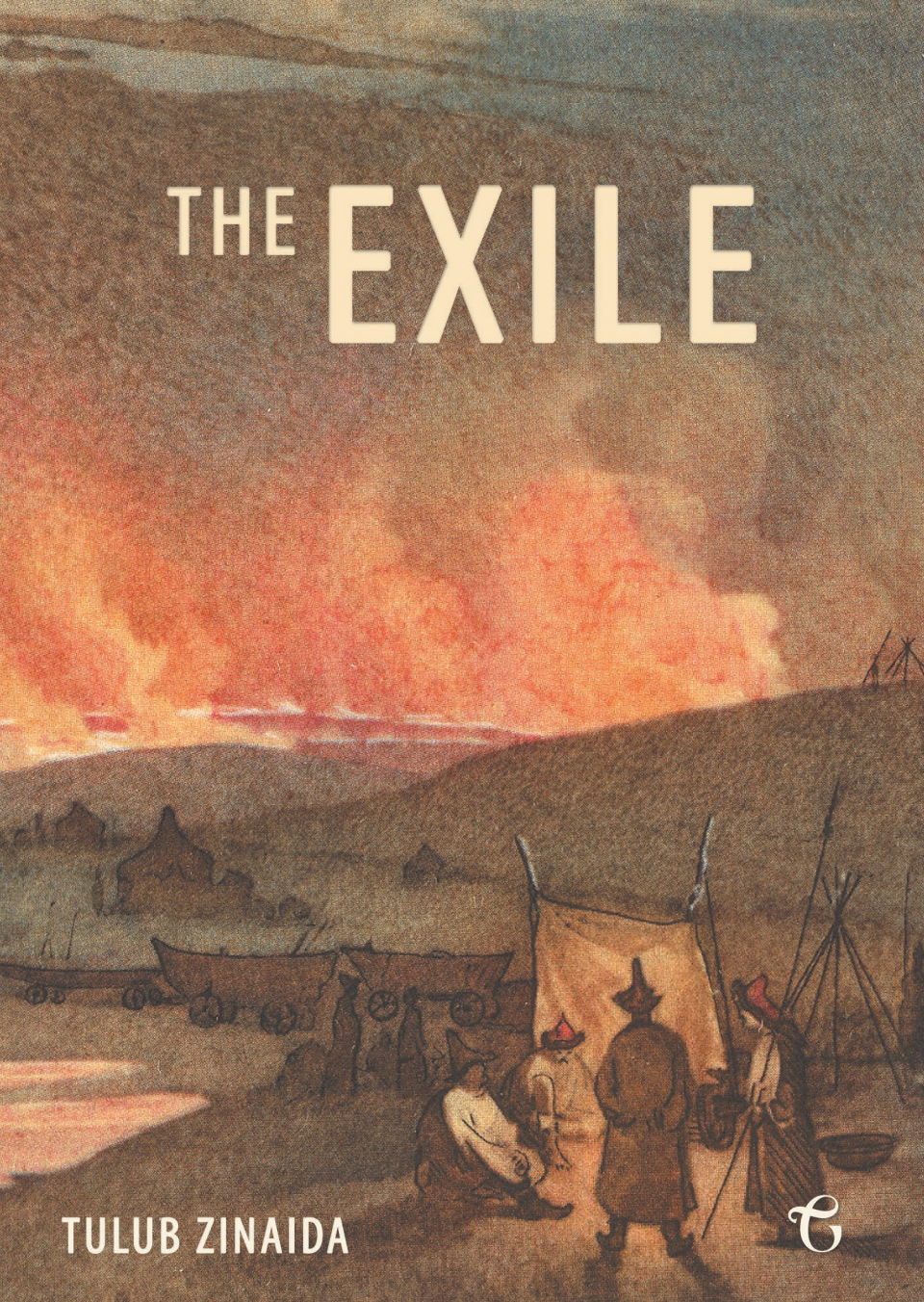


A NOVEL ABOUT TARAS SHEVCHENKO

THE EXILE



TULUB ZINAIDA



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GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS

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A novel about Taras Shevchenko

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PART I

I. IN THE BLACK YURT

Djantemir *Bai* had pitched the yurts of his *aul* in a valley several *verts* from the town of Orsk. It was a fine place for wintering, and it was not the first time Djaniemir had come here. A dense growth of reeds stretched along the banks of the river Or. The herds grazed on a rolling plain nearby, where the obliging wind swept away any extra snow so that the sheep and horses could help themselves to forage in winter. And when a snowstorm broke, they could hide in the valley where, apart from the yurts, stood Djantemir's house and a number of sheds for his goods.

When the frosts grew severe, Djantemir moved from his yurt into the house for three or four months, but as soon as the thaw set in he returned to his white yurt. The black yurts of his kith and kin, servants and *tyulenguts* were scattered along the slope of the valley in strict compliance with seniority and dependence on the *bai*: the newer the yurt was, the nearer it stood to the *bai*'s white yurts; while farther away, on the very edge of the *aul*, huddled the old, black yurts of the poor, the *jataks*, who for offal from his board and for old rags slaved for him from dawn to dusk. In the farthest corner, almost on the pasture ground, stood the black yurt of the herder Shakir, who was as old as his home, which barely withstood the thrust of the steppe winds assailing it on all sides through the threadbare felt, *tunduk*, and the poorly fitting entrance flap.

Shakir was well over seventy years old. Nobody in the *aul*, however, knew his exact age. He was an outlander to them. For

thirty years he had been grazing the *bai*'s sheep and horses, and now for the first time he had been visited by a prolonged illness.

Just before the Russian Christmas, a snowstorm had suddenly broken out. The shepherds were late in driving the flock to the refuge of the valley. The frightened sheep burst headlong into the steppe, while the confused shepherds, pressed in between the animals, rushed about helplessly.

When the flock stampeded past the herd of the white-bearded Shakir, the old herder immediately sized up the situation. Whistling to his dogs, he overtook the flock on horseback and met it with loud shouts, whiplashes and a vicious attack from his trained dogs. The flock was forced to a halt, turned in the right direction and headed away toward the valley with no losses.

Old Shakir paid dearly for rescuing the flock. An acute attack of pneumonia brought him down three days later. His wife, Kumish, gave him hot tea with milk to drink, rubbed him with sheep fat, and put little bundles with hot sand all round him. Shakir pulled through, but he was not his healthy self anymore. He was so weak that he lay still for hours or was shaken by a hacking cough. And in the night he was drenched with a wearying, slimy sweat.

On learning about the rescue of his flock, the delighted Djantemir became generous and gave Shakir, apart from two sheep, a thin-legged colt from one of the herd's best mares. The colt was pathetically weak, because Djantemir's son Iskhak had been riding the pregnant mare so hard the previous year that her newborn could not get on its feet for three days and was already marked for the butcher's knife, when the children tearfully begged to have it spared.

Shakir was not a fine herdsman for nothing. He realized at once that a handsome horse would grow out of this little weak colt, and when the *bai* sent him the present, the old man's heart missed a beat for joy; he ordered his wife to crush two handfuls of millet and cook porridge for the colt every day.

"Shakir, my dear, you would have been better off if you cared

more for yourself," old Kumish pleaded with him. "There's only the skin and bones left of you, while you refuse to eat horse meat! You're sick. You must get well. Nobody is going to work for us, and without work we'll die of hunger."

"Never mind! I'll be all right. Mark my words — he'll grow up into a horse that'll win any *baiga*," Shakir persisted, breathless for his shattering cough. "We won't have to feed him long; the snow is melting already — and that means spring is on its way. We'll go to the *jailiaou*, and there he'll fend for himself."

Kumish, swallowing her tears, meekly crushed the millet in a large wooden mortar, and added dung to the fire to keep it going.

While Shakir was ill, his son, Jaisak, tended the *bai's* herd. The first few days the old man explained lengthily to his son what to do under this or that circumstance, but eventually he realized that Jaisak understood everything quite well himself and there was no need to worry about him.

With the advent of spring, the wolf packs became aggressive and sneaked up closer and closer to human dwellings. From his herders Djantemir started receiving ever increasing reports of a couple of fat-tailed rams or sheep having disappeared in the night, and at times a baby camel or colt was missing. Djantemir left for the Orsk Fortress to ask its commandant, General Isaiev, to stage a grand wolf hunt. But the general replied that a part of his garrison had marched off to fight the bands of the rebel Kenessary Kasimov, while the remaining troops had never hunted for wolves. But taking to heart the *bai's* predicament, the general presented him a fine hunting rifle and two pistols. Back home, Djantemir gave the rifle to his son Iskhak, who was always sent to lend a hand to the herders when the wolves' howls were heard too close to the pastures.

Iskhak was still a youth and a general favorite of the entire family. He complied with Djantemir's orders reluctantly, holding that his father had enough of his own herders and shepherds. Once he got the rifle, however, he was eager to become a good marksman as fast as possible so he could distinguish himself

at some great *toi*. On learning that his friend, also a *bai's* son, was getting married in the neighboring *aul*, Iskhak diligently practiced shooting for several days, after which he mounted his horse, and without so much as saying a word to anyone, galloped off to the wedding, leaving Jaisak alone to look after the herd.

That night a pack of wolves sneaked up to the herd much closer than it had at any other time before. The frightened horses nervously pricked their ears, listening intently to the wolves' howls. And when the green dots of wolf eyes glittered in the dark, the horses stopped grazing altogether and gathered in a huddle: the colts and mares in the middle, the stallions in a tight circle around them to hoof off the attacking beasts.

The sky was curtained with heavy, black clouds hiding the moon. Everything around was gloomy, the color of lead-gray. Six dogs growled furiously and tore at their leashes. Jaisak felt his mount tremble as it tried to move to one side, while the wolves leaped about quite near, their glittering eyes flashing against the rippling snow here and there. They looked like weightless and silent apparitions flitting amid the snowdrifts. Suddenly a huge wolf the size of a six-month-old calf came over the nearest snowdrift in a high bound and landed right in front of Jaisak. The young man did not lose his wits: his sling went into a whining whirl over his head, and the heavy stone hit the wolf's ribs with a crunch. The animal jumped into the air, yelped from pain, and then melted into the murk like a lifeless shadow.

That instant, at the other end of the herd, a piercing scream of agony rent the air. Jaisak unleashed the wolfhounds and rushed in the direction of the scream.

"*Ait! Ait!*" he shouted to the dogs, spurring his horse and reaching for his *soyil*.

One of the wolves had crept up to the herd very close, and the moment a barely perceptible chink appeared between the cruppers of two stallions, he jumped through it and sank his fangs into the side of one stallion. Seized with unbearable pain, the stallion reared and froze for an instant like a motionless

statue, the wolf still hanging on to the horse's side and tearing pieces of blood-dripping flesh out of the defenseless belly.

"*Ait! Ait!*" Jaisak shouted, rushing to the rescue.

But the stallion had dropped to the ground by then and was writhing in the throes of death. Half a dozen wolves attacked him at once, the wolfhounds pounced on them, and seconds later everything turned into a confused, blood-mad, viciously growling and teeth-snapping mass. Chunks of hair and flesh, splashes of blood flew on all sides, more and more wolves leaped from behind the snowdrifts and pounced on the scuffling heap or on the herd which instantly backed away and gathered in a tight huddle again. The horses neighed, snorted, kicked furiously and trampled the wolves. The vapor hovering over the fighting animals reeked of blood.

Jaisak killed two wolves with powerful blows of his *soyil*. One of the wolfhounds was lying with a ripped throat in a puddle of blood, and two wolves finished him off in a flash. Jaisak kept twisting on his horse like a gudgeon, dealing mortal blows to the wolves when suddenly the shaft of his *soyil* cracked and broke to pieces. Jaisak threw it away and swiftly grabbed his heavy *shakpar*, although it was not set with steel spikes like the ancient Russian bludgeons, its heavy blows cracked the wolves' ribs and skulls. Jaisak felt that victory was already close at hand when a young wolf suddenly jumped onto his hack and started to tear at his sheepskin coat furiously. Casting aside the *shakpar*, Jaisak drew his knife and hit the wolf's throat, chest, and any other place he could reach. The wolf's fangs snapped by his ear like scissors. At last the fangs reached Jaisak's flesh. Blood streamed down his shoulder and side. His eyes went dim from pain, but he kept hitting the wolf with the knife until the animal dropped into the snow. Mad with fright and free of the restraint of the bridle, Jaisak's horse carried him at a gallop to the *aul*.

Jaisak was more dead than alive when he was taken out of the saddle. The *aul's* young men rode to the rescue of the herd which, unresponsive to the human voices, beat off the attacks of

the depleted wolf pack together with the wolfhounds. On the snow lay six dead wolves and two hounds, and a third hound was at the point of death as he frantically pawed the snow. Two she-wolves were also bleeding profusely and crawling behind the snowdrifts when the *jigits* arrived from the *ail* and killed them; the rest of the wolves growled and snarled at people as they finished eating the dead horse and tore at the flesh of a still living mare, as its agonized neighing carried through the night.

It was only before dawn that the *jigits* brought together the whole herd, in which one more horse and colt were missing. On learning that Iskhak had gone to the *toi* with the rifle and left the herd in charge of Jaisak only, Djantemir flew into a rage and sent two *axakals* to Iskhak with strict orders that he return to the *aul* at once. He then took away the rifle, and personally gave his son a whipping, as though Iskhak were only a small boy. Djantemir had old Abdullah sent to Jaisak to have a look at his wounds and heal them, and he ordered that his daughter Kuljan take food to Jaisak and Shakir every day.

Time dragged. Shakir and Jaisak were lying side by side, covered with all the rugs and worn clothes that could be found in their black yurt. The first days Jaisak felt so bad he could neither speak nor think, and Shakir only sighed sadly, listening to him moaning, while old Kumish started to moan to herself against her will as she swayed from side to side, tears of pity and fear for her only son trickling down her swarthy age-furrowed cheeks.

As the sun climbed higher and higher over the steppe, the snow melted and turned gray. The mounds of snow, thawed as they were on the southern side, took on the peculiar shapes of white wolves sitting on their haunches. At midday their pointed muzzles dwindled as water dripped from them onto the ground. On one slope of the valley the earth had pushed out of the snow, and the first snowdrop burst into bloom. On her way from the river with a full water skin, Kuljan plucked the snowdrop and took it to the black yurt of old Shakir as she carried food there.

"That's for you, Shakir *Ata*, the first flower. See how warm it is outdoors: snowdrops are blooming in the steppe," she said, smiling kindly at the old herder. "Soon we'll move to the *jailiaou*, but this year it'll be a long trek, right to the river Illi where the mountains rise over the clouds and there are lots of berries and nuts and the grass is green and fresh the whole summer long."

The girl wanted to cheer up the old man, but unwittingly she touched upon a secret and painful thought that had been troubling Shakir for a long time now. Since Shakir was not working, Djantemir would not give him either a horse, camel or even a scrawny gray donkey. Shakir's old camel could barely carry the yurt, while his two-year-old colt had not been broken in yet, and there was no one to do it now. Traveling on foot was now out of the question for Shakir. How then would he get to the *jailiaou*? His strength was waning drop by drop every day. Besides, Jaisak was still bad. A month and a half he had been lying motionless, the wound would not heal, although old Abdullah had set the bones pretty well and frequently rubbed the wound with a rust-red concoction of algae taken from the Aral Sea to disinfect it and make it heal faster. So where would he and his family go during the long and blistering hot summer in the steppe? Shakir thought with despair. Would they have to stay behind at the *kistau* as *jataks* to watch over Djantemir's house and sheds and sow millet on the virgin lands?

Shakir fell to brooding as his toothless gums slowly chewed the mutton the girl had brought, and a heavy gloom gripped his heart. He realized that he was dying: not without reason had his mouth been suddenly filled with salty blood several times already, without him coughing or feeling any pain. At first he spat it out and covered the little red blotch with earth, but then he started swallowing the blood. Kumish, however, saw quite well that her husband was wasting away, and whenever the *aul* women inquired about his health she only sighed sadly.

After eating the last piece of mutton, Shakir wiped the bowl

clean with his fingers, licked each finger, and gave the empty bowl back to Kuljan.

"Thank you, girl. Let your life be as bright and sunny as this first day of spring. Give my thanks to the *bai* for not forgetting an old man."

Kuljan smiled in response, and taking the other bowl from Jaisak, slipped out of the yurt.

"A fine girl," Shakir said musingly. "I wish you had such a wife, Jaisak. But the *bai* would hardly marry her to a beggar."

"She is already engaged, *ata*. Soon her wedding will be held, I suppose. To tell you the truth, though, nothing's been heard of her betrothed, as if he didn't exist at all."

The old man did not say anything in reply. He lay there and listened intently to the wheezing of his disease-ravaged chest, and recalled the years of long ago.

"You know, Jaisak," he spoke suddenly, "there was a time when we were not that poor. I was born here, in the Great Steppe, and then moved to the Bukei's Horde beyond the Urals. Djantemir would not have dared make me work for him then. I had a white yurt, big and fine. And I had two thousand sheep, a whole herd of camels, and two wives, older than your mother. It was a big family I had..."

"Yes, I know," Jaisak remarked. "*Apa* told me about it. I even remember how we crossed a big, big river on sheaves of reed one dark night. And then," Jaisak added uncertainly, "I seem to have had brothers. Yes, two brothers and a little sister with red ribbons in her plaits." He looked inquiringly at his father.

Shakir kept silent.

"Yes, you had," he said in a dull voice, at length, and propped himself up on his elbows with an effort, fastening the ragged robe at his chest. "I'll tell you everything. You must know the truth."

"In this steppe," he began, frequently falling silent to regain his breath, "the pastures are poorer and drier than on the right bank of the Ural. The wet meadows there are quite rich, the grass

juicy and dense, and along the Ahtub and the Caspian Sea there are boundless expanses of reed. Just the land to enjoy living in and growing prosperous. But wherever there is grass and reeds in plenty there are a lot of rich men with hordes of servants and *tyulenguts*, and even more cattle. They seize the best lands and pastures by force. When I was as young as you, we freely crossed the Ural to winter on the far bank, and came back here in spring. But with time the Russian czar prohibited the *auls* from the Great Steppe from moving to the right bank of the Ural.

“We were under the rule of Sultan Bukei then. He pleaded with the czar to permit us to settle for good on the lands between the Ural and the Volga. The czar agreed, and we were happy at the news. Five thousand yurts moved across the Ural ‘to the rich lands.’ But our joy did not last long. As we learned, the shores of the Caspian with their fishing grounds and reeds had long belonged to Prince Yusupov and Count Bezborodko, and the lands between the Uzen and the Ural was the domain of the Yayik Cassacks. Bukei died then, but his son Jangoz and his father-in-law Karaul Hodja were people without either a sense of honesty or honor, or a heart. Apart from the czar’s usual taxes and *zakat*, he burdened us with a heap of other taxes. But we never had money, and traded just like we do now — for sheep, but not for money. Karaul Hodja came to an agreement with Yusupov, by which we were permitted to graze our herds on his lands for money. Whereas Yusupov’s price was two rubles, Karaul Hodja demanded that we pay five. We suffered from hunger, while he grew rich on our tears. Besides, *aul* after *aul* came pushing from the Great Steppe across the Ural to winter in our parts. Then came a terrible winter when snowstorms raged without end, followed by such glazed frost that no horse could smash the ice crust with its hoof. Day and night we were breaking the crust with *ketmens* and shovels, but half of our sheep flock still died. The rest could have been saved if we had been allowed to graze in the reeds, but the Yayik Cossacks refused flatly. And we had no money to pay them...”

Shakir broke into a heavy cough and could not regain his breath for a long time. Then he continued his story, trying to vent his grief, which had been such a heavy burden for him to bear all his life.

“Our animals perished to the last lamb. Death from hunger stared us in the face. My older wives died that winter. Only Kumish, your mother, stayed alive. Just then a caravan arrived from Bukhara, with rice and flour for which we had neither sheep nor money to pay. Seeing our woe, the Bukharans started selling flour in return for children. Kumish and I went and did a horrible thing: we sold the elder children to save them from starvation and preserve the youngest child. They traded three bowlfuls of flour for a child. So we got nine bowlfuls. The boys survived, but your sister died a day after she was sold. The Bukharans visited us with abuse, demanding that we give you away in her place. And so we decided to flee to our homeland — here, to the Great Steppe. The Russians did not let anyone across the Ural at that time. We had to cross it in the dead of night. But we had neither boat nor raft to do so. We cut dried reeds, covered our heads with hay, and waded into the water. You were put on a sheaf of reeds and covered with hay, too. In this way we were not spotted, because a lot of hay and brushwood washed off the wet meadows by the flood was drifting down the river then. We came to this place, to Djantemir’s *aul*. His father Undasin had once been a friend of mine, but he was dead by then. Djantemir received us well, like friends: he had a ram butchered, treated us to a meal, but when he learned that we were beggars... Oh well, you know yourself how we have been faring here —” Shakir stopped short.

Jaisak kept silent, but his tightly compressed lips showed clearly enough what intense bitterness and irrepressible hatred blazed in his heart.

“Listen to me, son,” Shakir spoke again, spitting a clot of blood out of his mouth. “If you ever come across a Bukharan caravan or get to Margelan, look for the merchant Habibula

Omer there. He bought your brothers Kasim and Tyulenbai. And if fortune ever smiles on you, redeem them."

"All right, *ata*, I will. I swear I will," Jaisak said quietly, but firmly. "I'll get myself a royal eagle for hunting. They say the Russians pay big money for furs. I'll work hard. Don't you worry, *ata*. I won't let you die of hunger."

"There is one more thing I want to tell you, son," Shakir said quietly after a while. "Take care of our colt as you would of the apple of your eye. He's born of Karligach, the light-footed mare, and" — he dropped his voice to a barely audible whisper — "of Blizzard, the very same Blizzard that wins every *baiga*. The colt is priceless, but he has to be fed better, brought up and broken in really well. You know how to handle a horse and teach it so it responds to your voice and understands you without a whip. A horse, mind you, is a reliable, trusty friend: both in trouble and at a *baiga* it'll come to the help of its master. In it you will find your luck. I called the colt Abkozad, because when he's grown up he'll turn white as *airan*, and will be prized more than pure gold."

Jaisak listened, without saying a word.

"Do you hear me, son? Will you do what I ask you?" Shakir said and feebly lowered himself onto the piece of felt.

"I hear you, *ata*! I'll do everything you say, and my word is firm as an inscription on rock," Jaisak replied.

The old man sighed with relief, as if he had thrown an overheavy burden off his chest, but then he recalled something else and raised his head again.

"Djantemir, as you know, gives me ten sheep for a year's work. In thirty years that could have made a whole flock, but he deducts from my earnings for every sheep and ewe lamb a wolf pack tears down. Now I've got forty-five sheep and seventy ewe lambs. Remember that and don't let your memory grow rusty when he's paying off the poor," he finished, smiling with bitter irony.

Both lapsed into silence — Shakir, because the long talk had made him tired, Jaisak, because just then he was trying to stir his

maimed fingers, and he sensed with joy that they were bending slightly, although a sharp pain stabbed him above the elbow or somewhere near the shoulder blades.

"Allah be praised, I can stir my fingers a bit now," he said to comfort his father.

A wane smile lit up Shakir's face, but his eyes, gazing into emptiness, were illuminated by an inward light that appears with people after some terrible suffering or when they approach the threshold of oblivion.

Kumish entered with a sack of dung, raked aside the ashes in the fire, and was about to lower the flap of the yurt when Shakir stopped her.

"Please don't! I want to breathe some fresh air. It makes me feel better."

"But the sun is setting, Shakir dear," she remarked timidly. "There's still snow in the steppe; you'll get cold."

"I'll die tomorrow," the old man said in a stern and matter-of-fact manner. "Let me admire the sun for the last time... and the land... It's so beautiful," he added quietly. "Tell the people to come and bid me farewell."

Kumish glanced at him with pain and horror, hung down her head, and started to move something by the fire with trembling fingers.

"I want to see everyone and bid them farewell," Shakir repeated with effort.

Suddenly both Jaisak and Kumish realized what a horrible truth stood behind these words. Wincing with pain, Jaisak made an attempt to rise.

"*Apa*, help me! I shall go," he said, but could not check the moan escaping his lips.

Frightened, Kumish rushed to her son.

"Lie down! I'll go myself! At once!" she mumbled, and quickly putting on a kerchief, slipped out of the yurt.

When she was back, a few men were already sitting in the yurt. White-bearded old men wearing soft boots, felt stockings,

and warm *chapans*, made their salaams before the sick man on entering, then they nodded to Jaisak in a friendly way, and unhurriedly, as was proper for the occasion, settled solemnly around Shakir.

"How do you do, Shakir *Ata*," they said, calling him respectfully as they had never done before. "What is the matter with you? You must fight death like your *batyr* fought the wolves, but not yield to it. It is still early for you to say farewell to life."

"It has got the better of me, *axakals*," Shakir breathed out with effort, and a fit of coughing attacked him.

"*Axakals*, be like fathers to my son. He still needs advice from wise people at an evil hour. Good advice is dearer than a fat ram."

"Rightly so! We shall advise and help him!" the *axakals* responded, interrupting one another.

Jaisak's friend, the sinewy tanner Taijan, rumbled in his low voice:

"Neither his father nor mother have done him out of his share of a good mind. He himself can give good advice to others."

On saying that, he slapped Jaisak's shoulder in a friendly manner, making the latter wince with pain.

"*Oi bai!* I forgot about your wounds!" Taijan said. "Forgive me! How's your arm?"

"It feels a bit better," Jaisak replied. "I could stir my fingers today."

Shakir lay silent for a while, his eyes shut tight against the glittering snow. Then he raised his head again with an effort and looked around. "Where is Djantemir? What did he say?"

The drinking bowl slipped out of Kumish's hand. "But how can you trouble the *bai!* I just didn't dare to..." Suddenly Shakir said severely and loudly, with an unexpected force:

"Go and tell him: I want to see the son of my friend Undasin, and Rahmatulli's grandson. Tell him that Shakir is dying."

Kumish was so confused that neither her feet nor tongue would obey her.

Then Jaisak extended his sound hand to Taijan, and said:

"Help me get up; I will go to see him myself."

Clenching his teeth in pain, he got on his weak feet. Somebody threw a sheepskin coat on his shoulders, girded it with a belt, and helped him walk out of the yurt. The sun was already rolling along the distant horizon, slowly slipping down the other, unseen side of the earth. Cold air wafted from the steppe. Kumish lowered the flap of the yurt silently, raked the ashes aside, picked up some embers to light an earthenware wick lamp with sheep fat, and hung it by the *shangarak*. Then she put dry dung onto the embers, puffed at it, and a thin wisp of smoke curled up to the *tunduk*. That instant somebody obligingly threw back the flap, and Djantemir entered.

"Salaam to you, Shakir, and to you, *axakals*," he said and settled in the place of honor where Kumish had hurriedly put the family's only piece of white felt with trembling hands. "What did you want to tell me?"

Shakir raised his fading eyes, and suddenly the glow of life was in them again.

"I want you to confirm the truth of what I shall say now," he said, gasping. "I am dying, Djantemir. To lie before death means to condemn my soul to eternal torment. Tell me, have I worked well throughout all these years since I returned to my native steppe from beyond the Ural?"

Djantemir kept silent for a minute, thinking over whether an answer in the negative would bring him any loss or harm, but unable to hold the fixed gaze of the old herder, he nodded reluctantly.

"That I confirm. You have worked honestly and well. Kumish, too, has worked well, and your son has done a good job and fought the wolves like a real *jigit*."

"Yes, like a *batyr*," the *axakals*, silent until then, said of one accord. "He hacked to death six wolves — and that is no joke."

"He also wounded two she-wolves so badly they were breathing their last when our *jigits* arrived."

"Whenever a snowstorm broke, I rescued your flock as if it

were my own property," Shakir went on in a barely audible voice. "And now I'll explain why all of us have worked like we did. Our honor did not allow us to work badly. So confirm now, Djantemir, what kin we come from, and that your father Undasin was my best friend and you visited our *aul* as a boy and were a guest in our yurt — in a white yurt like yours."

"Well, I did visit your home," Djantemir confirmed, this time irritated. "But you, too, Shakir *Ata*, had been my father's guest for weeks. We're quits on that point and nobody owes anybody anything."

"And nobody is asking anything," Jaisak flared up.

Djantemir only shot him a sidelong glance with the narrow slits of his eyes, and turned to Shakir.

"So what can I do for you, Shakir? I have a guest, the *akyn* Abdrahman, waiting for me now. I want to hear his songs. You're holding me up."

"I don't need anything," Shakir said hoarsely. "But Jaisak was mauled by wolves, because your son ran away to a *toi* with his friends and left my son alone. To award him — that is the debt of honor you owe me," he concluded, touching the most sensitive point of the *bai*'s code of honor.

Blood rushed to Djantemir's head. He was about to let bad language escape his lips, but his ear caught a whisper of indignation and a stir among the *axakals*. To make things worse, here were the elders of the entire kin with whom he had to reckon. The words of Shakir, who had never told anyone in the *aul* about his past, had produced a tremendous impression on them. So restraining his tongue which was ready to roll off abuse, Djantemir managed a forced smile and spoke out, lending his voice unusual warmth.

"I have not forgotten anything, Shakir *Ata*. I remember how you taught me to ride on horseback and told me old tales about Koblanda *Batyr*. I know very well the meaning of honor, and I shall reward Jaisak. You, too, I shall not forget. So do not worry and get well."

Picking up the ends of his sheepskin coat, the heavy-set and haughty *bai* went out of the yurt, without granting anyone a parting look.

The men listened intently as the slightly frozen snow crunched under his receding tread. After his footfalls had died away, everyone started to speak at once.

"But why have you kept silent?" old Faizullah said, slapping one palm against the other. "We didn't have the slightest idea of what he had done to you!"

The tanner Taijan grated his teeth and spit out angrily.

"What a tight-fisted sort our *bai* is! He'll think ten times before he makes up his mind whether to give you two sheep."

"Two sheep won't save him," the thick-set Baimagambet threw in. "That scum's turned his father's friend into a servant."

"He's disgraced our entire kin," the bone-setter Abdullah droned away. "I wouldn't keep silent; I'd tell the people the whole truth. We'd force him to be human!"

A warm wave of sympathy seemed to have made the yurt a warmer, cozier and dearer place to live in. Kumish looked at the people and did not recognize them. It seemed that suddenly some secret recess of goodness had opened in their souls which she had not suspected before. In the meantime, the angered and excited men kept on talking, interrupting one another, and no one noticed that Shakir's head had fallen back and a heavy rattle came from his chest.

"Tea! Give him hot tea!" Jaisak suddenly cried out, rushing to his father's side. "He's dying!"

The next instant everyone went into a sudden bustle, trying to allay the suffering of the dying man in whatever way they could. Someone ran to a neighboring yurt where a samovar was aboil, and instead of a bowl of tea brought the samovar for the dying Shakir. Someone else produced drinking bowls from a trunk, filled them with fresh tea leaves, and moments later Kumish, swallowing her tears, was giving Shakir hot tea with camel's milk which Kuljan had brought promptly. Faizullah fed

the fire with some additional dung which sent a sharp smell throughout the yurt and made the dying man cough heavily.

Taijan rushed out of the yurt and returned with some blazing hot bricks on a shovel; he put them on the fire and threw the smoking dung out of the yurt.

When the blue cloud of smoke dispersed, he went outside and carefully closed the *tunduk*. It became warmer in the yurt immediately.

But Shakir could not recover consciousness any more. He had spent all his effort for the last talk with Djantemir and was drained of strength now, his hair, grown longer throughout his illness, sticking to his sweaty forehead. His chest rose and fell heavily and spasmodically. The *axakals* were leaving the yurt one by one, after having said to Shakir warm words of parting. Only Taijan stayed behind to help the utterly exhausted Kumish and Jaisak who was still bedridden, his teeth firmly clenched lest he moan for the pain his wounds caused.

Shakir gasped for breath and thrashed the whole night through; one hour before dawn his last breath gave way to the serenity of death.

When the sun rose, eight old men came to the black yurt to wash and prepare the deceased for his last road in accordance with ancient custom, while Taijan and two *jigits* galloped off to the cemetery to dig a grave.

Kumish, as a woman, could not be present during the washing of the deceased. She did not leave his side to the last moment, because once he was covered with a shroud, she would never see his face again.

Shortly after, several women came for her and took her to one of the neighboring yurts where she was settled on a piece of felt, surrounded in a tight circle, and made to join a mournful *joktau*, a dirge with which every Kazakh woman accompanied her husband to the grave.

While the women sang the *joktau*, intoxicated by its somber beauty, the *axakals* washed Shakir, shaved his head, trimmed his

beard and mustache, and dressed him in a shroud — a long piece of white cloth sewn together only on two sides, with an opening for the head. Then they wrapped him up in three long pieces of thin white cloth from head to toe, and tied his feet, hips, and body below the shoulders with three white kerchiefs. After that he was put down on his right side in the place of honor facing the entrance, and curtained off with a clean cloth screen.

Shakir's words must have hit Djantemir's pride painfully, because this time he did not sting himself and had sent the broad long pieces of cloth, kerchiefs and a luxurious Persian rug in which Shakir was wrapped before being carried out of the yurt, and had three fattened sheep slaughtered for the funeral repast.

The mullah intoned the prayers long and solemnly in the yurt, while Kumish, not daring to break the law, stayed outside, her face buried in the snow she was lying on. When at last the body of Shakir was put on a camel and the sick Jaisak placed in Djantemir's sleigh and almost all the men of the *aul* left to see Shakir off on his last journey, she got to her feet submissively and returned into the yurt where the women were already preparing the funeral repast.

Taijan and his friends had dug a deep grave in the rocky, frost-bound ground which had to be hacked with a crowbar, *ketmen*, and at times with an ax. By tradition, the grave was quadrangular. In the depth of it, Taijan had dug a lateral niche. The deceased was taken off the camel, unwrapped out of the rug, all the three kerchiefs were untied, the pieces of cloth taken off to become, by custom, the property of the mullah, and Shakir was lowered into the grave to the accompaniment of a prayer. He was put in the niche to lie on his right side, covered with the rug, the niche was boarded, the grave filled with earth, on which stones were placed lest wolves and jackals dig it open, and then a tombstone was put up at the head. Later on the name of the deceased, his years of birth and death would be engraved on the stone.

Everyone kept silent on the way back. Even the young *jigits* did not urge on their horses nor rush around the sleigh, trying to outrace one another as they usually did. Djantemir *Bai* sat silently in the sleigh beside the taciturn Jaisak, and when they approached the yurts, he muttered haltingly:

“Since a wolf tore your sheepskin coat and robe, I’ll have everything new sent to you, and for your wound you’ll get a camel, ten sheep and a horse. You can pick the best you see in the herd.”

Jaisak gave a nod, having nothing to say to Djantemir in response.

2. ARRIVAL IN ORENBURG

The sun was slowly setting over the horizon that was as flat as the surface of a calm sea. The boundless steppe was spread out under the sun. The feather grass, still silky in its vernal attire, stood motionless and showed up white in the distance just like the evening mists in the lowlands of Russia’s North. But it was parchedly dry in the steppe, without any dewdrops or other traces of humidity.

A tarantass sped down the road with a clang and rattle, leaving a comet-like trail of whirling dust stretching out far behind it.

“They must be needing me very much in Orenburg, if you’re in such a hot hurry,” one of the occupants of the carriage said with undisguised irony. He wore a round felt hat and was dressed in an old soldier’s greatcoat over a crumpled tailcoat and a dirty shirt with starched dicky and collar, but without any tie around his neck.

“You’d have been better off if you swallowed your tongue and wrote less of those squibs, you *khokhol** versifier,” the courier ensign sitting at his side snapped back. “It would have been

* *Khokhol* — derogatory name of a Ukrainian in czarist Russia

better for you and me: then we wouldn't have had to go to the other end of the world."

Shevchenko shrugged his shoulders.

The dust had made his throat sore and irritated his eyes. His whole body ached from the eight-day jolting without any sleep and rest, with only half-hour halts at the post stations to have the horses changed.

Dusk was falling. The sun declined slowly far behind them, and the blue air of the summer night, so unexpected and beautiful after the "white nights" of St. Petersburg, was approaching from the east.

"Thank God, there is a town over there!" the coachman suddenly roused himself, pointing his whip into the distance.

But because of the gathering night neither the passengers nor the gendarme sitting on the box beside the coachman saw anything, except for a huge solitary building with blank stone walls, the dome of a Muslim mosque, and a tall slender minaret at its side standing far out in the steppe.

A caravanserai, Shevchenko guessed, and even rose slightly from his seat as the *tarantass* drove nearer. He had talked about it with Brüllow the year before last: the mosque was built to the design of the painter's brother, the architect Alexandr Brüllow, but mentioning to the gendarme and courier the name of the teacher he loved so much would have been shrill blasphemy, so the poet only looked silently at the slender minaret which seemed to be soaring toward the first stars.

It was well into the night when the *tarantass* rumbled through a vaulted gateway and the exhausted horses stopped in front of an ordnance house.

The coachman had to knock on the oak window frames, the gate and the door with both whip and fist for a long time before a sleepy watchman reeking of raw vodka and sweat opened the door to let the arrivals enter the office.

"Where is the officer of the day?" the courier asked sternly.

"His Excellency has gone, and left orders not to be disturbed,"

the watchman answered hoarsely, and fussily went about lighting a candle from an icon lamp in the corner of the anteroom.

"I have brought a convict, a state criminal. Let him stay here, while I'm away at the commandant's office," the courier continued, pointing at Taras Shevchenko. "You shall be responsible for him. And you, sir, don't contrive any tricks during my absence. It'll only make matters worse for you," he added as he was leaving the room. "Let's go, Tishchenko!"

The heavy front door shut with a bang, and the courier and gendarme's footfalls resounded with a crunch under the windows outside.

Shevchenko was silent. The journey had exhausted him utterly. On his way he had seen the marshy lowlands of Ingermanlandia, the dense forests of the Kostroma and Vladimir provinces, towns and their suburbs, villages and fields, the imposing might of the Volga at flood time in spring, the black lands beyond the Volga, and the drearily desolate expanses of the steppe — all of this had merged into a motley jumble of impressions. "Sleep. Sleep only!" his weary body pleaded.

"Do you want anything to eat?" the watchman asked with a yawn. "I'll find a slice of bread and some water to drink. As for cooked food... if you'd come a bit earlier..."

"Give me some water; I don't want anything to eat," Shevchenko said and sat down on a bench.

The watchman brought a big bottle with water and, while Shevchenko drank long and greedily and could not drink his fill, the watchman said, scratching his hairy chest:

"Well, you'll have to sleep in the entrance hall. Just lie down on the floor there, brother, and don't worry, because it's clean: it was scrubbed with a knife today. Don't you worry; we don't have anything like fleas around this place. How come you didn't take any suitcase along?"

"Sleep. The only thing I want is sleep," Shevchenko repeated mechanically, handing back the bottle at long last. "I'll do without a suitcase somehow."

The watchman barred the front door with a heavy iron bolt on which hung a huge padlock, pocketed the key, let Shevchenko into the entrance hall, locked him up in the office, and added didactically through the door:

“Mind you don’t smoke in there... or else you’ll get chased down ‘the green street’ to the roll of drums.”

Shevchenko took a look at his new surroundings. The only entrance hall window, grated with ordinary prison bars just like the window in the office, barely let in the wan light of a full moon rising leisurely from behind the distant horizon. There was no bench in the room. He chose himself a place by a wall and stretched himself out on the unpainted resinous floor planks, lay there for a while, without thinking about anything, unconsciously delighting in the silence, and then sunk into a deep, dreamless sleep.

It was unbearably hot in the office of the provincial border commission. The bright June sun pouring in through the windows had made the room so stuffy that the luxuriant fair hair of Fedir Lazarevsky had stuck to his forehead, and rivulets of sweat rolled down his face and dripped on an opened Personal File lying in front of him on the desk. It was horribly difficult to sit in the uniform of a civil servant with a tight, starched collar, but since this was a workday and office hours, he had to be dressed in uniform while performing his official duties. Lazarevsky sincerely envied the junior clerk who wore a printed cotton shirt and sat in a draft near the door where he heaved sighs now and then. The other tables on either side of Lazarevsky were empty. His friend, countryman and colleague Serhiy Levitsky had left for the post office to collect a parcel from his mother and old aunt, and Lazarevsky relished in advance the delightful moments in the evenings, when they would be looking through the new journals and books and regaling themselves on the tasty sausages, fruit liqueurs and other goodies which, along with the food for the mind, was sent to them by loving parents and relatives in Chernihiv Province. His other

colleague Galevinsky, a secretary, or rather senior clerk, had left to get some blank forms they had ordered a long time ago.

Summoning his will, Lazarevsky forced himself to buckle down to work: he had to write an account on the results of an investigation into an intricate complaint, the disentanglement of which would have made even the devil go up in smoke in cool weather, let alone in a torrid blaze of forty degrees centigrade. Three times he started to write, and every time he had to throw it into the paper basket.

"On the grounds of Instruction No. 179 from the manager of the office of your Excellency, the Military Governor, of May eleventh of the current year, and on the grounds of my personal investigation of File No. 842, I have the honor to..."

Lazarevsky fell to thinking whether it would be better to write "to report" or "to inform"? What should his missive be called anyway: account or report? Of all the papers to write! Besides, the quills were soft that day as if they were not a goose's but a duck's or a hen's. And the inkwell was full of flies. Every time the quill picked up a drowned fly there appeared a black blot on the paper. The words came out so clumsy, the work was so boring. Why did it have to be him doing it?

"Stepan, old chap!" he cried out in despair. "Bring me a bottle of kvass."

No sooner had Stepan's blue shirt flashed behind the door than the clerk Galevinsky rushed into the office, threw the bundles of freshly printed blank forms on the desk and exclaimed excitedly:

"They've brought in the *Kobzar* tonight!"

"Why make so much noise about it? I have a *Kobzar*," Lazarevsky restrained the clerk's outburst.

"But it's not the book I have in mind. The author, Shevchenko, has been brought here! The one who wrote the *Kobzar*," Galevinsky said. "I met the officer of the day who took him over from a St. Petersburg courier in the morning. He's at the fortress now, in the transit barracks."

Impossible! In the barracks! Lazarevsky thought. So he was made a soldier? Or was he banished into exile? Just like the Decembrists, like Pushkin, Lermontov and Odoievsky for having dared to speak the truth out loud!

Galevinsky was carrying on about the blank forms and the print shop, but Lazarevsky was not listening. He had to find Shevchenko at once and tell him everything that had accumulated in his heart throughout the lonely winter evenings and nights when his mind had dwelled upon the dear verses of the Kobzar! He had to help him. Immediately, then and there!

He swept the papers off the desk into a drawer, snatched his cap from a hook, rushed out of the office, and made for the fortress almost at a run.

He kept asking around for a long time until an officer told him where to look for the poet. With quivering heart he went past the guard, shoved a crumpled pass into his hand, and crossed the threshold of the partly empty barracks.

By the farthest window four half-dressed men were playing cards, accompanying the game with vile curses. Another pair was squatting before an oven, roasting something skew-red on a rusty bayonet. Yet another two were just loafing around, their eyes probing everyone alertly like some market crooks seeking an easy gain. On a bunk by the nearest window lay a portly man of about thirty-five years, reading a thick, tattered book.

It's him, Lazarevsky thought and went to the bunk with quaking heart.

In the morning, the courier Widler had indeed handed the poet over to the officer of the day, who in turn had the convict sent to General Liefland, the commandant of the fortress.

The general looked quickly through the file of the arrival and raised his eyes to him with curiosity.

The poet returned the look in a calm and intelligent manner. He gave brief and proper answers to the questions and did it with such a degree of dignity that the general found it difficult not to talk to him as an equal, contrary to regulations.

But the verdict was explicit enough in stating that this blue-eyed artist and poet was incredibly dangerous to the state. That was something the general's mind could not grasp, so he thought better of going into the details of the case, and he explained to the poet — just as laconically and formally as he would have done to an officer reduced in rank after a duel — that he would be assigned to the Fifth Line Battalion and sent to his place of service in a couple of days. Then the general ordered that Shevchenko be shown to the bathhouse, issued a new set of underwear, and put on the allowance list.

In the bathhouse Shevchenko was delighted to get rid of the dust and dirt of the road, after which he went to the barber. The latter made the poet sit on a stool, and then a pair of sharp scissors snapped and chirred long over his ears, snipping the thick hair off his nape and head and off his two-month-old beard.

Then the barber took an open razor.

"Give it to me! I'll shave myself," Shevchenko said, reaching for the razor.

"That's against the rules!" the barber said sternly. "We've got such rakes around this place that if you give one of them a razor — slash! — he'll cut somebody's throat, yours or his own. A penal battalion is a penal battalion."

A chill crept involuntarily down the poet's spine. That's where he was ordered to be sent away by the obtuse and cruel Holsteinian, the "powerful Orthodox Czar of the State," as the recently approved national anthem, "God Save the Czar," went. Throughout the entire Christ-loving Russian army, German rods, drill, fist law, and stupid discipline held sway, but here, in these line battalions, it was carried to the point of being absurd.

"Don't be afraid; I won't cut you," the barber said, honing the razor rhythmically against a strop. "Every day I shave not only soldiers but the officers and the general himself," he continued, interpreting in his own way the shade of alarm that had passed across the lively face of the new arrival.

"Leave my side whiskers at least," Shevchenko asked.

"That's against the rules," the barber retorted categorically and snipped away at the remainder of the beard and the whiskers which Shevchenko had grown when he received the letter of enfranchisement and enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts.

"But soldiers are permitted to have a mustache, and in the cavalry it is even a must. This gives them a dashing look," the barber said, lathering Shevchenko's cheek. "Want me to leave you a mustache? You *khokhol* chaps always wear mustaches."

"All right, leave it then," Shevchenko said with a sudden smile. "I'll have a mustache like a Zaporozhian Cossack."

The barber loved his trade and fussed around the poet for a long time, trimming and clipping his hair here and there. At last, satisfied with his work, he clicked his tongue with satisfaction:

"Everything's ship-shape! You are a picture of a lady's man!"

The barber produced a cheap little mirror from behind the cuff of his uniform and handed it to Shevchenko.

The last time he looked at himself in a mirror was on the fifth of May at a coaching inn at Brovary near Kiev, when he wore a tailcoat and had a nosegay of orange blossoms pinned to a lapel as the best man at Professor Kostomarov's wedding. Just over two months had passed since then — only sixty-five days, but looking out of the mirror now was a strange old man in whose eyes was such deep sorrow that it made Shevchenko shrink back involuntarily.

He had grown ten years older within these two months: deep wrinkles of sorrow creased his face from the nose to the corners of his lips. Without the groomed whiskers he was accustomed to, his immature mustache stuck clumsily over the drooping corners of his mouth like the bristling brush of a walrus. The curly dark-copper tuft on his crown was gone as well, and the close-cropped hair lay flat, making his bulging forehead look all the more disproportionately large.

"Just like a fine lady's man," the barber repeated, waiting to be complimented on his work.

I'm more of a horror, Shevchenko wanted to say, but remained silent and gave the barber a ruble.

Overjoyed to have been given an unexpected tip, the barber shot a surprised look at what he took for a peculiar customer, snapped smartly to attention, and shot out like he would have done in front of an appreciative general:

"Thank you very much indeed! I'll have a nip to your health."

In the barracks, Shevchenko lay down on his bunk, oppressed and shocked by the striking change in his appearance. But it was not the lack of his luxuriant hair and smart side whiskers that distressed him: in the cheap mirror he had seen the reflection of his inner torment, and realized that he could not hide it behind a sham front of contempt or indifference.

He bit into his lip and turned away to the wall, but several minutes later he sat up and brought his fist down on the bunk.

"Enough! I'll have to learn to keep in check not only my nerves. I'll have to learn to control my facial expression and fashion myself a mask lest my eyes, lips or the line of the eyebrows betray my inner pain. And I'll make it a purpose. Yes, I will, whatever it may take me!"

That moment a man of about thirty with shining pitch-black eyes and a mop of curly disheveled hair of the same color came up with a peculiarly swaggering gait.

"May I introduce myself?" he said. "Kozlovsky, Andrei Kozlovsky! A nobleman."

"Shevchenko," the poet replied dryly with a slight bow, but did not extend his hand.

Kozlovsky did not bat an eyelid at such a greeting, and sat down at Shevchenko's side without any invitation.

"*Mon cher*, we've landed at the end of the world, as it were. Why did they pack you off here, if it's no secret?"

Kozlovsky's manners and free and easy tone irritated and jarred upon Shevchenko, and so he answered evasively:

"Well, you know how it happens. I wrote something, and some people didn't exactly like it."

"A promissory note, I suppose?" Kozlovsky understood it in his own way and seemed to be glad. "I autographed a couple of them myself. Papa and me, we've got similar handwriting; you might even say it's identical. Both of us are Kozlovsky, and both Andrei. Well, when the time came to pay my debt, my devil of an old man got wildly mad. 'I've earned all that by working my fingers to the bone,' he said, 'and you think you're just going to gamble it away?' Well, my mama saved me a couple of times, but then he went and put me away. The damned old gizzard! He'll croak one day, and you can be sure he won't take his filthy lucre down into his grave. But I'll pay him back yet!" He flashed his eyes angrily. "I'll settle accounts with him one of these days!"

"Please, excuse me," Shevchenko interrupted him. "All this is very sad, even tragic, I would say, but I haven't had a wink of sleep for eight days. My whole body aches from the jolting. I want to rest. Let's have a talk another time."

"I understand! *Comprene and pardon*," Kozlovsky said, jumping to his feet. "I'll be going! But... could I have *quelque chose* on credit... Well, at least for a quarter of a bottle of vodka or for a nip."

His brazen face abruptly took on a humble and cringingly pathetic look like that of a hungry dog at the sight of food.

Shevchenko searched in his pockets and gave him some coppers.

"Thank you ever so much!" Kozlovsky said. "Have a good rest!"

He made for the door with the same peculiarly swaggering gait, while Shevchenko stretched himself out on the bunk as before, but sleep would not come to him. Snatches of thoughts revolved in his mind in a restless swarm. The future rose before him in a black impenetrable curtain, while everything surrounding him seemed like a cesspool in which his life would have to ebb away. He got up, went to a water keg, drank of the water, and asked the orderly, making besoms of saltwort, to give him something to read.

"We're permitted to read only divine books," the orderly

answered after a thought. "Only those who belong to the Old Believers really care for such reading, but the nobility aren't interested much!"

"Give me something divine then," Shevchenko said with a smile. "An intelligent person can find a lot of interesting things in the divine writings as well."

The orderly took a thick Bible in a half-torn binding down from a shelf, blew a cloud of dust off it by the door, and gave it to Shevchenko.

"But mind you don't tear any pages out of it for rolling cigarettes," he added, and went back to his work.

On approaching the man lying on the bunk, Lazarevsky stopped in indecision. His excitement made him suddenly forget the name of the poet and all the words expressing rapture, love and idolization he wanted to tell him.

"Excuse me, are you Shevchenko, our Bard?" he asked in a stutter.

Shevchenko leisurely put the Bible aside, looked Lazarevsky over with distrustful and rather unfriendly eyes, and sat up unhurriedly. What did this young civil servant want of him? After everything he had gone through since his arrest, he suspected every official to be either a spy or provocateur the gendarmes used to plant in the prison cells of the Third Department. At best it might be simply a provincial philistine, for whom the appearance of an exiled "versifier" would be, if not a sensation, in any case interesting news which could be broadcast to the Orenburg ladies and matrons whom it was easy to "take in" on what was presented as a big secret.

"What can I do for you?" Shevchenko asked so coldly that any other visitor would have instantly lost every desire to continue the conversation.

But Lazarevsky did not notice anything. He only knew that this was Shevchenko, the marvelous magician of the word who for the first time had made the Ukrainian language sound with the same force and beauty as the Russian under the magic pen

of Pushkin and Lermontov or the German in the fiery verse of Friedrich Schiller.

"My God! Where can I find the words to express what joy, what wonderful moments I experienced reading your Kobzar," he said. "Serhiy Levitsky and I have been reading and rereading it the whole winter through! We've learned almost all of it by heart. After we subscribed to *The Haidamaks* we counted the days when the book would arrive at last. We could have hardly dreamed to meet you! Why, it is such a ... such a —"

He stopped abruptly, realizing that he could not call this soul-trying meeting either joyous or happy and, carried away by his reverence and sympathy, he enclosed Shevchenko in an embrace.

Shevchenko freed himself with a light shrug of the shoulder, and without looking at Lazarevsky, answered dryly as before:

"Thank you for your appreciation of my work. I am glad you have enjoyed it."

"*Enjoy* just isn't the word. I was happy. We're missing our homeland terribly, for we are countrymen after all — from Chernihiv Province, and were assigned to this place after graduating from the university. We're in our third year of service here, and it's boring." The young man sighed so sincerely that for the first time Shevchenko looked at him attentively with an inquiring, although still distrustful look in his eyes.

Lazarevsky sat on the outermost edge of the bunk and looked at his favorite poet like a schoolgirl would have regarded a famous actor after a breathtaking stage performance. At the same time there was such a painful sadness in his look, and Shevchenko felt awkward for his distrust and reserve. But the bitter experience of the past two months had opened to him a facet of life which made him unwontedly cautious.

Lazarevsky wanted to tell him everything that was on his mind and to hear at once everything from the poet he adored. But he felt uneasy about asking him, lest he touch the fresh wound in the poet's soul. He faltered in embarrassment, not

venturing to raise the most horrible, albeit most important question: Who had dared do such a thing to the poet, and why? Shevchenko had not been simply banished to this place like some of the other political prisoners, but conscripted by arbitrary force into twenty-five-year service as a private in a line battalion of the Orenburg Military Border District adjoining a wild steppe, where the ungovernable tribes of Kokand and Khiva frequently attacked the improvised forts and border posts.

In the meantime, the two suspicious characters squatting at the oven had stealthily moved up closer and, pretending to be looking for something in their tattered greatcoats, overtly eavesdropped on their new neighbor and the lanky bright-haired official. Shevchenko noticed them and chose his words with extraordinary caution, trying to speak quietly and vaguely.

Lazarevsky, however, did not see anything and was suddenly carried away.

"But how did they dare? Who, and why?" he almost cried out, throwing up his arms.

Shevchenko winced at such a display of emotion, and replied with deliberate clarity, sternly and dryly:

"By the supreme command of His Imperial Highness I, being of strong physical constitution, have been sentenced to military service as a soldier."

"Where are you being sent to serve?"

"I don't know. I've been assigned to the Fifth Line Battalion and will be shortly sent to my place of service," Shevchenko repeated, in an even voice, what he had been told by the commandant that morning.

"I wish they'd let you stay here," Lazarevsky said with a sigh. "Life is easier in a town anyway. I'll intercede for you and achieve my purpose. We have good, honest people here," he said, burning with a desire to act immediately. "You tell me what you wish and what I can do for you, and I, for my part..."

"Thank you, but I do not need any help," Shevchenko said, shaking his head. "I will help myself, and earn something for my livelihood. Even today the warden of the deportation prison asked me to teach his children. I'll manage somehow..."

Lazarevsky hung his head in confusion and embarrassment.

"And still... I am so inextricably indebted to you for all the beautiful things I have thought, reading your *Kobzar*! I see the common people and even the Kirghiz absolutely differently now. You yourself do not know what light and truth emanates from every one of your words!"

Emotion took his breath away, and his lips quivered.

"All right," Shevchenko said softly. "If I need anything, I will let you know, and you will help me."

"Yes, yes! Certainly!"

Lazarevsky clasped Shevchenko's hand and pressed it with both of his.

"Do not lose courage. It's just a temporary affair! Everything will pass! It cannot but pass. So hold out!"

Shevchenko looked round. The two suspicious characters in tattered greatcoats had come still closer and eavesdropped openly. Somehow he had to warn this trusting and exalted young man. Recalling nothing better than a phrase he had frequently heard in the aristocratic homes when the nobles warned one another not to speak without reserve in the presence of the servants, he said:

"Prenez garde: les gens!"

Shevchenko got up, letting Lazarevsky understand that it was time to terminate the conversation. Lazarevsky turned red in the face and jumped to his feet.

"Yes, yes. You are quite right, Taras..."

"...Grigorievich," the poet prompted, seeing off his new friend; and this time he shook his hand in a warm and strong manner.

Lazarevsky rushed out of the fortress as though he took wing, passionately determined to plead for Shevchenko, regardless

of whether the poet wanted it or not. Without knocking on the door, he flew into the office of the manager of the border commission, General Ladizhensky, which he usually entered only on official business and timidly at that.

"Your Excellency!" he cried out from the threshold. "Shevchenko has been brought here. Our famous Kobzar! I saw him and spoke to him. What misfortune! We must help him somehow!"

The general looked up in surprise, regarded the young man attentively, tiny wrinkles fanned out from the corners of his usually stern, steel-cold eyes; a kindly smile fluttered and disappeared under his gray mustache. He understood that passionate and sincere impulse of the soul, but it had to be dampened somehow lest the cruel blow rebound on that bright-haired head. So lending his voice a ring of stern officialdom, the general said:

"First of all, young man, you forgot to greet me on entering, and secondly, Shevchenko most probably deserved such a bitter fate. Besides, such things have to be approached with particular care and thought before voicing one's sympathy for the convict, the more so before resenting the verdict of a court of law. And generally," he raised his voice, "I am utterly surprised that you approach me with such a request. The office I head is unrelated whatsoever to the Third Department of the Office of His Imperial Highness, which considers such matters, nor to the war ministry, under whose authority Shevchenko finds himself right now. So from all points of view I have no possibility or right to interfere in the fate of your protégé."

Lazarevsky was taken aback, his face turned red, he muttered something incoherently, his cap slipped from his fingers, and he darted out of the office. The general gave a sigh and shook his head. "That's how such effusive young men destroy themselves. He could get into an ugly mess now. But what a fresh and unspoiled nature he still has! He is on active duty for the third year now, but he is still as fervent as a student."

The general got up from behind his desk, picked up the cap, shook his head again, and rang a bell.

"Catch up with Mr. Lazarevsky and give him his cap," he ordered the courier.

Sad and oppressed, Lazarevsky returned to his office where he, together with Levitsky and Galevinsky, started to think how they might help Shevchenko. After some lengthy arguments they came to a unanimous decision to appeal to Colonel Matveiev, the official who was responsible for special missions in the office of the Orenburg military governor and who was considered omnipotent in Orenburg.

Matveiev came from the Ural Cossacks and in his heart condemned Czar Nicholas' regime which had considerably curtailed the old traditional privileges of the Yayik Cossacks. A sincere and straightforward person, Matveiev hated to give ungrounded promises and dispense perfunctory consolation. After hearing out Lazarevsky, he was obviously moved and even excited. Lazarevsky pleaded that Shevchenko be left in Orenburg, where there were humane and educated people, good doctors, a library, and a kind of cultural life. The colonel did not promise anything, but the young man left his office inspired with hope and confident that their request would at least not be forgotten.

But when Matveiev had looked through Shevchenko's papers the next day, it turned out that the order on his assignment to the Fifth Battalion, billeted partly in Orsk, partly in the neighboring forts, had already been signed, while a copy of the order had been sent to the war ministry in St. Petersburg by special messenger.

Such hurry surprised Matveiev very much. He even had a horseman sent after the messenger, but the courier Widler had left Orenburg that very same morning and taken the messenger along in his *tarantass*. Matveiev's man, nearly riding his horse to death, turned back from the first post station, without having carried out the order.

3. TO THE JAILIAOU!

Ten days after the death of Shakir, the scouts Djantemir had sent to choose, secretly from the other *auls*, and lay claim to the best summer pastures in the Alatau mountains, returned from their mission. Everyone had guessed by now that this year the *aul* would wander much farther than they usually did, but no one dared ask the terrible *bai* about it.

On dismounting, the scouts went directly to Djantemir.

"Well?" the *bai* asked, without responding to their salaams.

"Glory be to Allah and his Prophet," Murzabai replied; Djantemir trusted this forty-year-old man, more than the others, for his thriftiness. "Beyond the river Hi it's already warm, but in the mountains the snow is still knee-deep. We have chosen a good place by a river fed from the huge glacier on the Kungei mountain ridge. Down below there are forests all around, full of berries, nuts and all sorts of fruit."

"I know!" Djantemir interrupted him. "Did you lay the *aul's* claim to it?"

"Of course! We've tied the grass in bunches in nine places by the waterfall, shoveled away the snow, and laid out your *tamga* with black stones on the ground."

"And then the snow will fall and cover up 'my *tamga*' so that it will be impossible to find!" Djantemir remarked derisively. "You've made me happy indeed!"

"There is no reason for you to be angry, Djantemir *Aga*," Murzabai rejoined calmly. "We've painted your *tamga* in yellow on the steep cliffs, then we made notches with axes on the fir trees in a lot of places, and here and there we stripped the bark and branded your *tamga* on the fresh wood with red-hot knives."

"Oh, that's much better," Djantemir gave a nod of satisfaction. "A good thing you thought up. All right, go and have a rest. If it doesn't rain, we'll set out tomorrow."

In the sheds near the *bai's* white yurts stood the light yurts intended for the summer pastures in the mountains. All of

Djantemir's three wives — Zeineb, the thick-set Nurina, and Shauken — were taking down the yurts with the assistance of two servants, and the agile Kuljan was carefully looking them over and telling the servants which of the yurts needed cleaning or patching. Not far away the *jigits* were sharpening their *soyils*, knives and Bukhara yatagans on whetting stones, as if they were preparing not to travel but to engage in a *barimta* or some other kind of raid. In the yurts the women were emptying their trunks and packing separately everything they would be needing for summer, and chose for themselves and their children the best adornments and holiday dresses for the ceremonial departure, while the old people got ready their fishing gear, nets, hooks, and what they called “muzzles” to catch fish in the numerous steppe rivers they would be crossing on their way.

The trek was to be a long one. It would be a happy event only for the children and teenagers riding on camels beside their mothers or on horseback. Everything they would be seeing on the way would be entertaining and joyous. But the shepherds and herders scowled sullenly, since nomadic wandering spelled the hardest and most responsible work for them.

Kumish was worried: she understood that Djantemir would not postpone the departure even for the sake of his own son, but Jaisak could neither ride on horseback nor even get up on his feet without somebody's aid. Kuljan, who brought them milk and mutton every day as she had done when Shakir was still alive, met a weeping Kumish.

“What has happened, dear auntie Kumish?” she said, rushing to the widow.

“It looks like we will have to stay here guarding the winter camp,” Kumish replied, swallowing her tears. “Jaisak cannot ride on horseback yet. And without any cattle we'll die here.”

“But isn't he strong enough to ride a camel? Didn't my father fulfill his promise and give him a horse and a camel?”

“He did, hut where can I get a saddle for a man who still cannot sit or stand?”

"Zeineb has such a saddle," Kuljan exclaimed joyously. "I just saw it by her cattle shed."

"But will she give it to me?"

"I won't even ask her," Kuljan said with a jerk of her braids, her eyes flashing with an impish light. "Just don't ride with all the women up front. If anyone asks where you are, I will say that you went to the grave of Shakir *Aga* to bid him farewell and will catch up with the *aul* at the summer camp. So get on a horse, we'll put Jaisak on the camel, and you'll follow us way behind the *aul*. The horses and sheep will raise such a cloud of dust nobody will see you behind it, and if anybody sees the saddle when we make a halt for the night, they're not going to take it away from you, because I'll be doing the explaining then."

"May Allah bless you, girl," Kumish thanked her from the bottom of her heart, as a pale smile of joy touched her prematurely withered lips.

The morning of the next day was sunny and cloudless. One hour after dawn the *aul* was ready to depart.

The caravan set off in a strict, traditionally established order: the first to gallop ahead were three scouts who were to explore the lay of the land, warn the *aul* of danger if there be any, and choose a place for a halt or for the night. When they disappeared behind the horizon, they were followed by thirty *tyulenguts* who were well armed with *soyils*, *shakpars*, knives, slings, and Bukhara yatagans, and after them came the slowly and solemnly strutting camels.

Up front on the two-humped camels rode the women with their infants and children — all of them dressed in varicolored holiday garb which stood out vividly against the tender green of the vernal grass.

Behind the women the one-humped camels strode along with great dignity, burdened with light travel yurts called *jolim uyami*, and little summer yurts known as *turlin ujami*. Then came the cattle surrounded by mounted shepherds and herders, wolfhounds and sheep dogs. After them walked the camel bearing the sick Jaisak, alongside Kumish riding an old peaceful

mare. A second detachment of armed *jigits* brought up the rear of the caravan.

They moved right across the steppe, without keeping either to streams, caravan tracks or even wells, because with the arrival of spring there was plenty of water everywhere.

After midday the caravan made a halt. The sheep and mares were milked, the flocks and herds were allowed to graze, but the men did not unsaddle the horses: they only slackened the girths and took off the bridles, while the guard intently watched the steppe lest any marauding band of Khivans or other Kazakh tribes at odds with Djantemir might fall on the traveling *aul* and snatch an easy booty. But the halt was uneventful, and three hours later the *aul* set off again after a good rest.

The camel bearing Jaisak strutted forward with a swinging gait, rocking the sick rider to sleep. His youth was gaining the upper hand, and his wounds were slowly healing. Jaisak was happy to stir the fingers of his maimed hand and feel the pain receding with every day. He was disgusted with having been laid up in the yurt, choking on the smoke and steam, and seeing day in and day out how his mother's slave labor for the *bai* was draining her last strength. He dreamed of catching an eagle in the mountains, training him for hunting fox, and selling a lot of furs for which the Russian "mayirs" paid lavishly — and then... The first thing he would do then was put up a good yurt, warm and clean, and maybe leave Djantemir's *aul* completely and wander about with his own flock. Occasionally a number of poor nomads got together into a wandering *aul* and gradually became not exactly rich, but in any case not as poor as they had been before. And then... then his sweet dream about a young wife — a gentle, bashful girl — made his chest rise and fall with deep, stealthy sighs.

4. THE FIRST FRIENDS

Levitsky and Lazarevsky sat by the window, drinking tea, as they leafed through the latest issues of *Sovremennik* (The

Contemporary), *Otechestvennye zapiski* (Annals of the Country) and *Severnaya pchela* (The Northern Bee) and exchanged occasional phrases. Suddenly Lazarevsky put the magazines aside, pushed back his chair, and looked out of the window. On the street in the distance he saw a man of medium height, wearing a round felt hat and a gray tailcoat. The man walked slowly down the street, at times stopping and regarding the buildings attentively.

"That's him! Shevchenko!" Lazarevsky exclaimed and dashed out.

Levitsky had not yet finished buttoning up his embroidered Ukrainian shirt when Lazarevsky led the poet into the room.

"Dear Taras Grigorievich, may I introduce you to my countryman and best friend, Serhiy Levitsky. Both of us studied at the Chernihiv Gymnasium and graduated from university at one and the same time — he in Kiev, I in Kharkiv. Now we're here serving on the border commission."

Levitsky was a broad-shouldered, sturdy man, tall of stature and seemingly much older than the somewhat lean and lanky Lazarevsky. His lively black eyes had a joyous expression, while his swarthy face bubbled with health.

Lazarevsky talked animatedly, not knowing where to seat his famous guest. "I have an elder brother, Mikhailo, here, too. He also works with the border commission, not in Orenburg, but in one of the forts."

"Could it be Orsk by any chance?" Shevchenko asked, sitting down.

"No, Troitsk. Why did you ask about Orsk?"

"It's where I am to serve. At least that's what the colonel told me this morning."

The friends exchanged glances in despair. Had Matveiev deceived them? Shevchenko continued speaking, after he had put his hat on the windowsill and wiped his sweating face.

"He called me over this morning and received me like a good friend: shook my hand, offered me a seat, and said that he had

wanted to leave me in Orenburg, but the order on my assignment had already been signed and he had no right to rescind it. He asked me about St. Petersburg, Brüllow and Zhukovsky, and recalled Pushkin who visited these parts fifteen years ago to gather material about Pugachov. We had a lengthy conversation, and he issued me a leave warrant for two days.”

The young men from Chernihiv exchanged glances again.

“Well, we can confess to you now, dear Taras Grigorievich that we went to see him about you yesterday evening. That’s Matveiev. He’s a decent and humane person, and if he could... It is very difficult to help you now, but I am sure everything will be managed with time. Oh, but why are we just sitting like this? Axinia, bring a samovar, quick!” Lazarevsky called to the housemaid. “Also bring from the cellar everything we’ve got from home. And fry some eggs for three.”

Shortly after the samovar was humming and a sausage was sizzling on a frying pan Levitsky poured *horilka*, steeped in caraway seeds and anise, into glasses. The conversation flowed easily and without restraint. It turned out they had common friends in Kiev and throughout Chernihiv Province, the length and breadth of which Shevchenko had traveled. Soon it became clear to him what sort of people he was talking to and he told them about the Society of Cyril and Methodius and what he had been accused of by the czar’s secret police. Both of the young men were overwhelmed by the tragic fate of Professor Kostomarov who in their student years had not been a professor, but was already known as a talented historian and connoisseur of antiquity. They were appalled by the actions of the traitor Yuzefovich and the careless Andruzsky whose unbridled tongue had caused the greatest harm to the poet. There was a ring of profound sadness in Shevchenko’s voice when he told them what a cruel blow was dealt to Alina Kragelska, Professor Kostomarov’s bride, when she learned about his arrest on the day of their wedding.

“That is why I am still wearing my tailcoat,” Shevchenko

concluded with a bitter smile. "I was in a hurry to get to Kiev for the wedding. Kostomarov had invited me as his best man, but instead of a wedding the gendarmes rushed me off to St. Petersburg. I was apprehended in my summer clothes, because it was already warm in Kiev, the cherry and apple trees were in bloom and so were the chestnut trees, while in St. Petersburg there was deep snow."

He did not say anything about the interrogation. Levitsky and Lazarevsky tried to divert him somehow from his dark recollections, since they did not know yet that keeping silent and nursing his grief made it even more difficult for Shevchenko.

Every conversation has some unexpected break, and when such a moment of silence interrupted the conversation's flow, Shevchenko got up, went to the window and looking at the first stars on the sunset sky, suddenly started to speak about what had grieved him most.

"Worst of all were the sleepless nights in prison when there was no oblivion or rest. I felt as if I were in a stone grave; I looked enviously at the sparrows chirping outside, although I knew pretty well that every single moment they could fall a prey to a hawk or a cat which are as implacable as the gendarmes in their blue uniforms. And still I envied the sparrows.

"You know" — he dropped his voice to a whisper — "at such moments I wanted to turn into hundreds, into thousands of sparrows and fly in a flock through the bars of that cursed prison; or turn into hundreds of mice to burrow under the walls and come out into the light of the other side or, maybe, much farther — abroad, where I'd turn into a human again. I would lie on my bunk, sleeping, or sometimes I'd sink into a nightmare and it **seemed** to me that the executioners eavesdropped on my thoughts and were waiting to rush forward to look for me on the other side of the prison wall and trample the helpless mice in which my human essence rested, and when I became a human again I'd see that they had crushed my hands or eyes or ripped my liver, like Prometheus'."

Shevchenko's lips quivered. He poured himself a glass of wine and emptied it in one draft.

Tears had welled up in Lazarevsky's eyes; Levitsky stared at the floor.

"Did you write anything there?" Levitsky asked, pulling himself together with effort.

"I did — I'll title those poems *In Prison*."

"Read something to us, if it won't distress you," Lazarevsky asked.

Shevchenko fell to thinking.

"Some of the verse I dedicated to Kostomarov," he said at length. "He is a good honest man, but he lives as if in a cloud, believing that schools and education alone will make people more humane and noble. A dreamer, a starry-eyed dreamer. No, that's not the way out! Around us there are tears, misery and slavery, cruel slavery, into which I was born as well. Tears won't move a crocodile! You have to have power, armies, guns and guillotines. Kostomarov, though, is not a fighter. But I like him. I like and respect him. He has been sentenced to imprisonment, after which he will be exiled."

Shevchenko lapsed into silence, probably recalling the opening lines of a poem, and then he recited. At first his voice sounded even and soft, but gradually it gained in force and rang out with tragic power.

"How wonderful!" the young men said of one accord. "Recite us some more, please."

Shevchenko recited again.

Lazarevsky could not restrain himself, turned away and ashamed of his tears, wiped them off with his fist.

"More," Levitsky asked in a dull voice.

Shevchenko's eyes glistened with struggling tears as well, but he checked himself and said: "All right, enough of fraying your nerves. I'll read you another, jollier verse, though written in prison as well." With a voice grown unexpectedly steadier, he recited:

*A cherry garden at the cottage,
Above the trees cockchafers buzz...*

Levitsky and Lazarevsky raised their heads. In their mind's eye they saw a peaceful evening in spring, with dancing chafers and trilling nightingales. The lyrics sounded so simple it seemed that this was not a poem at all, but a real landscape with recreated sounds, smells, a light warm breeze kindly fondling their faces. The walls of their bachelor's home seemed to have disappeared and opened onto their homeland, revived by the charming force of Shevchenko's talent.

Shevchenko fell silent, his hands pressed tightly against his temples.

"I am sure your friends in St. Petersburg will do everything possible to have you freed. They are influential people after all," Levitsky said.

"The dying man is always told that he will get well, and the prisoner sentenced to death that he will be pardoned," Shevchenko said with a bitter smile. "I haven't seen much of freedom anyway: I was born a slave, grew up a slave, and then became free, but not for long. And then, do we really have such a thing as freedom here in Russia?"

Every one of us is like a dog on a chain, with the only difference that one's chain is a bit longer, while another's shorter. Well, enough about that," he said, bringing his fist down on the table. "All that is nerves, and I'll have enough strength to cope with the rest. We'll see yet who'll win!"

Axinia brought in the samovar. She brewed some fresh, strong and aromatic tea. Shevchenko drank it with rum, delighted to feel its pleasant, invigorating warmth flowing through his body.

"How good it feels," he said, placing the empty cup on the table. "Last night and the night before I came down with a cruel fever. I caught a chill on the way: in St. Petersburg and right up to the Volga the nights were dreadfully cold, and the greatcoat they gave me is thin and threadbare."

"So go to the military hospital tomorrow," Lazarevsky said, happy to have hit upon the idea. "Maybe they'll let you stay here while you're ill."

"No," Shevchenko refused flatly. "Shirking isn't my cup of tea. The fever will rattle me some and then everything will be all right. Better tell me about the Orsk Fortress. It must be a pretty hole, since I am being put away there by the 'most pious autocrat?'"

"Well, how can I put it... We have never been there, but all our forts are very much like the Belogorsk Fort in Pushkin's story *The Captain's Daughter*. Orsk Fortress is to the south-east of Orenburg."

"How do you like our town?" Levitsky asked to divert Shevchenko from his thoughts of the bitter future.

"A wretched place I must say," the poet told him frankly. "When you walk down the street, you see only high-jutting fences on either side without a single tree or shrub, and all the buildings look so naked; they might have been covered with ivy, hops or vines at least. I haven't seen a single flowerbed under the windows. Its name, too, sounds so asinine: Orenburg. Does it stand for *long-eared town*?"

The young men burst into hearty, spontaneous laughter.

"That's where you are wrong, dear Taras Grigorievich. *Burg* really is from the German, but *oren* does not mean *ears* in German. It takes its name from the river Or on which now stands the Orsk Fortress, which itself was the original Orenburg. Later on it was thought that the upper reaches, of the Ural were poor in water for a big town, so the town was moved to this place where the river is much fuller."

"Oh, I see," Shevchenko said. Suddenly he began to sing in a pleasant, powerful baritone:

On the meadow, by the birch tree...

Levitsky, who had a wondrously beautiful tenor, immediately picked up the song, and their voices flowed forth, intertwining

melodiously and harmoniously. Lazarevsky also tried to join them, although his voice was much weaker.

After that they sang a second, then a third song. The singing was interspersed by recollections about Kiev, their student pranks and sport, the boat rides down the Dnieper, the merry and noisy Kiev fairs, and the wonderful church choruses ringing under the ancient vaults of Saint Sophia Cathedral which was built eight hundred years ago and held the remains of the great lawgiver of Kievan Rus, Yaroslav the Wise, in a marble sarcophagus.

Levitsky produced another bottle of strong blackthorn homemade liqueur and poured everyone a full glass. It inflamed their minds and they burst into another song when suddenly a wooden cuckoo popped out of its neatly carved "house" on the wall clock and announced the hour. Shevchenko clutched his head.

"Oh, my goodness! It's half past one! The gates of the fortress are closed at midnight!"

"Stay the night at our place," the young men said, unabashed. "Tomorrow, that is, today is a Sunday and we'll deal with the unpleasant consequences through the very same Matveiev."

"I don't think you'll have to, because I've got a leave pass for two days," Shevchenko put their minds at ease. "But I'm afraid I'll be too much of a bother to you."

"Oh no!" Lazarevsky exclaimed. "We're very glad to have your company."

Nobody was in a mood to sleep, however. Only after the lights were out did the young men pluck up enough courage to ask Shevchenko to read the verse for which he had been so cruelly punished by Czar Nicholas.

Shevchenko recited them his epistle *To the Dead, the Living and the Unborn...* as well as his long poems *A Dream* and *The Caucasus*.

Levitsky and Lazarevsky listened spellbound. Some of the allusions, though, they did not understand, but they dared not interrupt the great Bard with questions. New and hitherto

unseen and unknown horizons opened to their minds as they listened to his poetry. They seemed to hear the moans of the tortured and see the tears of slaves, as all these sounds merged into a single outcry of suffering, a mighty torrent of indignation and anger as mighty as the Dnieper's cataracts and as dazzling as a thunderstorm in the steppe. Here was an absolutely different Shevchenko, not the sad bard deploring the lot of a betrayed and abandoned country girl, neither a chronicler of the hoary past, nor a landscapist fascinated by the beauty of Ukraine's scenery. Before them was a formidable exposé whose words lashed out at the provincial lordlings, ludicrous in their aping of all things foreign, and at petty tyrants whose liberal word mongering did not stop them from committing any crime or exercising wanton and barbarous despotism.

Here was a champion advocating the overthrow of the obsolete czarist machinery of state. He censured the arrogant and adulating officials, bribers, vanity-minded persons and toadies, and he called on the people to shed their shackles and build a free, honest and new life, in which every man would find his place and his work — not that of a slave, but work chosen as a vocation to bring joy and lend a purpose to human existence. And the young men understood that the verdict which had doomed the poet was prompted to the czar not so much by personal offense as by fear of the tribune of the people.

"I wonder whether he himself read that poetry?" Levitsky asked, after the poet fell silent.

Shevchenko shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably it was read to him or simply retold."

Nobody wanted to sleep. Their conversation was alternated by songs, in which they gave vent not only to their feelings and love for their homeland but also to what they had experienced, which a great Greek philosopher called catharsis — the purification of the emotions through art.

In the east, dawn was breaking, heralding the birth of a new day.

During breakfast Shevchenko's new friends asked him about his personal belongings.

"The manuscripts and drawings were taken away by the gendarmes, and the rest remained in prison," he answered indifferently. "With the little money I have about me I'll have to buy myself something for the summer, because it will be too hot and I'd look funny going around in a tailcoat."

That was enough for Lazarevsky to plunge into a flurry of activity. He called the housemaid Axinia and told her to clean and press Shevchenko's tailcoat, and to wash and starch his shirt. Levitsky offered to lend some money and a canvas suit. Shevchenko refused to accept the money but tried the suit on, and Axinia volunteered to shorten its legs and sleeves a little bit. Then she recalled that the husband of the landlady had recently died and left quite a few of his things. The young men took him immediately to the landlady who, on learning that Shevchenko was an artist and in exile besides, brought a summer coat from her wardrobe and flatly refused to take any money for it, adding to the coat several pairs of underwear, a straw hat, and a pair of warm winter trousers.

"This is not a present, but rather a down payment," she said to ease his embarrassment. "Once you are freed, you will paint a portrait of my late husband from this little daguerreotype. Consider me your first customer."

After parting with his new friends, Shevchenko took a walk around the town.

Dust and sweltering heat hovered over Orenburg. Its central part was a cluster of public buildings: the two-storied palace of the governor, beside it a large building occupied by the military district commander, a little farther away the Gymnasium, the building of the provincial revenue department, a military school, and a school for the girls of the nobility — all of them dull-looking in the heavy architectural style of Czar Nicholas' reign, and all of them painted with bright yellow ochre. On the square was a clumsily designed cathedral with a huddle of beggars on

the porch, an arcade with short smooth columns painted white, and a little to one side was a prison castle — simply a prison with guards on the watch towers behind the tall brick walls. All around there were innumerable monotonous single-storey buildings of wood, with blackened, unpainted tiny windows, tightly shut gates, and tall enclosures without a single chink.

There were practically no civilians in sight, except for some occasional old woman carrying a couple of wicker baskets or pails of water.

Helmets and epaulettes. Epaulettes and helmets. Soldiers and Cossacks, Shevchenko thought as he walked across the hot velvety dust. It's not a town but a military camp.

The streets all looked alike: on the dirt road lay heaps of ashes, at the crossing was a pile of rubbish, and on the market place the wind was whirling around wisps of hay, dirty paper, husks and dust. Salesmen or a proprietor-merchant yawned from boredom in the shops scattered here and there, and gawked at the strange pedestrian; and in the lower part of the town stood a green nondrying puddle in which two ducks splashed about and a mud-covered sow lounged. It seemed that the silence was suspended in the air along with the dust and sweltering heat, occasionally interrupted by the barking of a dog or the soul-rending sounds of a waltz coming from a barrel organ.

Without realizing how he came there, Shevchenko found himself in the steppe and suddenly saw on the horizon the outlines of the caravanserai and beside it the dome of the mosque and the tall stone needle of the minaret.

The minaret was much farther away than he had thought at first. Its narrow door was open. Behind it, in the semi-darkness, he saw the barely distinguishable stairway rising in a spiral. Shevchenko stopped in indecision: he wanted to climb the stairs and look at the steppe, the town, and the deep churning Ural River from thirty meters up, but the heat and walk had exhausted him, and it occurred to him that the faithful might

take his unwonted intrusion as an offense against their holy shrine.

So Shevchenko only walked round the minaret, admiring its revetment of rose granite and the facing of intricate cornices of colored tiles covered with clear-cut geometrical ornaments girding the wall in several bands. Then he came up to the mosque and was about to cross its threshold when an old Kazakh wearing a white turban shook him by the shoulder and angrily gestured at his feet. Shevchenko stopped in surprise, but seeing that everyone entering the mosque took off their footwear first, he pulled off his shoes as well. The old man in the turban gave him a nod and motioned for him to enter.

It was cool and quiet inside the mosque. The air in it smelled pleasantly of the steppe grasses. Shevchenko wearily sat down on the deep-pile carpets covering the marble floor and crossed his legs in Oriental fashion. He did not notice how long he was sitting like that, engrossed in dreamy contemplation, while his tortured soul found respite and all his anxieties faded away in his torpor.

Loud voices from the threshold of the mosque jolted him back to reality. He got up and went outdoors.

Opposite the mosque rose the tall blank wall of brick of the caravanserai. A motley crowd milled about on the huge square of the caravanserai. There were quite a few Kazakhs, or Kirghiz as they were called at that time, and Russian merchants. Shevchenko was dazed by the varicolored and unexpectedly thrilling scene that unfolded before his eyes. He could not make up his mind what was better to look at: the arrogantly disdainful camels looking down on this feverish bustle, or the proudly dignified Bukharans in shiny silken robes and with faces the color of dark bronze, murky black eyes and aquiline noses, or the Kazakhs with their mysteriously calm slitlike eyes looking down from light-footed steppe horses, or the Uzbeks wearing lavish turbans bobbing above their gray little donkeys.

"Taras Grigorievich, can it really be you?" a familiar voice asked from behind him.

Zinaida Tulub's novel *The Exile* is one of the most brilliant works in the canon of fiction about Taras Shevchenko, the outstanding Ukrainian poet and artist.

The idea of writing about Taras Shevchenko first occurred to her when she was in her thirties. Initially, Tulub worked on the screenplay for a film called *Kobzar and Yakin*, which can be seen as an early prototype for the novel. Tulub's primary goal in the novel was to celebrate Taras Shevchenko's indomitable will and his burning desire to fight for the liberation of the nation, even when he was in exile.

Armed with a wealth of detailed biographical information about Shevchenko, Zinaida Tulub created a thrilling portrait of the poet that is both historically accurate and artistically convincing.

Depicting the first period of Shevchenko's exile in a detailed, comprehensive manner, Zinaida Tulub adheres strictly to the historical timeline, tracing step by step the path that fate had in store for the exiled poet. She doesn't leave out a single detail from Shevchenko's life, adding light and shade to every important moment or turning point along that treacherous path.



Zinaida Tulub was born in Kiev in 1890. She was the granddaughter of an active member of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood. Tulub graduated from the Advanced Courses for Women (an educational establishment in Kiev) in 1913. She wrote the story *At the Crossroads* (in Russian, 1916) and two historical novels in Ukrainian: *Hunters of*

Men, which is set in Ukraine in the early 17th century, and *On the Boundless Steppe Beyond the Urals* (1964), about T. G. Shevchenko's life in exile. During the Soviet era, she switched to writing in Ukrainian. Tulub also wrote poems, plays and screenplays and translated works by various Ukrainian and French writers into Russian.

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