

M. Prishvin



THE SUN'S STOREHOUSE



Mikhail Prishvin

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THE SUN'S STOREHOUSE

A true fairy-tale

1

Two little children were orphaned in a village not far from the Bludov Marsh, outside the town of Pereslavl-Zalesski. Their mother died of an illness, and their father was killed in the Patriotic War.

We lived in the same village, only two doors away from the house where these children lived. And so of course we did what we could, with the other neighbours, to help them. They were very sweet. Nastya was like a long-legged golden chicken. Her hair was neither dark nor fair, but shot through with gold, and she had big freckles like golden coins all over her face, they were so thickly scattered that there hardly seemed to be room for them, and they spread on all sides. The only place free from them was her little turned-up nose.

Mitya was two years younger than his sister. He was only ten. He was short and very sturdy, with a big forehead and a broad back of his head. He was a stubborn strong little boy.

The schoolteachers called him among themselves "The Little Farmer".

Like Nastya's, his face was a mass of golden freckles, and his nose, too, was free from freckles and turned up at the end. The peasant homestead became the property of the children after their parents' death—a large cottage, the cow Zorka, the calf Dochka, the goat Dereza, some anonymous sheep and chickens, Petya, the golden cock, and Khren, the pigling.

With this wealth the poor little things inherited many cares for all these living creatures. But our children had to overcome greater troubles during the strenuous years of the Patriotic War. At first some distant relations of the children, and we who were their neighbours, came to their aid. But soon the children, who were very intelligent and the best of friends, learned to do everything themselves, and got on splendidly.

What clever children they were! Whenever possible they took part in the life of the village. Their little noses were seen in the fields, meadows, and stock-yards of the collective farm, at meetings and in the anti-tank ditches. And these little noses were extremely perky.

Although we were new arrivals to the village, we were familiar with the life going on in every house. And it is safe to say that there was not a single house in which the inhabitants lived and worked so harmoniously as in the house of our little favourites.

Just like her mother, Nastya got up long before the sun, before day began to break, as soon as she heard the shepherd sound his horn. She drove her beloved flock through the gate with a twig in her hand, and trundled back to the cottage. She did not go back to bed but heated the stove, peeled the potatoes, got the dinner ready, and kept busy right till the evening.

Mitya's father had taught him to make vessels from wood—barrels, tubs, troughs. He had a joiner's plane and a cooper's instrument twice as tall as himself. And

with this instrument he knocked boards together, adjusted them, and put iron or wooden hoops round them.

Since they had a cow the children did not really need to sell wooden vessels in the market, but there were always plenty of good folk who wanted a tub to go under the washstand, a rain-water butt, a little vat for salted cucumbers or mushrooms, or simply a small wooden receptacle with a zigzag rim for potted plants.

Mitya would do what was wanted, and the recipient would do him a good turn. But aside from his cooper's work he had to do all the man's jobs on the farm, and he also had his social responsibilities. He attended all the collective farm meetings, trying to understand what the social tasks meant and no doubt taking something in.

It was a very good thing that Nastya was two years older than her brother, otherwise he would certainly have put on airs, and the friendship, the wonderful equality between them would never have existed. As it was, Mitya every now and then remembered how his father had told his mother what to do, and took it in his head to order his sister Nastya about in the same way. But his sister took very little notice, only stood there smiling... Then the Little Farmer would lose his temper and strut about, bristling up and saying:

“So there!”

“What are you bristling up about?”

“So there!” her brother would repeat angrily. “It's you who's bristling up, Nastya, not me.”

“No, it's you!”

“So there!”

After teasing her obstinate brother a little, Nastya would give him a pat on the back of the head, and as soon as this small hand touched the broad back of his head, the master of the house would abandon the tone of assumed parental authority.

“Let’s weed the kitchen-garden!” the sister would say.

And they would both set to weeding the cucumber beds, or the potato patch, or would hoe the beet-root.

2



The cranberry, that tart but wholesome berry, grows in the bogs in the summer, and is gathered in the late autumn. But it is not everyone who knows that the cranberry is at its best, is *sweet* as we say here, after it has wintered beneath the snow.

That spring the snow still lingered in the dense copses of firs till the end of April, but it was a great deal warmer on the bogs, and by now there was no snow left at all. When Mitya and Nastya discovered this, they decided to go and look for cranberries. Nastya had fed all her charges before daybreak. Mitya shouldered his father’s double-barrelled Tula gun, pocketed a grouse whistle, and did not forget to take the compass. His father had never gone into the woods without this compass. Mitya had often asked him:

“You’ve been going about the woods all your life, you know them so well. What do you need that thing for?”

“You see, son,” his father would answer, “that thing is better than your own mother when you’re in the woods. Sometimes the sky clouds over and you can’t find your way in the woods by the sun, and have to guess which direction to take, and make a mistake, lose your way, get hungry. But you only have to look at the

needle and it tells you where your house is. Follow the needle all the way home and you will find food and shelter there. That needle is your best friend—your own people may deceive you, but the needle always points north, wherever you are, however you turn and twist it.”

With a fond glance at the miraculous object, Mitya fixed the needle so that it should not quiver needlessly on the way. He wound strips of linen neatly round his feet as his father used to, and tucked them into his boots, then he put on a cap so old that the peak gaped—the uppermost layer reaching up towards the sun, the lower descending almost to his nose. He next put on his father’s old jacket, or rather a collar which held together strips of what had once been good homespun. The lad secured these strips over his stomach with a belt, and his father’s jacket made a coat for him, reaching to the very ground. The hunter’s son then thrust an axe into his belt, slung a pouch with the compass in it over his right shoulder and the double-barrelled Tula gun over his left, thus making himself a thing of terror for all birds and beasts.

Nastya prepared for the expedition by folding a long towel into a shoulder strap and attaching a large basket to the ends.

“What’s the towel for?” asked Mitya.

“Why—have you forgotten?” exclaimed Nastya. “Don’t you remember how Mummy used to go for mushrooms?”

“Mushrooms! A lot you know! There’s always such a lot of mushrooms that the strap cuts your shoulder.”

“And how do you know there won’t be even more cranberries?”

Mitya was just going to come out with his “So there!” when he remembered what his father had told them about cranberries, before he went away to the war.

“Do you remember what Father told us about cranberries, and the Palestine* in the woods?”

“I remember him telling us he knew a place where the cranberries simply drop into your hand,” said Nastya, “but I don’t know anything about any Palestine. And I remember him telling us about an awful place called the Blind swamp.”

“Well—the Palestine is just next to it,” said Mitya. “Father said—go to the High Knoll and then keep on going north, and when you have crossed the ridge of the Echoing Woods, keep on going north and you will see the Palestine coming to meet you, as red as blood, because it’s all over cranberries. Nobody has ever yet been there.”

Mitya said this as he was going out of the house. While he was talking Nastya remembered that there was a whole pot of boiled potatoes left over from yesterday. Forgetting all about the Palestine, she slipped quietly to the stove and spilt the potatoes out of the pot into her basket.

“We might get lost,” she said to herself. “We have plenty of bread with us and a bottle of milk, and the potatoes might come in handy too.”

Her brother, who thought his sister was just behind him all the time, went on telling her about the Palestine, which was so wonderful, but to get to it you had to cross the Blind swamp where many had perished—human beings, cows, and horses.

“Well, then, tell me about this Palestine of yours.”

“So you weren’t listening?” he exclaimed.

And he patiently repeated to her as they went along what he had heard from his father about this Palestine which nobody knew about, and where the sweet cranberries grew.

* Palestine, a word given by country people for some favourite spot in the woods.

The Bludov* Marsh where we ourselves have so often lost our way, starts like almost every big swamp, with a dense thicket of willows, alders and other bushes. The first person to make his way through this approach to the bog had done so with an axe in his hand, hacking out a passage for those who came after. Human feet had trodden down the hummocks on the surface of the bog, and the path had become a ditch filled with flowing water. In the dark before the dawn the children got through this place without much difficulty. And when the view was no longer obscured by bushes, the swamp lay before them in the early morning light, like a sea. As a matter of fact this Bludov Marsh had once upon a time been the bottom of an ancient sea. And just as there are islands in the real sea, and oases in the desert, there are mounds in bogs. In our Bludov Marsh these mounds are sandy and covered with pinewood, and the people call them *borina*. Passing a little way over the swamp the children got on the nearest mound which went by the name of High Knoll, where, by standing on a bare spot on the top, they could just make out the Echoing Woods, hazy in the grey light of the approaching dawn.

Before they had reached the Echoing Woods they began to see blood-red berries here and there quite close to the path. At first they popped these berries into their mouths. Anyone who had never tasted autumn cranberries and began by eating the spring berries would hardly be able to endure their acidity. But the village orphans knew very well what autumn cranberries were,

* Untranslatable allusion. The name *Bludov* Marsh means "marsh where people lose their way".—*Tr.*

and so, when they tasted the spring berries, they exclaimed:

“How sweet!”

The Echoing Woods offered the children the freedom of a spacious glade, which was even now, in April, covered with dark-green whortleberry leaves.

Amidst this last year’s greenery the white snowdrops and the tiny, fragrant purple blossoms of what we call “wolves’ bast” peeped out here and there.

“They smell so nice, try to pick one of them,” said Mitya.

Nastya tried to break off a stem but could not.

“Why is it called wolves’ bast?” she asked.

“Father said the wolves weave themselves baskets from them,” her brother answered. And he laughed.

“And are there still wolves here?”

“Aren’t there just? Father said the awful Grey Squire wolf lives here.”

“Oh, yes, the one that used to kill our sheep before the war!”

“Father said he lives down the Dried-Up Stream.”

“He won’t attack us?”

“He’d better try!” said the hunter with the split peak to his cap.

While the children chattered, and the morning grew towards sunrise, the Echoing Woods were filled with bird song, and with the howlings, gruntings and cries of small animals. They did not all come from the mound, but they all resounded against it, from the damp, soft surface of the bog. The mound, with its pines, resonant on its dry slope, gave back echoes to all these sounds.



How the poor birds and animals strained themselves to say something which everyone should understand, just one beautiful word! And children, even such simple children as Nastya and Mitya, understood their efforts. They all wanted to utter just one beautiful word.

A bird was singing on a bough, and every feather in its body could be seen quivering from its efforts. But birds cannot use words as we can, so they have to warble, to utter cries, to tap out their meaning.

“Rat-tat!” rapped out the huge wood grouse, but it could scarcely be heard in the dark wood.

“Quack-quack!” cried the wild drake as it flew over the river.

“Criak-criak!” came from the wild duck on the lake.

“Goo-goo!” gurgled the pretty bull-finch from a birch-tree.

The snipe, a small, grey bird with a long beak like a flattened hairpin, rent the air with sounds like the bleating of a wild ram. The woodcock seemed to be crying “It’s me, me!” Somewhere a black grouse was muttering and chuckling, and the willow ptarmigan laughed fiendishly.



We hunters learned long ago, in our childhood, to distinguish, to welcome, to understand the words they are all vainly striving to utter. And when we go into the woods in the early spring at dawn, and hear their voices, we say these words to them as if they could understand us—“Good morning!”

And then they seem to be happy, too, as if they had also caught up the wonderful word escaping from the lips of human beings.

And in reply they utter their quacks and rat-tats, trying to greet us in all their voices:



“Good morning! Good morning!”

But amidst all these sounds one, which was like no other, could be distinctly heard.

“Hear that?” said Mitya.

“Of course I do,” replied Nastya. “I’ve been listening to

it for a long time and it frightens me.”

“There’s nothing to be frightened of. Father told me about it, and showed me, too—that’s how hares cry in the spring.”

“Why do they?”

“Father said they’re trying to say: ‘Good morning, Mother-Hare!’”

“And what’s that booming sound?”

“Father said it was the bittern, the marsh bull.”

“And what makes it boom?”

“Father said it has a wife, and is saying ‘Good morning, Mistress Bittern’ to her, like everyone does.”

And suddenly everything was fresh and cheerful as if the earth had been washed all over, the sky became bright, and a delicious smell came from the bark and buds of all the trees.

And at that very moment, drowning all the other sounds, and quite different from them all, came a triumphant shout, like the shout men would give if they could all shout together with joy:

“Victory! Victory!”

“What’s that?” asked Nastya, radiant with happiness.

“Father told me it was the cranes greeting the sun. It means the sun will soon be up.”

But the sun had not yet risen when the seekers after sweet cranberries got down to the great marsh. Here the

ceremony of greeting the sun had not yet begun. The small, crooked firs and birches were still tucked up in a blanket of grey mist which muffled the lovely sounds coming from the Echoing Woods. The only sound was a heart-breaking, plaintive groan.

“What’s that, Mitya?” asked Nastya, shrinking. “What’s that howling so dreadfully, far away?”

“Father said,” replied Mitya, “it was the wolves howling over the Dried-Up Stream. I expect that’s the Grey Squire. Father said all the wolves on the bank of the Dried-Up Stream have been killed, but nobody can kill the Grey Squire.”

“Why does he howl so dreadfully?”

“Father said the wolves howl in the spring because there’s nothing for them to eat. And the Grey Squire is all alone, so he howls.”

The dampness of the marsh seemed to penetrate their bodies and chill their very bones. They didn’t feel a bit inclined to go further into the damp, oozy bog.

“Which path shall we take?” asked Nastya.

Mitya took out the compass, discovered where the north was, and said, pointing to a faint track leading north:

“We’re going north along that path.”

“No,” said Nastya, “we’re going along that big path where everyone goes. Don’t you remember Father telling us about that frightful Blind swamp, and how many people and animals perished there? No, no, Mitya dear, don’t let’s go there! Everyone goes this way, so it must be there that the cranberries grow.”

“A lot you know about it!” the hunter interrupted her. “We’re going north, the way Father told me, that’s where the Palestine is, where nobody has ever yet been.”



Nastya, seeing that her brother was beginning to get angry, suddenly smiled and stroked the back of his head. Mitya calmed down at once, and the friends took the path shown by the needle, no longer side by side, but walking in Indian file.

4

Some two hundred years ago the sower-wind wafted two seeds to the Bludov Marsh—the seed of a pine-tree and the seed of a fir-tree. They both fell into the same hollow beside a large flat stone. And the pine-tree and the fir-tree grew up together. Their roots became intertwined in their infancy, their trunks soared upward towards the light side by side, striving to overtake one another. These trees of different species fought with their roots for sustenance, with their branches for light and air. As they grew taller and taller, their trunks thickening, they pierced one another's living bodies with their dry branches, in some places driving them right through the trunks. The malicious wind which had forced such a wretched life on the trees, sometimes flew overhead to make their branches sway. And then the trees groaned and howled all over the Bludov Marsh like living creatures, so that the fox, rolled up in a ball on the mossy crust of the marsh, lifted her sharp nose. These groans and howls affected all living creatures, and a dog which had run wild in the marsh, hearing them, would howl its longing for man, while the wolf howled its undying hatred for him.

The children reached the place of the Flat Stone just at the moment when the first rays of the sun flying over the low crooked marsh firs and birches were lighting up

the Echoing Woods, making the powerful trunks of the pines look like candles burning in some great temple of nature. The birds' greeting to the rising of the great sun reached this flat stone on which the children sat down to rest, very faintly.

The whole of nature was utterly still and the children, now rather chilly, were so quiet that the black grouse, Kosach, took no notice of them. He was perched high overhead, where the branches of the pine and the fir were interlaced, forming a bridge between the two trees. Kosach, establishing himself at this place, which was quite a broad one for him, nearer to the fir than to the pine, seemed to be blossoming in the rays of the rising sun. The crest on his head blazed like a fiery flower, the blue glint in his black breast-feathers looked almost green. His brightly coloured tail, spread out in the form of a lyre, was the most beautiful part of him. Catching sight of the sun as it rose above the puny marsh firs, Kosach gave a sudden leap on his elevated bridge, disclosing the snow-white, perfectly laundered underclothes beneath his tail and wings, and cried:

"Choo, chee!"

Choo, in black grouse language, probably stands for "sun", while *chee* may be an equivalent for our "good morning".

In answer to this first "choo-chee", the mating-call of Kosach, the entire marsh resounded with the same cry, accompanied by a great flapping of wings, and in a very short time big birds, strikingly like our Kosach, came to the Flat Stone by the dozen, and perched round it.

The children were sitting on the cold stone, waiting with bated breath for the sun's rays to fall upon them and warm them a little. At last the first ray, lighting up the tops of the small fir-trees nearby, played on the

children's cheeks. And Kosach, from his seat on the boughs overhead, paid his respects to the sun by desisting from his jumps and "choo-chees". Crouching low on his lofty perch, he stretched his long neck along the bough, and embarked on a long-drawn song like the gurgling of a stream. In reply dozens of birds, all cocks like himself, and exactly like him, stretched their necks out and took up his song. Now it sounded as if a great river were splashing and gurgling over invisible pebbles.

Time and again we hunters, sitting through the dark, chilly hours of early morning listening with awe, have tried to understand this song. And when we tried to repeat their mutterings in our own way, it would come something like this:

*Ur-tur-goo,
I'll fly at you!
Ur-tur-goo,
At you, at you!*

Thus warbled the black grouse in friendly unison, while getting ready for a fight. And while they warbled their song, a little incident took place in the very depths of the dense fir-top. A Mother-Crow sat on her nest, trying hard to avoid notice from Kosach, who was singing his mating-song quite close to the nest. The crow would gladly have driven Kosach away, but she did not dare expose her eggs to the chill air of morning. The Father-Crow, whose duty it was to guard the nest, had not yet come back from his morning rounds; he had probably met with something of a suspicious nature on his flight, and was therefore late. Awaiting his return, the Mother-Crow crouched in her nest, keeping as quiet as a mouse. Suddenly she saw her mate flying towards

the nest, and uttered a loud "Kra!", obviously signifying "Help!"

"Kra!" cawed Father-Crow, addressing his remark to the singers, implying that there was no knowing who would fly at whom.

Taking the situation in at a glance, Father-Crow alighted upon the bridge of boughs on which his nest was built and where Kosach was singing his mating-song but nearer the pine-tree. Taking no notice whatever of the crow, Kosach gave a call familiar to all hunters:

"Car-car-caks!"

It was a signal for the fight of the mating-cocks to begin. How the feathers flew! As if he, too, were obeying the signal, Father-Crow took a few mincing steps along the bridge towards Kosach.

Seated on the stone, motionless as statues, were our hunters after sweet cranberries. The sun, warm and clear, rose opposite them above the stunted marsh firs. At the same time a small cloud appeared in the sky. It shot across the rising sun like a cold blue arrow, dividing it in two. A gust of wind made the pine-tree lean against the fir, which growled in reply.

Refreshed by their rest on the stone, and warmed by the sun, Nastya and Mitya got up to go on with their journey. But from the very foot of the stone the wide marsh path was forked: one path, looking safe and firm, went to the right, while a fainter one pointed straight ahead.

Verifying the directions of the paths with his compass, Mitya pointed to the fainter path and said:

"We have to take that one, it goes north."

"But it's not a path at all," retorted Nastya.

"So there!" said Mitya angrily. "People have walked along it, and that means it is a path! We must go north. Come on, and stop talking."





Nastya felt the indignity of submitting to Mitya, who was her junior.

“Kra!” cried the Mother-Crow from her nest.

Father-Crow took a few more steps towards Kosach along the bridge, covering half the distance between them this time.

A second dark-blue arrow crossed the sun’s face, and grey clouds gathered in the sky.

Nastya took courage and tried to talk her brother round.

“Look how firm my path is,” she said. “Everyone goes this way. Why should we think ourselves cleverer than other people?”

“Let others go that way,” said the obstinate Little Farmer resolutely. “We must follow the needle, as Father taught me, and go north towards the Palestine.”

“Father was telling us fairy-tales, he didn’t really mean it,” said Nastya. “And very likely, there is no such place as the Palestine. It would be very silly of us to follow the needle: we won’t find any Palestine, but we’re sure to land in the Blind swamp.”

“All right,” said Mitya suddenly, turning away. “I won’t argue with you any more. You go along your path, where all the women go for their cranberries, and I’ll take mine, to the north, all by myself.”

And he walked away along his path, forgetting all about the basket for the cranberries, and the food.

Nastya ought to have reminded him about it, but she was so angry that she only spat after him, her face as red as fire, and went along the common path for her cranberries.

“Kra!” said the Mother-Crow.

And Father-Crow, quickly covering the distance between himself and Kosach, gave the latter a peck with all his might. Kosach started as if someone had poured

boiling water down his back and endeavoured to join the other grouse, who were flying away, but the irate crow overtook him, pulled a bunch of feathers, white and multi-coloured, from his tail, scattering them in the wind, flying after him, chasing him far away from his nest.

Then the grey mass in the sky came lower down, obscuring the sun and its vivifying rays. A sharp blast came from the cruel wind. The trees with the intertwined roots, piercing one another with their boughs, filled the Bludov Marsh with their howling, growling and moaning.

5

So piteous was the wail raised by the trees that it brought the hound Travka out of the half-covered potato pit near Antipych's hut, and she began howling in unison with the trees.

What was it that made the dog leave its warm, comfortable lair so early in the morning and join the trees in their piteous wail?

The howling, growling and moaning of the trees that morning made one think of a child, abandoned or lost in the woods and crying bitterly.

And that was the one sound

Travka could not endure, it would rouse her at midnight, at any time of the night. The dog could not stand the wail raised by the two trees condemned to grow together forever, for they reminded her of her own grief.

It was now two years since the terrible disaster had come upon Travka: her worshipped forester, the old hunter Antipych had died.



For years we had been in the habit of going over to Antipych to hunt. Antipych was so old he had himself lost count of his years, he lived on and on in his hunting-lodge, and it seemed he would never die.

“How old are you, Antipych?” we used to ask. “Are you eighty?”

“More.”

“A hundred?”

“Less.”

Thinking he was merely making fun of us, and knew how old he really was, we would go on:

“Tell us the truth—Antipych, how old are you, really?”

“The truth,” the old man would answer. “I will tell you the truth, if you tell me what truth is, what it is like, where it lives, how one can find it.”

It was hard to find an answer to that.

“You’re older than us, Antipych,” we said. “Surely, you know more about truth than we do!”

“I do,” Antipych would answer with a chuckle.

“Well, then, tell us!”

“No, I can’t tell you yet awhile, you must search for it yourselves. Come to me just before I die, and I’ll whisper into your ears all the truth. You will come, won’t you?”

“Of course we will. But we might not know when to come, and you may die without us.”

The old man screwed up his eyes as he did when in a teasing mood.

“You’re not such babies yourselves, you know,” he said. “It’s time you found something out for yourselves, but you go on asking questions instead. All right, if I happen to die when you’re not here, I’ll whisper it into Travka’s ear. Travka!” he called.

A big reddish dog with a black narrow stripe running

down its back entered the hut. It had a black semi-circle under each eye and this made its eyes seem bigger than they were and now those big eyes seemed to be saying:

“What did you call me for, Master?”

Antipych looked at her in a special way, and the dog understood the man at once: it had been a friendly summons, he had no orders to give, but merely wished for her company, to share a good-natured joke. Travka wagged her tail, sinking her body lower as she advanced, and at last crawling up to the old man's knees, she turned herself over on her back, displaying a light-coloured belly with six pairs of black nipples. Before Antipych had time to stretch his arm out to stroke her, she was up again, her front paws on his shoulders, licking his nose, his cheeks, even his lips.

“That'll do, that'll do,” he said, calming the dog and wiping his face with his sleeve.

Then, patting her on the head, he said once more: “That'll do, now, go back.”

Travka turned and went out.

“There you are, friends,” said Antipych. “Look at Travka, a mere hound, she understands everything I say, and you, my sillies, you must go on asking where truth lives. All right then, try and be here when the time comes. And if you should miss me, I'll whisper it all to Travka.”

And one day Antipych died. Soon after that the Great Patriotic War began. No other forester was appointed in his place, and his lodge was left empty. The house was very old, older even than Antipych himself, and it had to be propped all round. One day the wind, seeing the master was absent, thought it would have a little game with the hut, and the hut fell apart as a card-house falls when a child breathes on it. In less than a year the tall stalks of the willow-herb came shooting through the

logs, and all that was left of the house was a small mound in the glade covered with reddish flowers. And Travka moved to the potato pit and lived in the woods like the wild beasts.

But it was not easy for her to adjust herself to the life of a wild beast. She had hunted game for Antipych, her great and generous master, but never for herself. Very often, while out hunting, she caught a hare. Tucking it under her forepaws, she would then drop on to her belly, waiting for Antipych to come out, and never venturing to touch the hare, however hungry she was at the time. And if Antipych for some reason failed to come, she would pick up the hare in her teeth, and with head high in the air so that it would not get knocked about too much, carry it home. Thus she had worked for Antipych, not for herself. And her master had loved her, fed her and protected her from the wolves. And now that Antipych was dead, she had to live for herself, as wild beasts do. When chasing a hare she would sometimes forget she was chasing it not for Antipych, but merely to catch it and eat it herself.



Sometimes Travka would be so oblivious to the present, that when she caught a hare she would carry it back to the hut, and then, hearing the trees moan, would get on to the little mound that once had been the hut, and howl....

The Grey Squire had been listening attentively to that howling for a long time....

6

Antipych's hut was close to the Dried-Up Stream, where a few years ago our hunters' brigade had been

summoned by the local farmers. The local hunters had found out that there was a big family of wolves somewhere near the Dried-Up Stream. We went to the aid of the farmers and set out to work in accordance with all the rules of warfare against beasts of prey.

In the night we went to the Bludov Marsh, imitated the wolf howl and got an answering howl from all the wolves inhabiting the banks of the Dried-Up Stream. Thus we discovered exactly where they lived, and how many of them there were. They lived on the cluttered, impassable bed of the Dried-Up Stream. A great war had raged there in the past between the stream and the trees. The stream fought for its freedom, while the trees stood guarding the banks. The stream had won the day, and the trees fell across, but after that the water ran into the marsh and was lost. Trunks of trees lay rotting tier upon tier, across the bed. Grass made its way through the prostrate trunks, and ropes of ivy twisted round the trunks of young aspen-trees, which had sprung up in vast numbers. A firm dam was formed, or, as we hunters called it, a wolves' stronghold.

When we ascertained the dwelling place of the wolves we went round it on our skis, describing a circle of some three kilometres, and hanging strings of little red flags of pungent-smelling bunting from bush to bush. Wolves fear the colour, and the very smell of new bunting alarms them, and when the wind moves the flags as it ripples through the thicket, the wolves are apt to lose heart.

We made openings in the circle according to the number of our guns. In each opening, crouching behind the dense branches of a fir-tree, was a man with a gun.

Shouting from time to time, and knocking their sticks together the beaters roused the wolves, and at first they turned towards their lair. The she-wolf led the way, her

young following, and behind them, strutting as it were on his own, was the great, heavy-headed old wolf, the notorious villain whom the peasants had nicknamed the Grey Squire.

The wolves moved with great caution. The beaters pressed on. The she-wolf changed to a trot. When suddenly—

Stop! Flags!

She turned another way, but there again—

Stop! Flags!

The beaters pressed closer and closer. The old she-wolf, her native intelligence forsaking her, tried at random this way and that, and at last found an opening, but was met with a bullet in her head shot from less than ten paces away.

That was the end of the pack, but the Grey Squire had been in scrapes like this before, and, when he heard gun-shots, simply leaped over the flag-line. As he was leaping, two shots were fired at him, one tearing his left ear off, the other, half of his tail.

The wolf family perished, but alone the Grey Squire killed as many cows and sheep in one summer as the whole pack used to.

He usually hid behind a juniper bush, waiting for the moment when the shepherds would leave the herd, or settle down for a sleep. Choosing the right moment, he would rush among the cattle, killing the sheep and mutilating the cows. Then, with a sheep on his back, he would leap over the fence and make for his inaccessible lair in the Dried-Up Stream. During the winter months he rarely succeeded in making his way to a cattle-shed, and was practically reduced to a diet of dog flesh. At last he became so brazen that once, while chasing a dog following its master's sleigh, he actually tore it

out of its master's arms, where the dog had leaped for protection.

The Grey Squire had become the terror of the country, and the peasants once more appealed to our wolf-brigade for help. Five times we tried to hedge him in with flags, and five times he leaped over our flag-lines. And now, in the early spring, after a bitter winter, almost perishing with cold and hunger, the Grey Squire waited impatiently in his lair for the real spring to set in, and for the village shepherd to sound his horn.

On the morning when the children had quarrelled and taken their separate paths, the Grey Squire lay in his lair in a hungry sulk. When the wind, spoiling the brightness of the morning, made the two trees beside the Flat Stone howl, he was able to stand it no longer and crept out. He stood over the dam, raised his nose, drew in his stomach, which was so lean it hardly needed any drawing in, cocked his one ear windward, straightened out the stump of his tail, and raised a howl.

What a piteous howl it was! Stranger, if you should hear it as you pass by, and be stirred to pity, don't let your feelings get the better of you, it is not the voice of a dog, man's best friend, you hear, but that of his worst enemy, the wolf, the victim of his own evil nature! Withhold your sympathy, stranger, do not give it to those who, like the wolf, howl from self-pity, but save it for those who, like the dog who lost its master, howl because they know not whom to serve any more.

7

The Dried-Up Stream embraces the Bludov Marsh in a wide semi-circle. At one end of it howled the dog, at the other, the wolf. And the wind hurled itself against the trees, bearing their moans hither and thither, heedless of whom it served. The wind does not care

where the moans and wailings come from, whether from the trees, from man's friend, the dog, or from his most bitter enemy, the wolf, so long as there are sounds for it to carry. The treacherous wind bore the piteous wail of the dog deserted by its master to the ears of the wolf. And the Grey One, distinguishing the dog's howl from the moaning of the trees, quietly left his lair, and pricking up his only ear, his mangled tail taut, ascended a mound. From this vantage point, having discovered that the howling came from near Antipych's hut, he swooped down the slope in that direction.

Fortunately for Travka she was too hungry to continue the sad wailings with which she lamented her fate, or perhaps called for a new master to come to her. It may be that to her dog's understanding Antipych was not dead, but had merely turned his face from her. Perhaps, to her, the whole of mankind seemed to be one Antipych with different faces. And if he turned one of his faces from her, perhaps the same Antipych, with a different face, would soon call her back, and then she would serve this new Antipych as faithfully as she had served the old one....

Yes, that was probably how it was: Travka was calling to her Antipych with all her might.

And the wolf, hearing the dog's detestable prayer for man, loped off in the direction from which it came. If the dog had persisted in her howling for another five minutes, the Grey Squire would have had her. But having uttered her prayer to Antipych, she felt a sharp pang of hunger, stopped calling Antipych, and went off to try and pick up the scent of a hare.

It was that time of year when the hare, a nocturnal animal, does not lie down at the first sign of the coming day, to wait anxiously with open eyes till nightfall. In spring, the hare fearlessly roams the fields and the

roads, even by daylight. Thus a veteran winter hare came to the spot where the children had quarrelled and separated, and, as they had, sat down to rest and listen on the Flat Stone. A sudden gust of wind brought the moans of the trees to his ear, scaring him, so that he jumped off the Flat Stone, lurched off hare-fashion, jerking his hind legs forward, and made for the Blind swamp, so perilous to man.

The hare was still moulting, and left not only traces of his pads on the ground, but bits of his winter coat on the bushes



and last year's stalks of grass. Although some time had elapsed since the hare had left the stone, Travka immediately scented him. True, she did not at once pick up the scent, because two small human beings had left their scent behind them, as well as the smell of bread and potatoes from their basket.

And so Travka was faced with a knotty problem—should she follow the hare's scent leading to the Blind swamp, where the footmarks of one of the small men also led, or follow the human scent leading to the right, and skirting the Blind swamp?

The problem would have solved itself easily if Travka could have made up her mind which of the small men had taken the bread. If only she could have had a bite of that bread, then she would have started on the track of the hare, and brought it to the one who gave her the bread.

Where should she go, which way should she take?

Man, when faced with a problem like that, stops to think, and hunters have coined a special word for the same state in a dog.

And so Travka did what any hunting dog in her place would have done: she began circling round with her

nose in the air, moving it up and down, from left to right, intelligent concentration in her eyes.

The wind, blowing from the direction in which Nastya had gone, brought Travka to an abrupt stop in her circlings. She stood still for a moment, and then got on her hind legs, like a hare.

Something of this sort had happened once before, while Antipych was alive. The forester was engaged on a rather difficult job of measuring timber. To have Travka out of the way, Antipych had tied her down near the hut. The forester left in the early morning. But it was only towards dinner-time that Travka realised that the other end of the chain was tied to an iron hook attached to a thick rope. As soon as she understood this, she scrambled up on the earth banked round the foot of the house, then on to her hind legs, pulled the rope towards herself with her front paws, and by evening had contrived to bite through the rope. Then, the chain dangling from her collar, she set out to find Antipych. More than twelve hours had passed since Antipych left, the scent was lost, and the traces washed away by a light drizzle, more like dew than rain. But it was so still in the woods that the air had never stirred and the subtle scent of tobacco-smoke from Antipych's pipe had remained hanging there since the morning. Travka had been quick to understand that there was no hope of finding Antipych by his footmarks, and so, circling the air with her nose, she suddenly got a whiff of the tobacco-smoke, and gradually, now losing the scent, now picking it up again, she reached her master at last.

She remembered that experience now. When the strong gust of wind brought the suspicious scent to her nose, she stood stock-still for a moment, waiting. When the next gust came, she got on her hind legs, hare-like, as she had done that time, made sure: yes, the bread or

potatoes had disappeared to windward, together with one of the small men.

Travka went back to the Flat Stone, to compare the smell left by the basket with the one brought by the wind. Then she had another sniff at the traces left by the other small man and the hare. She must have reasoned to herself thus:

“The hare will have gone straight to his day-time lair, he must be somewhere near, by the Blind swamp, settled there for the day, and he won’t leave. But the man with the bread and potatoes might disappear. And then, what’s the joy of chasing a hare to tear it up and eat it all by myself, compared to the happiness of receiving bread and kindness from man, perhaps even finding in him Antipych?”

Casting one more glance in the direction of the traces leading straight towards the Blind swamp, Travka turned towards the path skirting the swamp on the right, rose on her hind legs once more, and with one wag of her tail trotted along the path.

8

The Blind swamp, towards which Mitya, following the needle of the compass, had gone, was a perilous place, and many a man, not to speak of cows and sheep, had been submerged there. Certainly nobody ought to set out for the Bludov Marsh without knowing the sort of place the Blind swamp is.

The Bludov Marsh, as we see it, with its enormous resources of peat, is the sun’s storehouse. Yes, that is just what it is, and the warm sun is the parent of every blade of grass, every flower, every bush and berry, growing on the marsh. To each of them the sun gives its

warmth, and each of them, as it dies and decomposes to fertilise the ground, bequeaths this warmth to the new blades of grass, flowers, bushes and berries which grow in their places. But the water in marshes prevents the parent plants from passing on all their wealth to their children. For thousands of years this wealth accumulates under the surface of the water, the marsh thus becoming the sun's storehouse, and then the entire store of peat is inherited by man.

The Bludov Marsh contains enormous resources of fuel, but the peat layers are not the same thickness everywhere. By the Flat Stone, where the children had been sitting, decaying plants had been forming layers on top of one another for thousands of years. The oldest layers of peat were here, but further on, towards the Blind swamp, the layers were newer and thinner.



Little by little, as Mitya advanced, following the needle of the compass and the path, the ground beneath his feet, up till now merely soft, turned into slush. He would put his foot on what seemed firm ground, and the foot would sink beneath him, and he would ask himself in alarm: was it a bottomless pit? Some hummocks were so wobbly that he had to think well before stepping out. Then it would happen that he put his foot down, and there would be a great rumbling beneath it, the way one's tummy rumbles sometimes, only this rumbling went down, down into the marsh before stopping.

The ground under his feet was now like a hammock suspended over an abyss full of ooze. On this shifting ground, balancing on intertwined roots and the stems of plants, grew stunted, scraggy fir-trees, covered with

green mould. Owing to the acid marshy soil they cannot grow any higher, and yet these tiny trees were probably a hundred years old, perhaps older still.... These witch fir-trees were not like trees in a forest, tall, slender, as like one another as columns, or candles. The older the marsh witch, the uncannier she grew. That one over there raised a bare bough like an arm threatening to catch hold of you, another held a stick in her hand, ready to hit you when you came up to her, the third crouched down for some reason, and another stood knitting. And every one of them was like something that was not just a tree.

The layers of peat under Mitya's feet gradually became thinner and thinner, but the intertwined roots of the plants must have been strong enough to support the weight of a human body, for Mitya, swaying at every step and making everything sway a long way round him, went on and on. All Mitya had to do was to trust the person who had passed that way before him, and even trodden out a path.

The fir-tree witches seemed to be much perturbed at the sight of the small boy with the big gun and double-peaked cap. Every now and then one of them would stand on tiptoe, as if she would like to hit the audacious wayfarer, at the same time leaning forward to protect all the other witches. Then she would sink back, and another witch stretched out a bony hand towards the path. One more step, it seemed, and a glade would open with a witch's hut in the middle, surrounded by a fence with human skulls on the palings.



The black raven guarding his nest in the little wood, and circling the marsh to keep a lookout, caught sight of the small hunter with the double-peaked cap. Like other birds, the raven has a special spring call which a human being can somewhat imperfectly reproduce by a throaty-nasal "Drong-tong!" There are certain imperceptible overtones to the main sound, too subtle for our ear, which make us unable to understand what the ravens are saying, and we can only make blundering guesses, as if we were deaf and dumb.

"Drong-tong!" cried the watchful raven, intimating that a little man with a double-peaked cap and a gun was approaching the Blind swamp, and that probably something to eat was to be expected soon.

"Drong-tong!" the she-raven answered from her nest.

By which she meant:

"I hear, and wait."

The magpies, who are near relations of the ravens, on hearing the roll-call, began to chirr. Even the fox, who had just returned from an unsuccessful mouse-hunt, pricked up its ears at the raven's call.

Mitya heard it all, but was not a bit down-hearted—was not he walking over a path made by human feet? A man like himself had been there before, so Mitya could follow it fearlessly. Hearing the raven's cry, he even ventured upon a song:

*Do not circle, evil raven,
Low over my head.* ●

The song gave him courage, and he thought of taking a short-cut, instead of following the long, strenuous path. Looking down, he noticed that every time he put down his foot water gathered in the hollow it made. The feet of all who had taken this path had pushed the water

a little deeper beneath the mossy surface, so that on either side of the path, which was really a streamlet, there grew up on the dry banks high sweet-tasting tassel grass, which now formed a kind of avenue. And this grass, which was not yellow like the spring growth on the rest of the marsh, but whitish, made it possible to trace far ahead the windings of the man-trodden path. And Mitya saw that this path turned sharply to the left, before it quite disappeared in the distance. He found his bearings with the aid of the compass: the needle pointed north, showing that the path led west.

“Chee-vee?” cried the lapwing.

“It’s me, me!” the woodcock answered.

“Drong-tong!” said the raven, with greater assurance than ever.

And the magpies cackled from the witch firs all round.

Glancing round him, Mitya saw a clear, safe-looking glade in front, where the hummocks, getting lower and lower, finally joined, forming level ground. But the most important thing he saw was the tall whitish grass, the faithful companion of the man-trodden path, quite near the other side of the glade. Discovering by the direction of the tassel grass the path which did not lie due north, Mitya said to himself: “Why should I turn to the left, and step from hummock to hummock, when I can see a path, quite near, just beyond the glade?”

And he went fearlessly on, crossing the smooth glade.

At first it was even easier for Mitya to walk over the fen than it had been in the marsh. But gradually his feet sank deeper and deeper, and it became more and more difficult to pull them out. An elk would have been all right here. With its long, powerful legs, it can run as swiftly over a bog as it does in the woods. But Mitya,

“Drong-tong!”

Quick to sense mischief, the magpies understood the utter helplessness of the little man submerged in the bog. Swooping down from the tops of the fir-trees and alighting on the ground, they hopped towards him from all sides, embarking on their magpie offensive.

The little man with the double-peaked cap stopped shouting.

Glittering streams of tears trickled down his sunburnt cheeks.



9

A person who has never seen cranberries grow may saunter far into the marshes before noticing that he is stepping on berries. It is quite different in the case of bilberries, you can see how they grow: a thin stem shooting up, with little green leaves all round it like wings, and the small silvery-blue berries growing close to the leaves. Or there are whortleberries, blood-red, with thick dark-green leaves which do not even turn yellow under the snow, while the berries are so abundant that the ground seems to be splashed with blood. Then there is the cowberry, also a marsh plant, which grows on small bushes, the berry itself light-blue, and rather big, you could not help noticing them. In remote thickets, where the wood grouse dwells, the ruby-coloured berries grow in clusters, every ruby in a green setting. The only berries which hide are cranberries, especially in the early spring, on the hummocks, where they are almost invisible from above. It is only when there are a great many berries in one place that you can see them from above, and then you think:

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“Somebody must have been spilling cranberries,” and you stoop down to taste one, and then you pull up the green stem covered with the berries. You can pull out a whole necklace of big, blood-red berries then.

For some reason—whether because the berries are so expensive in the spring, or because they are so wholesome and remedial, and so nice with tea—people seem to be unable to stop picking them, and go on and on in a kind of frenzy. There was once an old woman in our village who loaded her basket so heavily with the berries that she was unable to lift it. But she could not bear either to throw any away or leave the basket behind. So she stayed by it until she died. Sometimes a woman comes upon a patch of berries, gives a quick look round to see there is no one near, and, falling flat on her stomach on the marshy ground, crawls up to them.



At first Nastya picked every berry from its stem, stooping whenever she saw a red one. But soon she stopped bending down for single berries—she wanted to get more at a time.

She could already see at a glance whether there would be one or two, or a whole handful on a stem, and only bent down when there was a prospect of getting a handful. And she dropped fistful after fistful into her basket, becoming more eager with every find.

When she worked about the house, Nastya was never far in thought from her brother, and every so often called out to him. But this time, when he was goodness knows where and all alone, she did not even remember that she had all the food, while her beloved brother was wandering somewhere in the murky marsh, with nothing to eat. And she was not thinking of herself, all she thought of was cranberries, and she wanted more and more of them.

She had quarrelled with her brother because she had wanted to follow the well-trodden path. But now, going where the cranberries led her, Nastya did not even notice that she herself had left the well-trodden path.

There was a moment when she waked from her trance and suddenly realised that she had left the path. She turned towards the place where she imagined the path was, but there was no path there. Then she rushed in the other direction, where two dead trees raised their bare boughs—there was no path there, either. Surely this was the moment for her to remember the compass, and what Mitya had told her about it, to remember Mitya himself, her beloved brother, wandering alone and hungry, and, remembering him, to call out to him....

And Nastya certainly would have thought of him if she had not at that very moment seen a sight which it is not given to every cranberry-fiend to see in a lifetime....

The children had argued which path to take, not knowing that both paths, the bigger and the smaller one, skirted the Blind swamp, meeting somewhere at the Dried-Up Stream, where they merged and at last came to the Pereslavl highway. Nastya's path was on dry ground and made a wide detour round the Blind swamp. Mitya's skirted its very edge. If it had not been for his blunder in letting the tall whitish grass out of sight for a moment, Mitya would have long found himself on the very spot which Nastya reached only now. And this spot, hedged by juniper bushes was that very spot, the Palestine, which Mitya had hoped to reach by following the needle of his compass. But even if Mitya had got there, what would he do there, on this blood-red Palestine, hungry and basketless? Nastya arrived at the Palestine, with her big basket, her store of provisions lying forgotten on the bottom, beneath the acid-tasting berries.

How was it that the little girl, so like a long-legged golden chick, did not think, when the joyful sight of the Palestine opened before her, of her brother and did not shout to him: "Here it is, darling!"

Ah, raven, you prophetic bird! You are probably three hundred years old yourself, and no doubt your mother told you all she had learned during the three hundred years of her life. And so, from bird to bird has passed the knowledge of all that has happened in that marsh for thousands of years. You who have seen and known so much, why do not you for once abandon your raven's business and carry a message on your strong wings, a message of a brother perishing in the bog?!

Tell them, oh raven—

"Drong-tong!" cried the raven, as he flew over the head of the man in mortal danger.

"I hear you," answered the she-raven from her nest, in the same "drong-tong" idiom. "Mind you get something before the marsh eats him up."

"Drong-tong!" the father-raven repeated as he flew over the little girl crawling along the damp ground, a few paces away from her brother, who was in such dire peril. This time the "drong-tong" meant that the little girl crawling over the bog might be a still brighter prospect for the raven family.

In the middle of the Palestine there were no cranberries. There was a little hill covered by a dense aspen grove, in the midst of which stood an enormous horned elk. Seen from one angle an elk is like a bull, from others—he looks much like an ordinary horse: the graceful body, the light, slender legs, the muzzle with the sensitive nostrils. But what a strange twist to the muzzle, what horns, what eyes! You gaze at it and think: perhaps it is neither a bull nor a horse, in fact perhaps there is nothing here but an illusion of

something huge and grey looming through the greyness of the dense aspen grove. But, no! It must be something more than just that, for did not the monster's thick lips touch the tree, and was not there a narrow white strip left on the delicate tree trunk? That was how the monster fed itself. And there is hardly an asp without the marks of his teeth. No, no, all that bulk could not be merely a marsh mirage! But how incredible that such a giant should be sustained upon aspen bark and the leaves of the marsh shamrock! And why should man, with his wonderful powers, be seized with such greed at the sight of the acid cranberry?

The elk, as he barked the asp, calmly watched the crawling girl from his elevation.

Oblivious to everything but cranberries, she crawled nearer and nearer to a big black tree stump.

Wet and dirty, the little girl we once knew as the long-legged golden chick could scarcely drag the basket after her.

The elk did not even regard her as a human being, for her ways were no different from those of animals, which he was accustomed to look at with indifference as we look at lifeless stones.



A big black tree stump stood there, absorbing the sun's rays and getting very warm. Evening was falling, the air and all the objects round were growing colder. But the tree stump, big and black, still preserved its warmth. Six small lizards crept out of the bog and on to the stump, clinging to its warmth; four lemon-coloured butterflies, their wings folded, pressed their feelers against it; great black flies settled on it for the night. A long cranberry shoot, catching on every grass stem, on





every unevenness of the warm black stump, wound itself all round it, turned several times over the top, and descended on the other side. At this time of year the adders are always on a lookout for a warm spot, and a huge one, half a metre long, crawled up the stump and coiled itself on top of the cranberry shoot.



The little girl crawling over the marshy ground never raised her head. Thus she came up to the charred stump, and pulled at the cranberry shoot, upon which the adder was resting. The snake raised its head and hissed. Then the girl raised her head, too.

At last Nastya came to her senses and jumped up, and the elk, recognising her for a human being, leaped out of the aspen grove, and, throwing out his powerful, long, stilt-like legs, sped lightly over the treacherous marsh, just as a winter hare would scuttle along a dry path. Startled by the elk, Nastya gazed in astonishment at the snake: the adder lay coiled up as before, in the warmth of the sun's ray.

Nastya felt as if it was she herself coiled up on the stump, and that the Nastya looking at it in perplexity had just shed her snake's skin.

A few paces from her a big reddish dog with a thin black stripe along its back stood looking at her. The dog was Travka. Nastya knew her at once, for Travka had sometimes accompanied Antipych when he came to the village. But she could not quite remember the dog's name, and called to her:

"Muravka, Muravka, come, I'll give you a bit of bread!" And she stretched her arm towards the basket. The basket was full to the brim, and the bread was under the cranberries. This meant hours must have passed for her to have filled the basket, dropping berry after berry into it, from early morning to the end of day. Where, then, could her poor hungry brother be, how could she have forgotten all about him, all about herself, too, all about everything in fact?

Casting one more glance at the stump on which the snake was coiled, she suddenly uttered a shrill cry:

"Mitya! Brother!"

And fell beside the basket of cranberries sobbing violently.

It was that cry which had reached the swamp, and which Mitya heard and answered, though his answer was carried away by the wind.



10

The strong gust of wind which had brought Nastya's call to Mitya's ears was not the last before the calm of the evening set in. Just then the sinking sun was passing behind a thick cloud, from beneath which the golden legs of its throne peeped out.

Nor was the gust which carried Mitya's answering call the last.

The last gust came when the golden legs of the sun's throne seemed to sink into the earth, the huge, clear, crimson orb just touching the horizon. The small songthrush began its sweet melody. Kosach timidly resumed his mating-song among the now silent trees by the Flat Stone. And the cranes gave three cries, not their morning "victory" call, but something which must have meant:

"Go to sleep, but remember: soon we shall wake you all, all, all!"

The day ended not with a gust of wind but with a last gentle breath. Then there was a great calm, and the slightest sounds, even the gentle whistlings of the hazel grouse in the thickets of the Dried-Up Stream, became audible.

Understanding that a human being was in distress, Travka came up to the sobbing girl, and licked her cheek, which was salty with tears. For a second Nastya raised her head, looked at the dog, and without a word, let her head fall on top of the berries. Travka could smell the bread through the layer of cranberries but though her hunger was acute she would not have dreamed of taking the liberty of putting her paws into the basket. Instead, seeing that a human being was in distress, she raised her head and howled.

Long, long ago, I seem to remember driving in a troika with bells jingling in the old-fashioned way. Evening was setting in, just as it was now, and the driver had abruptly pulled up the horses, and when the bell grew silent, the driver strained his ears and said:

"Something wrong somewhere!"

We seemed to hear some sort of a sound, too.

"What is it?"

“Something wrong: a dog is howling in the woods.”

That time we had not been able to find out what had happened. Perhaps it was also a man drowning in the swamp, and man's faithful friend the dog was howling out a litany.

When Travka's wail reached the ears of the Grey Squire through the evening stillness he at once understood that it came from the Palestine and made straight for it.

But Travka stopped howling very soon. The Grey Squire stood still, waiting for the howling to begin again.

And just then Travka herself heard a familiar, shrill, infrequent yapping, which came from the direction of the Flat Stone. Travka at once knew that it was the fox yapping after a hare. Putting two and two together, she also understood, of course, that the fox had picked up



the scent of that very winter hare she herself had detected from the Flat Stone. Travka was also aware that, without cunning, the fox would never overtake the hare, and that it was only yapping to make the hare run off its legs, so as to get it when, wearied with running, it lay down in some lair. Since the death of Antipych, Travka had employed that method in procuring her food. Hearing a fox yap, she hunted the way the wolf

hunts: as the wolf during the chase stands in wait for the dog barking after a hare, so would she lie in ambush, waiting for the moment to capture the hare chased by a fox.

As she listened to the fox's yapping, Travka understood, as well as we hunters understand in such cases, the route the hare would be sure to take: from the Flat Stone towards the Blind swamp, from there to the Dried-Up Stream, and then, making a wide detour, towards the Palestine, and from there inevitably back to the Flat Stone. And so Travka went straight to the Flat Stone and hid behind a thick juniper bush.

She did not have to wait long. Her keen ears caught the faint sucking sound made by the hare's paws over the marsh pools, a sound too faint for the human ear to catch. And the pools were those which had formed over Nastya's footmarks in the morning. The hare would be there, by the Flat Stone, in a moment.

Travka squatted behind the bush, tensing her hind legs in preparation for a powerful forward thrust, and as soon as she saw a pair of ears, she sprang.

But just then the hare, a big, old winter hare, scarcely able to hobble, took it into its head to come to a standstill, and sat up on its haunches to guess, from the sound, at the distance between itself and the yapping fox.

The hare's abrupt stop, and Travka's leap were simultaneous.

And so Travka was carried over the hare.

By the time the dog had righted itself, the hare was already bounding along Mitya's path towards the Blind swamp.

So the wolf's method had not worked: now the hare would not be back till it was dark. Adopting the dog-method, Travka rushed after the hare, and after

giving a shrill squeal, filled the evening stillness with a regular dog's bark.

When it heard the dog, the fox, of course, abandoned its pursuit of the hare and switched to the routine business of catching field mice....

And the Grey Squire, hearing at last the long-awaited bark of the dog, made for the Blind swamp at a gallop.

11

When the magpies heard the hare approach they fell into two groups; one, staying by the little man, cried:

“Dritt-titt-tee-ee!”

The others addressed themselves to the hare with a “Dratt-tatt-ta-a-a!”

It is hard to get at the meaning of the magpies' excited gibberish. It could hardly be a call for help, for should help come, whether in the guise of man or dog, the magpies themselves would be the losers. Perhaps they were striving with their cries to summon the entire magpie race to the bloody repast. Who knows....

“Dritt-titt-tee-ee!” they cried, hopping nearer and nearer to the little man.

They did not dare come quite close to him, for the little man's arms were still free. All of a sudden there was confusion among the magpies. One and the same bird would cry, now “dratt-tatt-ta-a-a”, now “dritt-titt-tee-ee”.

This was a sign that the hare was approaching the Blind swamp.

This particular winter hare had had previous experience of avoiding Travka, and knew therefore that it would be necessary to use cunning. And so, on the very edge of the swamp, a few paces from the little man, it stopped, thus rousing the attention of the magpies. They

all got on the top branches of the fir-trees and shouted at the hare:

“Dratt-tatt-ta-a-a!”

For some reason or other hares attribute no importance to these cries, and go through their pranks without taking any notice of the magpies. And that is why one sometimes thinks that all this magpie talk means nothing, and that, like men and women, they merely while away their time in idle prattle, out of sheer boredom.

Crouching motionless for a brief moment, the hare took its first great bound aside, then, after another moment's pause, made a bound in the opposite direction, then with a series of short jumps, changed its direction once more, turned round to keep its eye on its own spoor, in case Travka, seeing through these manoeuvres, discovered them; at least the hare would see the dog first....

Oh, yes, the hare is cunning, very cunning, but these tricks can be dangerous: an intelligent hound knows the hare has a habit of looking back at its spoor, and so guesses at the direction of its bound not by sniffing at its tracks, but by keeping its nose in the air.

How the beastie's heart begins to beat when it hears the barking no longer, and knows that the dog has started on her ominous silent rounds!

This time the hare was in luck. It realised that the dog, after setting out on her rounds in the swamp must have come across something there; all of a sudden the sound of a human voice was clearly heard, and then there was a terrific hubbub....

One may surmise that the hare, hearing all this noise, said to itself something like “I'd better make myself scarce!” and quietly retraced its steps to the Flat Stone.

As Travka rushed over the swamp after the hare, she

suddenly found herself looking right into the eyes of a little man, and, forgetting all about the hare, she stood as if transfixed.

There is no difficulty in guessing what the dog must have thought as she gazed at the little man in the swamp. It is only in our own eyes that we differ from one another. Travka divided humanity into two classes: Antipych with different faces, and the enemies of Antipych. That is why a good, intelligent dog never approaches a human being on first seeing him, but stops to think whether the human being is its master, or its master's enemy.

And so Travka stood still, looking into the face of the little man, lighted up by the last rays of the sinking sun.

At first the little man's eyes were dull and lifeless, but all of a sudden something seemed to flicker in them, and Travka saw the flicker at once.

"It's more likely to be an Antipych," thought Travka. And she wagged her tail ever so slightly.

We cannot of course tell what it was that made Travka decide who was an Antipych, and who was not. But we can make some guesses. Do you remember, has it ever happened to you, that bending over a still creek in a forest you would suddenly see reflected, as in a mirror, a man at full length, great and full of splendour, as Antipych had been for Travka? He is stooping over the water behind your back, gazing into the pool too, as into a mirror. How wonderful he looks in that mirror, surrounded by the whole of nature, the clouds, the trees—and the sun setting in the creek is the same sun that is setting in the world above and the new moon shows itself, and the thick clusters of stars....

That is probably how Antipych the man appeared as reflected in all human faces to Travka. She would have liked to rush into the arms of every man, if experience

had not taught her that there was an enemy of Antipych with just the same face.

So she stood and waited.

But her paws began gradually sinking too. Even a dog's paws may be sucked into the bog, and it cannot get them out if it stands too long in one place. She must not wait any longer.

Suddenly....

Not thunder nor lightning, nor the sunrise with all its triumphant sounds, nor the sunset accompanied by the cranes' promises of an other beautiful day to come, nothing, no miracle of nature could have been greater than the thing which happened to Travka in the marsh: she heard a word in the human language, and what a word!

Antipych, like the true, great hunter he was, had given his hound a proper hunter's name, derived from the Russian verb *travit* (to hunt), and at first our Travka was called Zatravka; but gradually its hunting significance was lost, and the name was shortened to the affectionate Travka. The last time Antipych had been to our village with his dog, she had still gone under the name of Zatravka. And the flicker in Mitya's eyes had meant that he suddenly remembered the dog's name. Then the blood rushed into the blue lips of the little man, so that they turned red and twitched. The movement was not lost on Travka, and that was when she wagged her tail a second time. And then came what to Travka's mind was a miracle. Just like the old Antipych of the early days, the new Antipych, so small and young, said:

"Zatravka!"

Recognising him for an Antipych, Travka immediately lay down.

“Come on!” said the Antipych. “Come on here to me, there’s a good dog!”

And Travka slowly crawled up to him in answer to those words.

But it was not in the spirit of pure friendship that the little man was calling to her, whatever Travka may have thought. Behind his words were not merely joy and friendship, but a cunning scheme for his own salvation. If only he could have explained to her his plan in a way she could understand, how joyfully she would have rushed to rescue him.

But there was no way in which he would make her understand him, so he was obliged to deceive her by kind words. It was even necessary that she should fear him, for if she did not, if he could not make her stand in wholesome awe of the great and powerful Antipych, if she had rushed dog-fashion on to his shoulders, the swamp would inevitably have swallowed up both man and his friend, the dog. The little man could not stand up to the ideal of the great man cherished by Travka. So he had to resort to cunning.

“Zatravka, dear Zatravka,” he said lovingly, thinking all the while: “Do crawl up nearer, oh, do!”

And the dog, her pure mind feeling the something that was not quite pure in the perfectly explicit words of this Antipych, kept crawling up, pausing every now and then.

“Come on, sweetheart, come on, just a little nearer!” said Mitya, thinking the while: “Only keep crawling up to me, that’s all!”

Little by little Travka crawled up to him. Now, by leaning on his gun and bending slightly over, Mitya could have stretched out his arm and stroked the dog’s head. But the cunning little man knew that the moment he touched the dog she would leap at him with joyous squeals and drown him.

And so the little man stifled the great heart within him. Calculating every movement, like a soldier ready to deal the fatal blow which should settle the issue of the struggle, he held his breath.

Another moment, and Travka would be on the man's neck, but the little man was not mistaken in his calculations, he thrust out his right arm and clutched the great strong dog by her left hind leg.

He must have been an enemy of Antipych after all, to have acted so treacherously!

Travka made a desperate effort to free herself, and would have torn herself away from the little man's hand, if he had not, now half out of the bog, caught at her other hind leg.

A moment later he was lying across the gun on his stomach, and then, letting go of Travka, went on all fours like the dog, moving the gun before him as he went, until he crawled up to the path used by men, the tall whitish grass springing up on either side of their footsteps. Once there, he rose to his feet, wiped off the last remains of tears from his face, brushed the mud from his tattered clothes and said imperatively, like a real grown-up man:

“Now you may come to me, my own Zatravka!”

The words themselves, as well as the voice in which they were uttered, put an end to Travka's hesitations: before her was her former Antipych in all his splendour. With a squeal of joy, recognising her master, she rushed at him, and the man showered kisses on the nose, eyes, and ears of his friend.

It is now time for us to say what we think of the enigmatic words uttered by our late forester, Antipych, when he promised to whisper his truth to the dog if we failed to see him before he died. We do not think it was just a joke on his part. It is quite possible that Antipych,

as Travka understood him, that is man in his ancient past, whispered a great human truth into the ear of his friend the dog, and we think that this is the truth about man's eternal, strenuous struggle for love.

12

There is not much left for us to say of the events of that great day in the Bludov Marsh. Though it had been a long day, it was not quite over by the time Mitya escaped from the swamp with the aid of Travka. After the first transports of joy at her reunion with Antipych, the practical Travka bethought herself of her interrupted hare-hunt. And no wonder, for being a hound, the business of her life was to go after hares for her own sake, but the joy of her life was to catch one for her Antipych. Recognising Mitya for her Antipych, she now resumed her interrupted round, and, soon falling on the scent of the hare, followed the fresh lead with loud barks. Mitya, who was half-dead with hunger, immediately realised that his whole salvation lay in this hare, that if he killed it he could set light to some twigs by firing off his gun, as he had often seen Father do, and then bake the hare in the hot ashes. After inspecting the gun and changing the wet cartridges, he stepped out and stood behind a juniper bush.

It was still light enough to look along the sight of the gun, when Travka, chasing the hare from the Flat Stone towards Nastya's path, and into the Palestine glade, turned it towards the juniper bush behind which the hunter was hiding. But it so happened that the Grey Squire, when he heard the dog resume the chase, selected the very bush behind which the hunter was hiding for his hiding-place, and now two hunters, man and his bitterest enemy, met face to face. When he saw

the grey muzzle no more than five paces away, Mitya forgot all about the hare and fired point-blank at the wolf.

The Grey Squire ended his life without a pang.

Though the chase was of course ruined by the report, Travka did not give it up. But the great thing, the best of all, was not the hare, and not the wolf, but the fact that Nastya, hearing a gun go off near her, gave a shout, and Mitya, hearing her voice, answered it at once, and she was at his side in an instant. Soon after this, Travka came back bringing the hare to her new, young Antipych, and the three friends sat and warmed themselves by the fire, preparing for their supper and rest.



Nastya and Mitya lived next door but one from us, and when the next morning their hungry cow began lowing, we were the first to go and see if the children were all right. We guessed at once that they had not spent the night at home and thought they must have lost their way in the marshes. Little by little the other neighbours came up and we all began discussing how best to rescue the children, if they were still alive. We were just going to scatter all over the swamp, when we saw our cranberry-seekers walking up in Indian file, a

heavy basket supported on their shoulders by a pole, Travka, the dog which had belonged to Antipych, at their heels.

They told us their adventures in the Bludov Marsh in the utmost detail. And we believed every word they said, for we saw with our own eyes the basketful of cranberries. But there were some among us who could not bring themselves to believe that a boy not yet eleven years old had shot down the wild old wolf. A few of those who believed, however, taking a big sleigh and a coil of rope, set out for the spot described and soon came back with the dead Grey Squire. Then everyone in the village, and even some from other villages, left their work for a while and gathered together. What talking went on! It is hard to say who was more stared at, the wolf, or the hunter with the double peak to his cap. Looking from the wolf to the boy, people said:

“To think that we laughed at him and called him the Little Farmer!”

After that the Little Farmer began gradually and almost imperceptibly to change, and during the next two years of war grew into a tall stalwart youth. Doubtless he would have become a hero of the Patriotic War, if the war had not come to an end. And then the Golden Chick gave us all a surprise, too. No one had thought of reproaching her with greed; on the contrary, everyone praised her for her prudence in striving to lead her brother along the well-trodden path, and for getting so many cranberries. But when people came to the village from the home for children evacuated from Leningrad, asking for aid for the sick children, Nastya gave them all her cranberries. And it was only then, winning the little girl's confidence, that we learned how she had reproached herself for her greediness.

It now remains to add just a few words about ourselves: who we are, and what had brought us to the Bludov Marsh. We are prospectors exploring the wealth of the marshes. From the very first days of the war we started working on this marsh, and we discovered that there was enough peat there to provide a large plant with fuel for a hundred years. Such are the riches concealed in our marshes!

There are still many whose only knowledge of these great storehouses of the sun is that they are inhabited by witches and bogies.

Nonsense. There are no bogies in the marshes.

1945



ARCTIC HONEY

1

It is a favourite amusement of mine nowadays to summon up the memory of someone I once knew, and train on him the rays of the present. The person then appears in a small, bright circle, as if on a television screen, for inspection and judgement. This extremely absorbing hunting by means of television requires neither gun nor hound, the prey is untouched, and we, the hunters of life itself, gain instruction from the reflection of the past on the current moment.

I begin to suspect that the majority of old people go in for this sort of hunting, especially old ladies as they knit stockings. I remember how it was with my nannie, when I, a little chap, would look up at her, and ask:

“Nannie, where have you gone?”

And she would come back to earth, finish the row of knitting, stick the needles in the ball of wool and say hastily:

“Coming, coming, little one!”

And then I would be very sorry that I had interrupted her dreams, called her back from somewhere. To make up to her I would say:

“You just go on as you are, Nannie, and don’t worry about anything. When I grow up to be a man I’ll look after you as long as you live.”

Then, remembering the way the grown-up peasants in the village talked, I asserted boldly:

“Dear Nannie, when I’ve made my way I’ll look after you while you’re alive, and bury you when you’re dead.”

And my nurse, with the whole force of her being—her living past, her unfulfilled dreams—would turn to me and hug and kiss me and weep for joy that there was still somebody to love her in her old age.

I now strongly suspect that old people are a great deal better off than the young imagine them to be. There is a pleasure in the exercise of the power to recall the past and, wise in the experience of long years, in the arranging of everything in its place at one’s sweet will.

I remember how we, children of the 19th century, crammed our heads with facts about the fertility of the Nile.

“What makes the Nile valley so fertile?” the teacher would ask.

“Alluvial silt.”

Now it seems to me that our own Oka would serve us as good an example of fertility as the Egyptian Nile. When you come out of doors on a spring morning, you find that everything has changed. Where are the woods, the river, the village? The river has become a sea, the villages—*islands*, and in front of every house is a boat for rowing the bees over this sea to the distant, invisible woods.

When the waters begin to subside, the fertile silt of our rich black soil settles on last year’s grass, and the whole meadow becomes one vast expanse of black velvet.

None of us had ever read about black velvet meadows in our school geographies, and, while gazing with all our eyes at the black velvet of the silt on the meadows,

taking it all in with as much feeling as small boys can be expected to possess, we never for a moment realised that this was that very silt which made the fertility of the Nile. We got marks good or bad according to our answers as to the fertility of the Nile, but what silt really was we did not know.

As the water begins to run back into the river or sink into the soil, the rain beats down the velvety silt, the green grass gradually covers up the natural fertiliser, and the bees begin flying out from beneath the ancient lime-trees and oaks of the forests, and over the meadows beside the Oka. Here, before the season has donned its spring attire, the willow, that April bride, with yellow globes of fragrant buds adorning its bare branches, begins putting out innumerable shoots along the sides of the ditches. There are thousands of such tiny trees in blossom along the ditches, and each tree has a crowd of guests. Honey-bees, bumble-bees, and butterflies abound, the silence of the butterflies always coming as a surprise amidst the general hum. They touch the chaste April bride so delicately that here for the first time the true meaning of the words: speech is silver, but silence is gold, seems to have been discovered.



Sun, sky, flowers and bees work in unison from morning to night, and every day greater and greater quantities of honey are stored in the hives. Our poets should long ago have sung the velvety meadows of the Oka, so that our children might first take their own river into their hearts; and then out of its rich black soil would spring up a clearer image of the remote Egyptian Nile.

And the beekeepers of the Oka! In my day our neighbour, Ivan Ustinych, enjoyed great fame. I would follow him with my eyes from behind a bush, afraid to turn my head, or move a branch, for fear of the bees noticing me. He never used a veil to protect his face from the bees. And what a face that was! It was a small dark-red disk, something like a red pippin, tucked into a grey beard. But he always had a whiff of smoke near him, and would emit little puffs from his bee smoker. There were certain days when the women ran instead of walking, their aprons thrown over their heads, warning everyone they met: "The bees are swarming!" or: "Ustinych is driving his bees!" And once I saw a cloud of bees, a grey cloud rising from behind a bush and in its midst Ustinych, standing there, tall and unprotected, a large wet twig broom in his hand. He took no notice whatever when the bees fastened themselves on his hands and cheeks by the hundred, and seemed to be waiting for something to happen so that he could settle in a trice the destiny of these thousands of living creatures. When he decided that the right moment had come, he plunged the broom forcibly in the grey cloud, then dipped it into a tub, shaking out stronger and stronger showers, again and again, until the bees began to settle, gathering in a single black cluster on the fence.

Never since have I seen such a master, and when I began to understand and classify human beings, as I did when still just a boy, deciding that some live for themselves, and others work for all, and that this work is called *service*, it seemed to me that of all the grown-ups I knew, Ivan Ustinych was the only one who really served.

Since those far-off childish days seventy years have passed. But I still remember distinctly how a beautiful filly was born in the neighbouring stud farm for Orel

thoroughbreds, and how in a few days it was found to have been born blind in both eyes. Ivan Ustinych took the filly, and tended it. He was too tactful to call it "Blindie", as would have been natural, and named it Zena. And very soon she was of great use to him. In the first place she periodically presented him with fine, sighted foals, and it was probably owing to Zena that he got the idea of a migratory apiary.

Whether the wise old man conceived this idea himself, or simply borrowed it, it is hard to say. Nor is it clear why, with the velvety meadows at his door, Ivan Ustinych had to roam: it must have been that he found a still better place and took the bees there to save them the long flight. And anyhow, the bees had to be carried to the fields when the buckwheat blossomed. On starting off on his travels, Ivan Ustinych would place the box-hives upside down on his cart, to enable the bees to form clusters on top. This tendency of bees to cluster when jolted or disturbed by noise or some other cause, is easily understood when we think of our flocks, the cattle forming a close circle against wolves, and, to carry the analogy nearer home, of ourselves, and the saying: there's safety in numbers. Here Zena was his invaluable assistant: the blind horse stepped so cautiously that the bees were hardly jolted. He did his travelling by night, stopping in the day-time where he thought fit, and where the bees could fly straight to nearby flowers and bring their honey back to the hives.

Only to think that seventy years have passed since then—the fleeting years of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries! I cannot now say for certain whether Ivan Ustinych had heard about migratory apiaries, or discovered the principle for himself, but at any rate another man, as with the discovery of America, considered the discovery, claimed it, and





spread the idea. I cannot speak of this with any degree of certitude, and anyhow it is not this which interests me. It seems to me that man's co-operation with bees influences his own nature. The bees teach us not to thrust ourselves forward, not to make abrupt movements, and to depend on mental rather than on physical force. For this reason it seems clear to me that Ivan Ustinych never wasted a thought on his claims to be the inventor of the new system of beekeeping: what did he care whose name was linked with the discovery? His was the first place in its application, and he would always keep this place.

2

Now when I look about me, I see, as on a television screen, my old mother country, and I understand that I have always loved my home, but have always been conscious of something missing, so that, as well as being unable to boast of it myself, I did not even place much faith in the praises of others. Was it not in search of some new, better home that I roamed over the north, writing down folk tales? But neither the tales, nor the spectacular beauty of the northern landscape was any good. The heart of these tales and this wondrous scenery was, of course, man himself, and man seemed to me a still more pitiful creature in the glow of the midnight sun and the northern lights than he was in my ordinary home place. At home, after all, nightingales sing and apple-trees blossom, whereas in the north there were not even bees to gather honey.

Now, that the whole of my native land lay before me, I realised that even then I found something near and dear to me in the north. Why otherwise, amidst so many great, almost daily discoveries, should arctic honey have

made such a strong impression upon me that I felt I had to tell the whole world how it was discovered and how delightful were the people who discovered it.

As I am writing this, crystal dishes filled with a fragrant and wholesome substance, known to man from time immemorial, and in existence ever since the first bee lighted on the first flower, stand on my table, reflecting the light from the electric lamps. But this well-known substance which has been so long in existence, was brought from a place where bees had never been before. The abundant nectar stored in the honey-yielding flowers of the tundra was inaccessible to man without the agency of bees. And this very honey, now gleaming from a crystal dish on my table, may rightly be said to have been created not by bees alone, but also, and mainly, by the efforts of man, setting our Russian native bee from the Oka meadows to work in the Arctic regions at the foot of the Khibiny Mountains, in the neighbourhood of Monchegorsk, in remote Murmansk, and, further north still, almost up to the 70th parallel beyond the Barents Sea, in Pechenga.

It is difficult to give a correct description of things connected with the taste, smell and colour; for after all there's no accounting for tastes. And too difficult for words to speak of honey from the tundra, honey which no one has ever tasted, honey which never existed before. Maybe so, but how one wants to be the first to speak of a thing so unprecedented, of which nothing has ever been said before. I thought that arctic honey had a much nicer taste than ours, and that the difference between southern and arctic honey was much like the difference between northern and southern scenery as regards light. What artists in the south call a *tone*, is split up in the north into more than ten shades, making the light infinitely tenderer and subtler, and not only the

light but shadows, clouds, water, and mountains. Everything in the north is more delicate, more subtle, the human element is more intimate than that of nature in the abstract, there is more happiness derived from human toil than the effortless happiness of the south. And so this honey, gathered from the flowers of the arctic tundra, appealed to me most from the point of view of the human efforts to bring the non-existent into existence.

3

We now know that the flowers of the arctic tundra contain millions of poods of nectar, and one can safely say that in time every inhabitant of the north will have as much first-rate northern honey on his table as he likes.

Amongst the multitude of current discoveries in our country this one has passed almost unnoticed, and no one knows who is the Columbus of this new honey region in the Arctic Circle. There have been plenty of discoveries in the world, beginning, for one, with the discovery of America, which opened a path for the plundering and destruction of a perfectly innocent population. Every creative endeavour must lead to discoveries. But the honourable name of the worker must not be allowed to sink into oblivion, and whoever describes a discovery in print, must also discover the names connected with it.

It would, however, be hard to say whom the inhabitants of the north ought to thank for honey: agronomist V. Demidenko, who in 1934, together with G. Ankinovich and V. Naumov, brought the bees for a fortnight's stay in the Arctic regions, or S. Lozis, chief agronomist of the Industria State Farm, or the Society for the Protection of Nature in Moscow, or the enthusiasts from the Murmansk Regional Executive Committee and Regional Committee of the Communist

Party. Mention must also be made of Doctor of Biology G. Avetisyan from the Institute of Apiculture. He grew up in a land of sunshine, in sight of the famous Mount Alagez. It would seem to be a sufficiently happy fate to spend one's life in a land of such an ancient culture, and in the neighbourhood of Mount Ararat. But our bee-lover found his happiness in the Arctic regions, in the tundra, where a birch-tree takes half a century to grow twenty centimetres high.

"There's nothing to wonder at in that," said Dr. Avetisyan to me. "The climates of north and south have altitude as well as latitude. It's quite possible that there is an altitude on Mt. Alagez itself, where you'll find a little old birch-tree not higher than that."

From this talk of ours it became obvious that in whatever altitudes one treads—the plains or the heights—what matters is that the motive power of the unknown, the non-existent, the new, forms part of the complex feeling for one's native land.

In the summer of 1949 Dr. Avetisyan went to the Arctic regions, and, making experiments with a few colonies of bees, managed so to inflame the patriotic sentiments of the Murmansk population that they eagerly took up the idea of arctic honey, and now it would be hard to say to which northern people are more indebted for the discovery of the boundless stores of arctic honey—scientific thought or local patriotism. But I should like to show this discovery of arctic honey as a chain of efforts made by definite persons, to name at least a few of the most important of them, and to travel from one to another until we arrive at the arctic honey itself.

For myself I should wish in this true story to go into the matter of the discovery in such a way as would relieve me of the slightest necessity for inventing any of

the details. It seems to me that all the inventions of an author would become absurd and unnecessary if he could get himself into intimate, close contact with life itself, and become himself the witness of the birth of something that has never been before. And as I have not the slightest desire to play hide-and-seek with the reader, I will tell him the end of the story—the honey was discovered. It is my business, as a witness of this new birth, to relate how it was born and what persons deserve praise for their assistance in the process.

4

What the Doctor said was:

“Does not the sun shine twenty-four hours a day in the Arctic regions, and does not the vegetation function throughout these hours? There is more nectar in northern than in southern flowers, and the brief northern summer could yield more than the long summer in the south.”

Golden words! But how convince the local inhabitant of their truth, when he knows very well that the birch-trees only put out their leaves here from the 10th of June and begin to turn at the end of July? How are these golden words to be believed when the bees only begin gathering nectar in mid-June, and stop by early August?

The local inhabitant has long struggled unaided with forest, water, and stone. True, the hand of the master now has control of forest, water, and stone, but he knows too well the worth of things to believe everything he is told, and release vast sums of money for experiments.

The great thing was not so much the honey itself, as that our arctic nights and days of labour should be rewarded by honey, that here, too, it was possible to live and achieve as people live and achieve in other places.

“The idea of remaking nature is more apparent beneath

the rays of the midnight sun,” said the Doctor. “In the arctic night electricity shines more brightly.”

“Golden words, Doctor!” There was no gainsaying the truth of what he said. “Honeyed words! But will there be honey?”

“By the autumn you’ll have it,” promised the Doctor. Then things began to move! The first Polar expedition brought five bee-colonies to Industria, the biggest state farm in the Kola Peninsula. This expedition was organised by the Society for the Protection of Nature and the Institute of Morphology of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The expedition included two workers from the Timiryazev Academy’s apiary, G. Ankinovich and A. Lyubimov, and S. Kholuyev, a teacher.

The members of the Industria State Farm worked with a will, and when the slopes of the Khibiny Mountains took on the sheen of burnished copper, Avetisyan, the head of the expedition, extracted a sealed comb of first arctic honey and carried it off for the authorities in Murmansk to see.

It is not hard to imagine the astonishment of the Murmansk dwellers when they tasted their own local arctic honey. And what fairy-tale could have a more marvellous end than our true story about that first summer’s experiments with the bees: on the 3rd of September, 1949, a decision was passed by the Murmansk Executive Committee and Regional Party Committee Bureau on the organisation of large-scale experimentation in 1950, including apiaries in Khibiny, near Murmansk, in Monchegorsk, and in Pechenga.

According to eye-witnesses the rejoicing over this decision coincided with a great local festival in Murmansk. Young men in bell-bottom trousers walked arm-in-arm with girls carrying bunches of pansies, grown in local hothouses on the shores of the Arctic Ocean.

Soon after the decision to purchase one hundred bee-colonies and transfer them for the organisation of arctic apiaries, the question arose as to the best place from which to obtain the bees. This question was approached from many angles, and, once it was unanimously agreed that the bees must, first and foremost, be frost-hardy, the Caucasus, the Ukraine, and all southern districts were ruled out. Then the Apiculture Department of the Ministry of Agriculture of the RSFSR proposed to take bees from Moscow Region. After some hesitation all agreed that the bees should come from those very velvety meadows on the banks of the Oka, where, in my childhood, Ustinych, our local apiarist, roamed with his famed blind horse, Zena.

Thus did the events marking the discovery of arctic honey march with those of my own life, and I felt as if I had been standing at the cradle of something completely new and unprecedented. "Surely," I said to myself, "if I relate all these new things as they sprang up beneath the hands of splendid people, my story, in which there will not be the slightest admixture of fiction, will be no less interesting than a fairy-tale!"

This idea of transporting a hundred bee-colonies all this distance was actually no different from the wanderings of Ivan Ustinych; the only difference was that this time there were more bees, and the transfer was made, not in a cart drawn by a blind horse, but with the aid of modern transport, and covering the vast distance between the Oka and the Arctic Ocean.

Thus came the spring of that year. An experiment of introducing bees to the Far North, the first in the world, was being conducted in Murmansk. And then an

obstacle arose: there were to be bees but there were no beekeepers. So beekeeping classes were started at Industria.

A jackdaw or a parrot can be taught to speak, and a machine can take notes more accurately than a human being. But what was needed here was intelligent people who would act, not like a jackdaw or a machine, but as only man, the lord of creation, can act.

For thousands of years on almost the same day in early spring the snow-bunting has appeared in the north, black clusters of insects have shown against the melting snow, the larks have started singing, and the birch-trees have come out; and throughout these same thousands of years, birds and insects have made their appearance and vanished, flowers have blossomed and faded, according to the round of the seasons. And then came man, and began noting when the birds began their migration, what flowers blossomed and when, when local bumble-bees flew over the flowers, when our imported honey-bees left the hive, and how much honey accumulated in the test hive.

The accuracy of these entries may not appear such a difficult matter, but for the ordinary person it was a step towards scientific work, to the discovery of the laws ruling nature herself. Thus the remaking of nature for the purpose of collecting once wasted honey had to begin with the remaking of man himself.

These northern workers were the people to decide the future of apiculture in the Kola Peninsula. It was not for themselves that they wanted honey: each one strove for his own good only so this would benefit the rest of his comrades. I think simple folk have always been like that when they enter the temple of science, but from the very beginning, besides the simple-hearted people, there have been others treading the same path, which ultimately

forked in two directions—the difficult path to our goal and the easy path into the jaws of the wolf.

The Doctor's pupils took the difficult path, and any book on the discovery of honey in the north would have to contain chapters describing the stages of psychological development of each individual. It is now obvious why names crop up along this path: all cannot be named, so we must confine ourselves to the very best.

The name of one woman shall therefore be cited as representative of all the rest—Anna Somova, a Cossack girl from the Don, leader of a vegetable-planting team. While observing the movements of the bees over the vegetable plots, she kept accurate observations of their pollination of cucumbers, and it would now be hard to say which is more beneficial to man in the north: the honey gathered by the bees, or their pollination of plants. Anna was able to prove that the work of a single bee-colony is equal to that of a hundred and twenty people engaged upon hand pollination of cucumbers.

In the very heat of the calving season Elza Bystryakova, a splendid reindeer expert and an energetic worker, was called away from the tundra and sent to Moscow. We in Moscow expected to see a sort of modern Amazon attired in reindeer skins, and were pleasantly surprised to see a sweet-faced girl in a nice blue coat, carrying the usual inconvenient handbag so dear to women. And she had come about a matter which required a handbag—she had come about money. Once the business of getting bank credits and a refrigerator-van for the conveyance of the bees had been settled, there arose the difficulty of finding the right escort for them, one who should be a bee expert, and an enthusiast ready to undertake the responsibility of getting the precious freight to the Arctic. It looked as if this would require the resurrection of Ivan Ustinych and

the bestowing on him of college education. For who could be found to undertake the conveyance of bees in carts scores of miles from the forests, to accompany them as they jolted thousands of miles by rail, shiver beside them in the refrigerator-van, plunge up and down with them in a boat on the Barents Sea, and once more jog in lorries over the uneven road to Pechenga?

In war-time, volunteers offer themselves for the most dangerous jobs, and Moscow was full of volunteers of all sorts, among them, of course, apiarists. Very soon it was clear that there would be no necessity to resurrect Ivan Ustinych. We bee-lovers knew very well that there must be such a man among us at the very moment, only nobody knew who it was, and he himself was too modest to come forward. But when the time came, he was sent by the authorities and proved to be another Ivan Ustinych, only he had a small grey wedge of a beard on his chin and the general appearance of a middle-aged, well-educated man. But his soul, like the soul of Ivan Ustinych, was a veritable beehive, murmurous with the humming of bees, and I think that this man, Konstantin Rodionov, even had a kinder heart than Ivan Ustinych.

Ustinych had to see, to hear, to smoke out the bees, but Rodionov, research worker of the Institute of Apiculture, could interest himself even in bees he had never seen. Because of his passion for bees, they called him "the last of the Mohicans" at the Institute, but we ourselves, and the whole Arctic will remember him and Dr. Avetisyan as the first of the Mohicans, the initiators of a business unprecedented in the north.

Which of us can say what we associate with the word "Mohican"? I think we mean something very admirable, but inevitably and unjustly vanishing from the world. Not only that—we know that we must reconcile

ourselves to live without Mohicans. I can never bring myself to that state of mind: when, as a child, I read about the North American Indians, I fancied I was fighting side by side with them for liberty.

And it is no mere chance that our first of the Mohicans, the moment he started on extending his native land's horizons, came up against a force which, far from wishing to extend, endeavoured to keep things in their present stage. The manager of the District Agricultural Department on the Oka refused to sell a hundred bee-colonies to Rodionov. It was then that a telegram from Rodionov brought Elza hotfoot from the tundra.

What a magic force this single-minded girl from the tundra possessed! Elza was so taken with the idea that people would develop the Arctic, laughed so scornfully when informed that not one of the wealthy collective farms on the banks of the Oka could spare a hundred bee-colonies for the Arctic, that the manager was dumbfounded.

And truly his outlook was a rustic one, limited by the zigzag contours of the forest, compared with the outlook of this young woman of the new type. Elza from the tundra, confined by no forests, understood this immediately and simply said:

“Comrade! Pull down your fences!”

This was when the manager was dumbfounded.

But she went on:

“You’ve fenced yourself all round with your rich collective farms on the Oka meadows. But we mean to produce more honey in our tundra than you get from your velvety meadows. Isn’t one of the main ideas of our time that backward people should get into the vanguard?”

This time the manager understood what she meant, and explained his resistance by his concern for his district.

“Your honey won’t be wasted,” replied Elza. “It will make the Oka famous.”

The manager recovered his senses completely, and replied:

“Our velvety meadows will exchange greetings with your arctic tundra!”

Thus adroitly did the worthy local worker leap over his fence, and Elza from the tundra, having gathered a huge bunch of all the honey-bearing specimens growing in the velvety meadows, went away.

6

That summer the haymaking in the meadows was somewhat delayed by rain. But just when Rodionov required helpers for the transport of the bees the rain stopped and, according to the immemorial custom in our parts, old and young rushed out into the fields. It was impossible to delay the transport of the bees any longer: in the rainy days they were eating up their stocks, and it was too late to hope for better weather any more. The food might not last out the journey: according to the plan the bees were to travel to the Arctic on their own stocks, and immediately on arrival set about gathering honey.

There was not a day to spare, and everybody was out haymaking, and there was not the faintest chance of getting round them, as Elza from the tundra had got round the manager. Fortunately there is always a sage, broad-minded individual in every corner of our country. In the present case it was Yakov Popov, an old beekeeper like Ivan Ustinych.

You would think there were no more kulaks * left, but

* Kulak—a peasant employing labourers on his farm.—*Ed.*

every now and then the old proprietary instincts make themselves felt even in the affairs of the community. There were people anxious to send inferior bee-colonies to the Arctic, and keep superior ones for themselves. And but for Yakov Popov things would have gone ill with the first of the Mohicans; his task was enormous, the area far from the banks of the Oka, lost in the Arctic regions. But Yakov Popov, though not a northerner, was ready to pounce upon anyone acting on the principle of "no swindle, no sale", for he was heart and soul for the Arctic regions.

Then came the *green night*, as it was afterwards called. Owing to a shortage of lorries, and, possibly, owing also to the all but absence of roads, the bees had to be conveyed from the woods across the meadows on carts and then across the Oka to the railway station. The bee experts, well-versed in the ways of bees, were as anxious as doctors before an operation. If a single bee had escaped from a hive and stung a horse, the horse might have shied and bolted with the cart. And if a single hive got broken—well, it only takes two hundred bees to kill a horse.... And there were several horses, each mare accompanied by her foal.

And so Yakov Popov went from one cart to another the whole night, breathing smoke into suspicious places, and Rodionov hurried up with a pail of clay to fill up every crack or crevice in the hives after a particularly bad stretch of road.

They travelled thus in ceaseless vigilance the whole night, and the whole night one common care occupied them—to see that not a single bee escaped from a hive. People had this worry on their mind, and out there in the summer night, in the meadows, there were other cares: the grasshoppers' was to fiddle and fiddle the same note, the partridges' to sustain their plaintive cries

all night, and the corncrake's to utter its admonitory railings.

This is why Rodionov afterwards referred to this night as his green night.

But nothing astonished us so much as the sympathy of the stationmaster—a consignment of bees, despatched the previous night, had been left at the railway station. Of course the bees were left with a watchman, but this latter had evidently been faced by some domestic crisis, and, no doubt saying to himself that nothing special could happen to the bees at the station, he had made off. But the bee-loving stationmaster took his place and kept watch all night, until the second consignment arrived, and for him, too, it was doubtless a *green* night.

7

Much as one might like to credit the discovery of arctic honey to the organised efforts of all engaged in it, the labour of the apiarist can never be appreciated unless it is realised what a sensitive thing a bee is. You only have to chat with any veteran beekeeper, to ask yourself: isn't this bee-lover drawing a long bow?

Yakov Popov told us that many years ago, just before an eclipse of the sun, the bees had flown across the Oka to the meadows in the usual way, but that several hours before people had begun to notice the eclipse the bees had flown back in a huge grey funnel, and clustered thickly round their hives. When the eclipse began everyone wondered how the bees could have known about it beforehand.

But if dogs have a special sense enabling them to find their master after losing him miles away in a wood, when rain has washed away all footprints, and birds can

fly across the sky better and more unerringly than we can sail across the ocean, why should not bees have a special sense of the sun's position in the heavens?

For a long time the dance of the bees was regarded as an exaggeration of the beekeepers, but now science has proved that the dance of the bees is their language, a means of communication between scout-bees and worker-bees, information about the topographical situation of honey-yielding blossoms between three points: the hive, the blossoms and the position of the sun. Of these three points, two are permanent, while the third—the position of the sun—changes. And the tale told by the scouts is, in reality, the describing of the angle for the moment of the sun's rays to the nectar fields.

Very well then—since at any given moment the scout-bees can report in their own way on the position of the sun, why should these same bee-topographers not carry to the hive information about the sun's condition just before an eclipse, and all the bees take fright at the “doom of the world”, and cluster around their hives for shelter?

There is nothing in the least fantastic in these phenomena, but, knowing what a sensitive thing a bee is, who would not tremble at the risks attendant on conveying them to the Arctic?

It was no easy matter, considering the urgent and complicated nature of the country's requirements, to get hold of a refrigerator-van for transporting bees to the Arctic regions, and then to get it included in the schedule for passenger trains. And once this was achieved, there was no time left to look for workers, or change one's mind—go you must, even if you are the bees' only guard—there is no turning back now.

“But how can you manage all alone?” Yakov Popov kept asking as he helped to stack the hives in the van.

“I’ve got to go,” was Rodionov’s only reply.

The bees had a heavy brood and that meant that the young bees would join the old ones in eating up their stocks on the way, especially if there were many delays, and when the stocks were all gone, the bees would die of starvation.

“But how will you manage?”

There was an ever-growing embarrassment in the voice of Yakov Popov.

And Rodionov thoroughly understood the cause of his anxiety: the old man thought it was his duty to ignore his load of 70 years, his innumerable domestic and farming affairs, and go with Rodionov.

“Old man,” he insisted. “Give it up! It’s no joke, you know!”

But to give it up would have meant to give up all hope of moving till next year: the van would be taken away, it would not be so easy to get another, and then the weather would break up, and sugar would have to be obtained.

In the urgency of his cares for the bees, the scientist quite forgot his own needs, and had to send a telegram to a friend, a fellow bee-lover, asking him to get some bread and pack a suitcase of the barest necessities for him, and bring it to the train.

Ivan Vzorodov, war invalid, an in no way remarkable individual, arrived with the suitcase exactly half an hour before the departure of the train, and immediately began stuffing straw in between the hives, in those places where, in his opinion, they were likely to rub against one another. He seemed to have taken in his friend’s predicament at a glance, for he worked away without taking the slightest notice of the warning bells, and allowed himself to be whisked away to the Arctic regions.

There are dark days on which everything presents itself in a dual light: if you follow one path, you will be in continual difficulty; if you take the other, all will be easy and pleasant at first, but you will inevitably end up in the jaws of a wolf.

Thus it was that the path of our apiarist friends forked, and it was hard to say which was the right way, and which way would lead to the wolves. The frames were removed from the supers while packing them, in order to give the bees room to cluster, and netting was nailed over the top to prevent them escaping. The very first stroke of the hammer agitated the bees, but this was nothing in comparison with the confusion in the hives when the train had worked up to its full speed.

Innumerable meat hooks dangled from the roof of the refrigerator-van with honey extractors attached to six of them, and when the train moved these hooks struck one another, ringing like bells above the bees. The unsufficiency of the load was another factor in their discomfort. True, there were a hundred hives with supers, as well as all sorts of equipment and instruments required for northern beekeeping, and the van was so full that there was scarcely room for the two passengers, but in weight all this fell far short of the usual load, and the vanful of bees, travelling express, was jolted and shaken unmercifully.

On the way it soon became apparent that the bees had imbibed masses of food and were clustering more and more densely in their excitement, thus raising the temperature. The ice kept melting. Frequent replenishing with fresh ice was required. But the very first attempt at this led to the discovery that it was impossible to fill up the van in the short time a passenger train stopped at

stations. The van had to be uncoupled, and a day and a night were wasted in waiting for the next train.

And now the apiarists were in the very position described by me from the first—the road to the north, to the flowers of the tundra forked off in two directions: to use ice for cooling, meant dragging out the journey for days and days, during which their stores would fail and the bees would starve; not to use ice, meant that they would work up a tremendously high temperature and be suffocated, together with the brood.

It seems, however, as if, whenever one embarks upon something quite new, the road will fork at some stage of the work, and there are no precedents to help one, for the unprecedented has come into its own.

Even now, at the very moment when I am absorbed in narrating this absolutely true story, my own road is beginning to fork, and I am tempted to abandon the difficult path of truthful narration, and take up the tale till I get to the place in which a good fairy appears in the nick of time....

The apiarists had no examples to look to—probably such a great number of bees had never before been conveyed by rail to the Far North.

But perhaps there is such a thing as luck, and even our apiarists may have some!

“Ivan,” said Rodionov, “let’s risk not getting out at the next station with ice supplies!”

“First let’s take a look at the temperature,” said Ivan.

At floor surface, it was 9 degrees above zero, that is, normal, and at the top—18, not very alarming either.

“Shall we risk it?” said Rodionov.

“We’ll risk it, Uncle Kostya,” said Ivan.

And the apiarists risked it, and did not stop at the station with ice supplies.

And very soon—how it came about, they could hardly have explained—the last remnants of ice melted, and the temperature inside the hives began to rise disastrously.

It was a moment such as a drowning man experiences when he clutches a straw. And there weren't even any straws to catch at.

The temperature at the bottom was not so bad for the bees, but it was cold and bleak for human beings; the floor jiggled constantly beneath their feet, there was nothing to lie on or cover themselves with and to crown all, it was dark. They crouched among the hives like a pair of finches sheltering from the weather in bushes, and when their hands warmed up, their hearts grew cold with fear for the bees.

“Ivan, it seems to be getting warmer, take the thermometer, here's a candle-end for you, climb up to the top.”

“Don't be in a hurry, Uncle Kostya,” replied Ivan. “We looked only a short time ago. Let's try and have a nap.”

But hardly had they fallen asleep, when there was a fresh alarm. Either from the heat, or for some other cause, or from everything together, a few insubordinate bees started feeling for a way out of the hive. Naturally the jolting of the van had caused some of the clay-filled crevices in the hives to reopen, and the restless rover-bees found a way out through them. They could not fly in the dark, but could only crawl down from the top hives to the ones beneath, and to the floor.

“A crawling bee doesn't sting you like a bee in flight: the sting is blunter and more painful.”

Rodionov told us this later, and I still do not know whether this is true, or whether it only seemed so to them, in the cold, dark van.

But anyone who has been on scientific expeditions, or in the war—and who is there nowadays who has not been in the war?—knows that all these things are mere trifles, and scarcely count in the march of events. The only trouble was that whenever a crawling bee stung them, their thoughts stung them still more forcibly and painfully.

And again, the worst of it was not that they were responsible for the bees, but that nothing they did seemed to be any good, and everything seemed to go wrong.

“No, Ivan, I can’t sleep. I’ll have a try at getting to the top myself.”

“I can’t sleep, either, Uncle Kostya—let’s have that candle-end!”

Candle-end in hand, Ivan climbed from hive to hive with the thermometer.

He was standing right at the top, on the third tier, waiting, thermometer in hand, for the prescribed number of minutes, and then bringing it level with his eyes, when suddenly the candle went out. Ivan lost his balance, and tumbled down the hives, the thermometer falling out of his hand and breaking.

It was not easy to find the thermometer, but they searched zealously, encountering crawling bees, uttering yelps of pain and curses, and at last they found it.

“What did it show, Ivan?”

“I can hardly bear to tell you, Uncle Kostya. It is 22 above. We’re done for!”

“It was our fault—we shouldn’t have tried to do without ice.”

“But if we’d been uncoupled again, another day or two would have been lost.”



And there you are! When you are the first to take a path to the new and unknown, where no one has ever been before you, the road is sure to fork. And we at this moment—shall we abandon the path of truth? Shall we turn the discovery of honey in the north into a fairy-tale, and leave the disentangling of it in the hands of a good fairy?

No! And this is why: there are not many poets in the world, but in his soul almost every man is a poet. And if this is so, then in life itself, as in one's own home, poetry lives, and whoever loves life can make of it a good fairy. Let us trust life and not abandon the way of truth!

The unfortunate apiarists sitting amidst the hives were far from gay, but they refused to lose heart. And we, too, understanding their position, will not lose heart. They had done everything possible, and it only remained for them to find out that the path to the new is never free from hazards. And all the time the train rolled on. Every now and then the bee guards wetted rolled-up rags and squeezed them through the netting at the top of the hives, so that the bees might quench the thirst which the heat was bound to arouse. It took a long time before each one of the hundred colonies of travelling bees had had a drink. And the train rolled on and on, and stations flew past. And suddenly at one station there came a knock at the door....

Now may our hearts rejoice for a moment: we have chosen the right way. In the year of the Spanish revolution great numbers of orphans came to our country—Spanish children—and among them was the girl, Paquita. Her father had fallen in battle, her mother died, and so she grew up among our snows, shared our sustenance, got her education. It was the strange fate of the Spanish girl with her hot southern blood to become

the manager of a refrigerating plant. And this very Paquita, with a red uniform cap on her black curls, now entered the van.

There are of course quite as many kind, intelligent women in our country as there are in Spain, but somehow the background of oranges, pineapples, olive oil, serenades, the Guadalquivir, seems to make a Spanish girl in the uniform of a refrigerating plant manager, more like a good fairy, than just a good-natured Russian woman. With the maternal instincts of a true woman, the girl quickly sized up the predicament and, warmly supporting the apiarists, helped them to have the train delayed while they got the van filled with ice, and found a substitute for the broken thermometer. She brought them straw for beds with her own hands, and even found time to treat them to tea and jam.

Look at Paquita, friend! Could a fairy be sweeter? And rejoice: we have chosen the right path, and the wolves will not devour us.

9

In the north, beyond the Arctic Circle, regular mountains of flowers sometimes spring up: if the mountain is white all over, it is the cloudberry and bilberry blossoming. And sometimes you will come across a pink mountain in July—that's the willow-herb beginning to flower, or the rosemary, or the geranium, or goodness knows what! And only to think that there is two or three times as much nectar in every flower as there is in our parts, and that every flower awaits a bee, and that there are no bees beyond the Arctic Circle!

I remember in my youth I would wander for days in



dry weather among these northern flowers, and my clothes would be damp, not with dew, but with honey, and yet I had not the sense—I was unable to summon up sufficient love of life—to guess what it is that nature herself required, nay, begged of man in the Kola Peninsula.

One of the great charms of our discovery of arctic honey is that it was not made to the detriment of nature, that the millions of poods of honey were only secreted in the flowers for the purpose of attracting bees for pollination, and that there were no bees till we imported them. The flowers awaited the bees, and this means that the sun also awaited them, for if we can identify ourselves with flowers, why not say that the sun, which gives us life, needed the bees? The sun, the flowers, human beings—all were waiting.

There are things of elemental worth in the world, things which are comprehensible to all, uniting within themselves nature and man in an ancient league, and one of the first of these things is—bread. But you must be very hungry before you can feel the sunshine in bread, it is much easier to do so in honey. It was this which caused such rejoicings among the crowds awaiting the arrival of the bees at the railway station of Apatity (Khibiny).

And even when the door of the refrigerator-van swung open, and the crawling bees, attracted by the light, sailed out and began stinging all and sundry—some on the cheek or nose, some the right side or left side, some through their shirts, others beneath their shirts—people only looked at one another, convulsed with laughter.

Thus naturally and gaily did the bees start their life in the Arctic regions.

Over half the bee-colonies remained in Khibiny and

were immediately whisked away in lorries, under the escort of trained apiarists, to their homes in the Industria State Farm, the Botanical Gardens and in Monchegorsk.

But here, as in every new undertaking, something was lost sight of—no one had thought of getting a supply of sugar for the bees, in case of their arriving hungry. And so the first raptures of welcome quickly gave way to alarm. It was not the fault of anyone in particular, but in the north the sun does not sink below the horizon in the summer, as it should. And when anything goes wrong, people get a feeling that it stays in the sky purposely to expose them, that it stands there with a reproachful gaze, asking:

“Why didn’t you think of that?”

You have to be inured to the ways of nature in that spot for the unwinking eye of that midnight witness of your intimate life not keep you awake.

And how still it is in the Arctic on these sunlit nights! You can even hear a beetle making its way between the stems of the blossoming bilberries. It is so still that you can hear the wood grouse snoring in the tree tops.

Time passes unheeded during these nights in the unremitting light of the midnight sun, and to speak of these nights is to speak of oneself: everyone feels things in his own way. Life in common begins with play in the sunshine, followed by a slight lowering of the temperature, then the arctic partridges awake with loud cries and, as at a signal, everything starts washing, everything gleams.

The first night of the bees in the Arctic was wonderfully still, bright, and warm. The weary, famished bees no doubt slept well, and the noise of their humming was audible. But on that night too the queen of the hive went on depositing her eggs.



At the first rays of the sun's morning light, the bees waked up and, as a matter of course, despatched their scouts. Just then the tundra was riotous with the blossoms of bilberries, cloudberry, wild peas, rosemary, and the willow-herb was just coming out. The scouts did not stay out long, returning to explain in their dance-language the lay of the land—what flowers were blooming, which were nearer, which more distant, and the best places to visit. After this the worker-bees flew off to gather nectar, and the queen went on laying her eggs.

That very first day the bees, weary, worn-out, and hungry as they were, gathered an average of two kilograms of honey per colony, some colonies working so vigorously that they brought in four kilos each.

The next day, too, of course, the sun stayed up all night to bear witness to the soul of man, but the beekeepers were happy now, and took no notice of the watcher. They slept.

It was recorded in the apiary that the bees worked till after midnight the first day, falling asleep at 1:30 a.m., that they went to sleep before midnight the next day, rising at 4 a.m., and that they worked from 8 a.m. till 10 p.m. on the third day.

10

The second consignment of bees was taken by Rodionov to the Arctic State Farm, near the Kola river. He knew nothing of the fate of the bees left at Apatity. He only saw for himself the first arctic flight of the

bees, here, on the banks of the Kola. He opened the bee-entrances in agitation, and was still more agitated seeing the bees, after having taken their orientation flight, rising high in the air and going off to gather nectar.

In a few minutes a boy came rushing up with cries of: "Quick! Quick! Come and look at the bees!"

Seizing Rodionov's hand he dragged him forward, repeating:

"Uncle, Uncle, they've all fallen down!"

The apiarist followed the lad in the greatest alarm, asking him again and again: "Where have they fallen?"

The boy only answered:

"They've fallen into the river, Uncle, into the river!"

They ran up to the bank of the Kola, and then all was clear. The bank of the Kola in this place is a broad sandy reef. The water comes up to this reef, and never entirely leaves it; there is always water in hollows, and the dimpled surface of the reef looked like thousands of little cups, and on the rims of each cup were thick clusters of bees, quenching the thirst of the long journey in long draughts of arctic water.

Who could have helped rejoicing at such a sight?

After a short rest at the watering place, the bees abandoned the reef and vanished over the river.

This was not the usual nectar-gathering procedure. But there was no time to think about it. A girl carrying a big bunch of honey-yielding flowers appeared on the pathway on the other side of the river, and Rodionov recognised in her Elza of the tundra, the girl who had so ably persuaded the manager of the Oka District Agricultural Department to part with his bees. They could not, of course, abstain from the usual reflection: "Isn't the world a small place?"

After which, Elza of the tundra said:

“Come quick and see the bees!”

And when the apiarists came to the tundra, they saw that the whole blossoming surface was covered with bees, each bee on its own flower.

And it was in the evening, it was the same in the Arctic State Farm, as in the Industria farm, the Botanical Gardens, and at Monchegorsk: each colony gathered from two to four kilograms of honey.

11

The last consignment of bees crossed the Barents Sea and were taken in lorries right up to Pechenga. The steamer was riding high on the incoming tide, and much difficulty was experienced in loading the hives by hand, and in dodging the hanging life-boats. There was danger, too, in conveying the bees by lorries over the rough roads, but this only enhanced the satisfaction on coming across them later, at a latitude of almost seventy degrees, and learning that their take was greater than the average at lower arctic latitudes. Here the rule was firmly established: the further north and the brighter the light, the more nectar there was in the flowers, and the higher the daily take of honey.

I might end my story of the discovery of arctic honey here, but I began it with the description of my childhood on the banks of the Oka, amidst the beekeepers, and now I cannot help feeling as if those childhood years were continued in the north. I have given so much of myself to the north, that I now feel as if it were a kind of continuation of my native land, and I seem to hear a voice asking:

“You saw the abundance of flowers in the tundra with your own eyes. You say yourself that when you walked about the Khibiny tundra in dry weather your clothes

were sticky with honey. How was it that you did not then propose transferring bees to the north? Every blossom in the tundra awaits its bee, and you could have accomplished such a great thing—you could have put millions of poods of this nourishing and curative substance at the disposal of the nomad tenders of reindeer in the north.”

I will end my story of the discovery of arctic honey and the organisation in the Arctic of apiaries in the summer of 1950, with the answer to this reproach.

It is five years short of half-a-century since I wandered about the north on foot and wrote down my stories. I got as far as the Kola Peninsula—on foot, on some chancemet horse-drawn cart, by boat along the seashore—and found myself quite alone in the midst of an arctic desert.

The apatite deposits slumbered undiscovered in the mountainsides, the Lapland Mountains towered amidst the clouds and in the stillness of the arctic night the Niva River ran its course for its own benefit alone, oblivious of man's needs. My soul was, at that time, like the northern flowers, laden with the honey of unrealised talent, awaiting the arrival of the bee. This is probably why my inner world seemed split in two by a fatal boundary line: on one side was talent, a possibility of great happiness and joy in life—on the other, a dark, sombre desert. In the same way my external life was equally split up—into the bright world of the sun which never set, and the sombre world of arctic night. Apparently not even a bee could cross this fatal line.

And so it was as if I, a story-teller by nature, crossed the desert in the sunshine, taking with me its stories to pass them on to happy folk, while the poor people of the north had to endure the sunless night with no aid from me.



Each smouldering summit seemed to whisper to me: "Pass on!" And my soul was wounded by the hostile words—I was a mere passer-by.

My tales, written down in the north, retold the legends of orchards, nightingales, cherries, raspberries, while in reality not so much as a spud could at that time be grown in the north.

But was my own dear native land despite its velvety meadows, luxuriant orchards, nightingales, flowers, despite Turgenev, and dear old beekeepers, really any better off than Lapland? Was not the peasant in my native country dubbed a muzhik, the very word implying that he was bound to the soil from which he sprang, like a Negro imprisoned in his black skin, and despised by the white slave-owner? A wretched plot of land was all he was entitled to, the plot inevitably shrinking as children were born, and the land had to be divided among them.

We grew up with this sensation of doom from our very cradles. Our first rays of conscious thought were imbued with the legend of the curse of man, the expulsion from paradise, and the eternal punishment of earning one's daily bread in the sweat of one's brow. And then, as we grew up and reason began struggling against the legends of the curse of man, we came up against the monstrous Malthusian "law", condemning man to endless slavery to nature: man was supposed to multiply in geometrical progression, while the means of subsistence merely showed arithmetical progression. Still later, when, as grown men, we entered government service, we had to swear fealty to the tsar, who crowned man's narrow-mindedness in nature.

This is probably the explanation of the fact that I,

myself to a certain extent a slave of the times in which I lived, passed over the tundra, with my clothes sticky with honey, and never thought of making the effort to have bees transferred to the north.

This feeling of doom extended to everything, including, of course, the supposition that bees would be unable to live in the north, owing to climatic conditions. And each individual, in the grip of the dark spirit of the times, denied himself the right of talent to overstep, as it were, the fatal boundary line. The most honest men lived according to the rule of our own day: first the socialist revolution, and then the development of talent, as a kind of personal happiness.

Now, in the places through which I once wandered in a confusion as before something inevitable, like death, towns have sprung up, the arctic night has become as light as day, the same vegetables grow there as are cultivated in our latitudes.

And now the light from electric lamps is reflected in the fragrant, wholesome substance in crystal dishes on my table—arctic honey, never before seen, and owing its existence entirely to the efforts of the new, emancipated human being.

1951



WOODLAND MASTER

Gossamer

Most boys finding themselves in a wood usually do all they can to show their power over nature—breaking branches, setting fire to resin on the trunks of trees, hammering nails into the living stems, pillaging nests. When considering the work of Young Pioneer camps we must take note of the state of the woods surrounding the camp.

And yet I do not think children are wholly to blame for all the injuries to trees that we discover. We were all children once and can remember how we longed to be the masters, with power over everything in nature. The desire for mastery, so common in little boys, is in my opinion an inherent quality and a very good one. The only thing wrong with it is that every child wishes to be the master of nature in his own interests, and sometimes



becomes a real danger to society. And so our wrath should not be entirely directed against the children—their teachers should come in for a considerable share of it.

It is for them to guide the healthy feeling of mastery that is natural to children into channels useful for society, and to accustom children to regard themselves as envoys of social man, furnished with the beneficent power to use the gifts of nature.

In the old days teachers endeavoured to temper cruelty, a trait supposedly common to the master of nature, with mercy ("the devil is terrible, but God is merciful!"). This sentimental education was no sort of good. After all, trees must be felled as well as planted. Every fully-matured forest when approaching old age is facing ruin from worms or fires. Better it should be made use of by ourselves than fly up in flames or crumble from worms.... And so we have to be ruthless sometimes and fell the trees. Moreover, if grainland is required, according to a correctly drawn-up plan, we shall have to uproot trees and plough the land. Cruelty, like power and pity, like solicitude for everything that lives, is an integral part of the feeling of mastery. Teachers must show us how to use them all. But these thoughts have no doubt been expressed over and over again from time immemorial, and the normal human being comes across them in life without the aid of teachers.

I should like to talk about myself, to tell how I came upon these ideas in my own life. But this would take a long time, and I would rather describe my daily encounters with these ideas, and the way I always go into the woods as a pupil, and emerge a teacher. I will recount my daily discoveries in the woods, in themselves perhaps insignificant, but ever fresh, and revealing my own path through life more expeditiously and more faithfully than a biography would.

I remember a sunny day, so brilliant that the sun's rays penetrated into the darkest parts of the forest. I

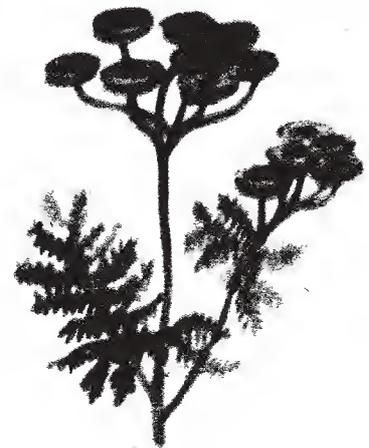
was trudging along a woodland path, so narrow that the trees on one side of it reached over to the other, and their leaves seemed to be whispering together. The wind was very slight, but still there was a wind, and overhead the aspens rustled, while underfoot the ferns swayed in their usual stately manner. Suddenly I noticed something: tiny fiery arrows were darting across the path from left to right. As always when confronted by some new phenomenon, I fixed my attention on them and soon noted that their movement coincided with the direction of the wind, from left to right. Next, I noted that the young shoots on the fir-trees had discarded their russet sheaths, and that the wind had blown these now superfluous sheaths from every tree in vast quantities. Each new sprout on a fir-tree was born with a russet sheath, and there were now as many sheaths flying about as there were sprouts—thousands, millions....

I observed that when one of these flying sheaths met one of the flying arrows, it hung in the air and the arrow disappeared. I then realised that the sheath was hanging from an invisible cobweb, and this enabled me to go close up to the web and discover the significance of the arrows—the wind was blowing the spider's web towards a sunbeam, and the web was ablaze, so that the arrow seemed to be flying through the air. At the same time I realised that there were any amount of these spiders' webs stretched across the path, and that by merely walking on I destroyed them by the thousand, without even knowing it. I felt that my aim—to learn in the forest to be its true master—was so important that I was entitled to tear all the cobwebs and force all the woodland spiders to work for me. But for some reason I spared the web I had just noticed—perhaps because it had aided me, by means of the sheath suspended from it, to discover the phenomenon of the arrows. Did I act

cruelly in destroying thousands of spiders' webs? Not in the least. I had not even seen them, my cruelty was the consequence of my physical strength. Had I been merciful when I bent my weary back to spare the one web? Hardly—in the forest I behave like a pupil, and would not willingly touch anything, if that were possible. I attribute the escape of this web to the action of my absorbed attention.

Woodland master

That was on a sunny day, now I will tell you about the woods just before rain. The silence and tenseness prevailing in anticipation of the first drops were such that every little leaf, every pine-needle seemed to be trying to be the first to catch the first drop of rain. And now every least little creature in the forest seemed to assume its own, particular expression.



I approached them all at that moment, saying to myself: all of them, like human beings, have turned their faces towards me, begging me in their innocence to send the rain—as if I were a god.

“Come on, now, old man!” I invoked the rain. “We’re tired of waiting. You’re coming anyhow, so make a start.”

But the rain paid no heed to me this time, and I bethought me of my new straw hat. If it rained, my hat would be ruined. And then, still thinking about my hat, I noticed a remarkable fir-tree. Having reached maturity in the shade, all its branches had grown in a downward direction. Now, after the season’s felling, it found itself in the light, and its branches had begun to grow upwards. In time the very lowest branches would

doubtless have lifted themselves, had they not, on coming into contact with the ground, struck root and become anchored.... And beneath this fir-tree, with the upward aspiring branches, an excellent wigwam had formed itself. I cut down some boughs to make the walls firmer, made an entrance, and spread other boughs for sitting on. I had hardly seated myself to resume my conversation with the rain, when I noticed just opposite me a great tree in flames. I hastily seized a bough, divided it into twigs to make a besom, and, beating at the flames, gradually put them out before they had time to burn a strip of bark off all round the trunk, thus putting a stop to the circulation of the sap.



The ground beneath the tree was not scorched by any bonfire, cows were never pastured here, and there could not possibly have been any of those shepherd boys there who are always blamed for fires. Remembering the pirating days of my childhood. I realised that some youngster had most likely set light to the resin on the trunk of the tree for a lark, just to see how it would burn. Going back to the years of my childhood, I imagined how delightful it must have been to strike the match and set fire to a tree.

I felt sure the culprit had suddenly caught sight of me when the resin began to burn, and was hiding in the bushes nearby. And so, as if merely going further, I walked away from the fire, whistling nonchalantly and, after I had taken about thirty steps along the path, I suddenly dived into the bushes, stole back to my old place, and lay low.

The rogue did not keep me waiting long. A flax-haired lad of seven or eight years, with bold, wide-open eyes, tawny from sunburn, half-naked and splendidly

built, emerged from the bushes. He cast a hostile glance in the direction I had taken, picked up a fir cone, and, obviously desirous of hurling it after me, took aim so violently that he spun round on his own axis. This did not seem to bother him—on the contrary, like a true master of the woods, he thrust his hands into his pockets, took a look at the site of the fire, and said:



“Come out, Zena, he’s gone!”

A girl just a little older and taller than himself came out of the bushes, carrying a big basket.

“Zena”, said the boy, “d’you know what?”

Zena gazed at him from great calm eyes and answered simply:

“What?”

“You don’t know a thing!” exclaimed the woodland master. “I’ll tell you—if that man hadn’t come and put it out, the whole forest might have caught fire from that tree. Wouldn’t that have been a sight?”

“You’re a silly,” said Zena.

“Quite right, Zena,” I said. “He’s very silly to boast of a thing like that.”

Hardly had I spoken these words when the cocky lord of the woodlands took to his heels.

But Zena had apparently not the slightest intention of sticking up for the rogue, she looked at me steadily, only raising her brows in faint astonishment.

At the sight of such a sensible little girl I felt inclined to make light of the whole thing, to win her sympathies, so that



together we might take the master of the woods in hand. In the meanwhile the tenseness with which all living creatures were waiting for the rain reached its highest point.

“Zena,” I said, “see how every tiny leaf, every blade of grass is longing for rain. The wild lettuce has even climbed up a stump to be ready for the very first drops.”

The little girl appreciated the joke and smiled graciously at me.

“Come on, old fellow,” I said to the rain. “You’ve worn us all out—come on, now, do!”

And this time the rain obeyed me. The little girl fixed her thoughtful gaze on me, puckering up her lips as if saying: “All very well to joke, but it really is raining.”

“Zena,” I said quickly. “What have you got in that big basket?”



She showed me—there were two big mushrooms there. We put my new hat in the basket, covered it with ferns and went to my wigwam to take shelter from the rain, breaking some more branches to cover it up well, before entering.

“Vasya!” shouted the little girl. “Stop fooling—come on out!”

And the master of the woods, prompted by the downpour, appeared without delay.

The moment the boy, sitting down beside us, prepared to speak, I raised my forefinger and ordered the master of the woods to be silent.

“Not a word!”

And we all three sat there still and silent.



It is impossible to convey the charm of sitting under a fir-tree in the woods during a warm summer downpour.

A hazel grouse took cover from the rain in the very middle of our dense fir-tree and alighted on the top of our wigwam. A chaffinch settled down beneath an overhanging branch in full view. A hedgehog put in an appearance. A hare shambled by. And the rain went on and on, whispering its secrets to our fir-tree. And we sat there a long time, and it seemed as if the true master of the woodlands was whispering its secrets to each of us...

Dead on the Roots

When the rain stopped and everything gleamed, we went out of the woods along a path beaten by the feet of passers-by. Right at the edge of the woods stood a huge, once-powerful tree. It had stood there for more than one generation of human beings, but now it was quite dead, it was what woodmen call dead on the roots.

After inspecting this tree, I said to the children:

“Perhaps some passer-by rested here and sank the blade of his axe in the trunk of this tree and hung a heavy sack from the handle. After this the tree fell ill and began healing its wound with resin. Or perhaps a squirrel, escaping from a hunter, took shelter at the very top of the tree, and the hunter began striking its trunk with a heavy log, to frighten the squirrel out of its shelter. One such blow is sometimes enough to injure a tree. For with trees, as with human beings and all living creatures, there are many, many things which may cause illness. It might have been struck by lightning. Whatever the cause, the tree would start healing its wound with resin. When the tree began to sicken the worms discovered it at once. The barkworm bored itself into the trunk and got to work with its jaws. In some way or other the woodpecker found out where the worm was, and began pecking here and there on



the trunk, looking for it. That takes some time. Or perhaps, while the woodpecker pecked away the bark and was ready to pounce on the worm, the worm may have passed on, and the woodland carpenter must search with its pecking beak in another place. And of course there was more than one barkworm, and more than one woodpecker, too. And so the woodpecker pecked, pecked at the tree trunk, and the tree, getting weaker and weaker, healed each wound with resin. And now look at the traces of bonfires around the trunk of the tree and you will understand that this path is used by people, that people rest here, and though it is forbidden to light fires in the woods they collect twigs and branches, and set light to them. And to make their fires burn quicker, they strip the resin-soaked bark from the trunk of the tree. In this way a white ring gradually formed around the trunk where the



bark was stripped, and the upward surge of the sap was stopped, and the tree withered. Now tell me who is to blame for the ruin of a fine tree which had been standing in its place no less than two centuries—sickness, lightning, barkworm, or woodpeckers?”

“Barkworm!” said Vasya quickly.

And then, glancing at Zena, corrected himself:

“The woodpecker.”

The children were apparently great friends and the lively Vasya was accustomed to read the truth from the

face of the wise, calm Zena. This time, too, he would no doubt have discovered the truth from her face, but I asked her:

“And you, Zena—what do you think, my dear?”

The little girl clapped her hand to her mouth, raised her intelligent eyes to me as if I were the teacher in school, and replied:

“I think—people.”

“People, people, of course!”

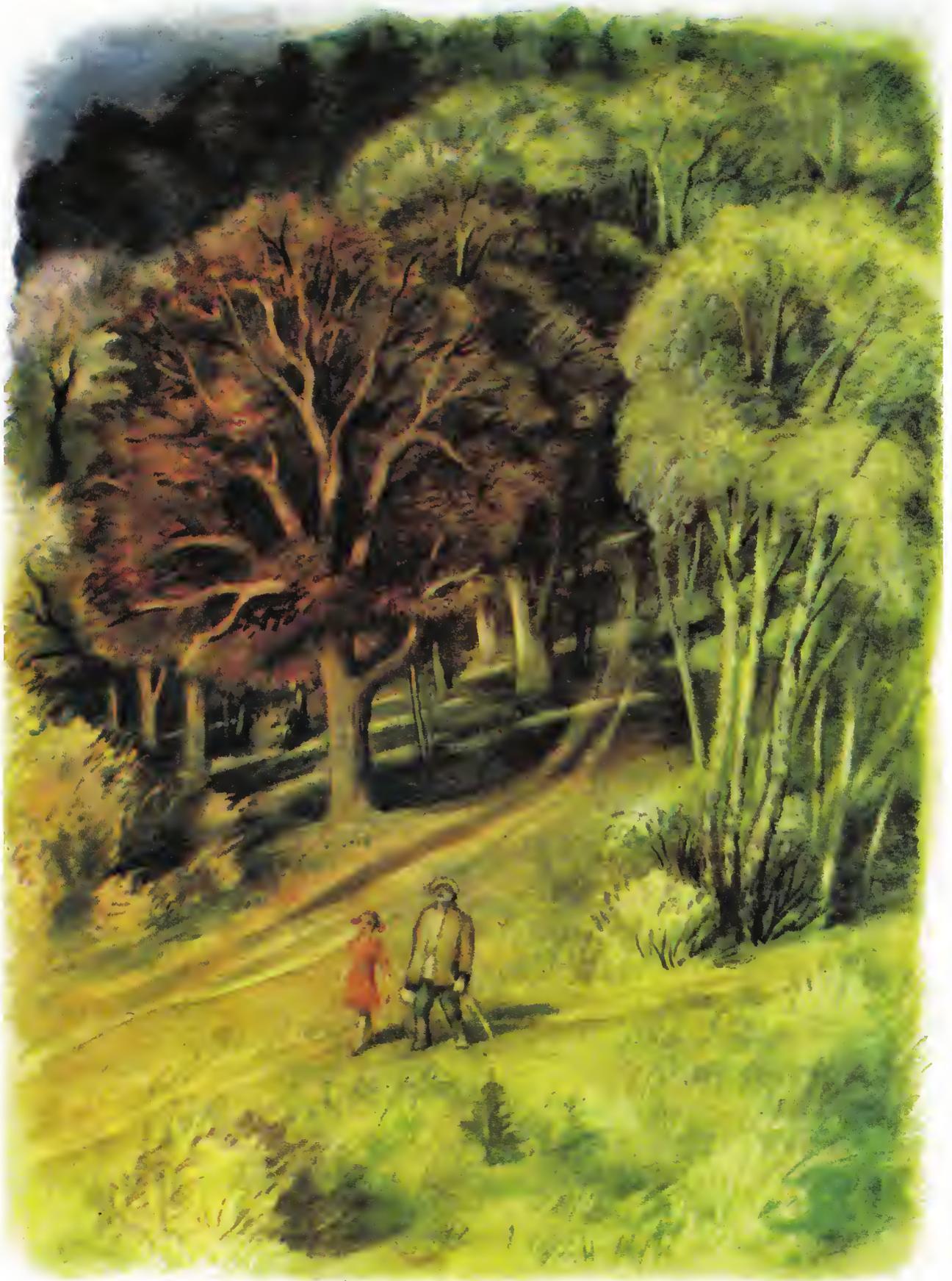
And I told them, like a real teacher, all that was in my mind: that the woodpeckers and barkworms were not to blame, for they have neither the mind nor the conscience which human beings possess to show them what is right and wrong. That there is a master of nature in each of us, but that we must study deeply before we can understand the woods, before we have the right to make use of them and to become the true master of the woods. I did not forget to tell them about myself, and how I was still constantly learning, and never interfered in the life of the woods without some plan or purpose. Nor did I forget to tell them of my recent discovery of the fiery arrows and how I had spared one of the cobwebs.

Then we went out of the wood and, as always happens to me now—I entered the woods a pupil, and emerged a teacher.

1950







VASYA VESELKIN

When the snow had all trickled into the river (we live on the Moskva River) white hens appeared on the warm dark earth all over the village.



“Up, Zhulka!” I commanded.

And she came to me, my favourite dog—a young setter with a white coat thickly speckled with black.

I buckled to her collar the metal clasp at the free end of a long leash wound on a reel, and began initiating Zhulka into the mysteries of hunting, the hens serving as game. This part of the training consists in teaching the dog to stand and look at the chickens without attempting to catch one.

This is how we teach a dog to show us where game is concealed, not rushing forward, but standing in its place. This is known among hunters as *pointing*: the dog stands still while the hunter either fires or throws a net over the bird.

The instinctive force which draws the dog to the hen is well understood by hunters and is even given a special name in their jargon. It should by no means be imagined that the dog is drawn on by the desire for a dainty tit-bit, such as a chicken or other bird. No, it is moved by the passionate desire to bring to a stop every living thing, everything capable of moving, running, swimming, or flying.

And so the white hens appeared on the warm, black earth, and Zhulka strained after them. Approaching them slowly, she stopped in front of one of them at a distance of two or three metres. When she came to a point like this, I stopped paying out the leash, and kept a firm grip on it. After standing still for a short time, Zhulka tried to rush at the hen which flew off screeching, and I tugged at the leash so hard that Zhulka fell over on her back. I only had to pull her up so violently once—to teach her a lesson.

“Down!” I shouted the next time she crouched.

And Zhulka, trained indoors during the winter to obey the command “Down!”, dropped on to her stomach.



This went on from day to day, and in little more than a week I had trained Zhulka thoroughly on the hens. I could walk about the village with the dog unleashed, and whenever she saw a hen she would come to a point, one eye on the bird, the other on me. The moment I was out of sight she abandoned the hen and ran after me.

The only poultry in our village are cocks and hens. We live on the bank of the Moskva, beyond the Rublevo reservoir, which supplies the capital with drinking water. To prevent pollution of the water aquatic birds are not

allowed to be kept in the village. And I trained Zhulka splendidly on cocks and hens, quite forgetting that there was a farmer on the other side of the river who kept geese.

I cannot say offhand what right he had to keep them and why nobody protested in the interests of the purity of Moscow's drinking water. The most probable explanation is that they were very busy in the collective farm and had other things to think of besides geese, and the owner of the geese was doubtless a decent chap on good terms with everyone—and so the keeping of geese was winked at for the time being. I had quite forgotten about these geese myself, and allowed Zhulka to run in front of me from right to left and back again from left to right, without the slightest misgivings.

Suspecting no evil, we reached the end of the village, where there is a track for the cattle. Between us and the river was a low mound, up the grassy slope of which ran a white path, trodden out by feet, big and small, bare-soled and shod. Zhulka ran up this path. For an instant I saw her silhouetted on the top of the mound, against the blue sky. There was the tenseness in her pose, to be observed in dogs when pointing. I hardly had time to shout the familiar "Down!", when she gave a sudden rush, and raced down the other side of the mound, which was invisible to me. The next moment I heard a great splashing, followed by cries and the flapping of wings like the sound of women banging linen against the flagstones with wooden rollers.

I ran up the mound, keeping time to my heartbeats, with low-voiced exclamations of distress.

If I took fright so quickly it was because I had been through a great deal in my time. Your dog mangles somebody's livestock, and there is nothing you can do

about it—you will be sworn at, held up to obloquy till you shrink up like a dried mushroom.

When I reached the crest of the mound I witnessed a spectacle enough to drive a dog-trainer mad: Zhulka was swimming in the river, trying to grab at each of the geese in turn. The hullabaloo was something terrific: the geese cackling, wings clapping, the air full of flying goose down.

The sound of my whistling and shouting went absolutely unheeded; having at last got hold of a goose, Zhulka was making its feathers fly, and the goose, goaded by a nip from Zhulka, rallied its strength and wriggled away with the aid of its wings, partly in, partly out of the water, to escape a second nip. Zhulka then turned her attention to another goose, and made its feathers fly, too....

Goose feathers flew above the water like snowflakes.

The worst of it was that, owing to the rising of the river it had not yet been possible to make the usual foot-bridges, and I could not move an inch

nearer the field of activities—everything was going on right in the middle of the Moskva, which had overflowed its banks on either side.

There were eight geese in all. Not only did I have time to count, I knew the position of each one of them, as a general knows that of every division in his army. My only hope lay in the geese themselves, in the possibility of some gander losing its temper and trying to get in a nip at Zhulka. For Zhulka was really a coward! If only a single gander had tried it on, Zhulka would have immediately fled to me for protection from the beak of such a heroic bird....





And I really thought one of the ganders had got the idea, in which case everything would have turned out all right. But just then Vitya, the son of the owner of the geese, came running round some bushes with his gun, and took aim at Zhulka's bobbing head....

My heart almost stood still. Now why didn't I shout, why didn't I stop the boy? I remember it all as if it were something I had dreamed, as if I had been struck dumb with horror. I would have shouted, of course, if there had been a moment for this. But it all happened so quickly I had no time even to shout.

There was a loud report.

I did, however, see a hand thrust out of the bushes and descend on Vitya's shoulder, and the shot fell into the water with a splash far from the field of battle.

Vitya was just going to fire again, when a voice from the bushes restrained him.

"What are you doing? The dog has a perfect right to chase the geese. This is a reservoir zone—it's the geese who are breaking the law, not the dog. You'll get your own father into trouble, you fool!"

At this, of course, I got back my tongue, and Zhulka, whom the shot had brought back to her senses, heeded my calls and swam back to my side of the river.

You may be sure I did not go so far as to let Zhulka see my joy at the escape. On the contrary, I stood on the bank waiting for her, speaking to her by my expression alone, as I know how to speak to a dog.

"Come on, come on!" I said "You'll answer to me for all those goose feathers!"

She scrambled on to the bank, endeavouring in her doggy fashion to conceal her confusion by shaking herself in the most businesslike way, snorting, and

rolling in the sand. But try as she might she could not get the goose down out of her mouth and nose.

“You’ll answer to me for all those goose feathers!” I repeated.

At last, sick of the pretence, she turned to me, and I could read in her expression:

“What’s to be done, Master? It’s my nature.”

“Oh, no, my dear,” I replied. “You’ll have to change your nature.”

“What’s to be done?” she asked, and took a step in my direction.

“I’ll show you what’s to be done,” said I. “Come on here, come here to be punished!”

But that was just what she was afraid of. Sinking down low on the ground she stretched her front paws in front of her on the sand, laid her head on them, and gazed at me with large, human eyes.

“Forgive me, Master!” her eyes said.

“You’ve got goose down on your nose,” I said. “You’ll answer to me for that down.”

“I’ll never do it again,” said her eyes, scarlet threads appearing on the whites, showing the strain and remorse she was labouring under.

“All right!” I said, and she understood the tone of my voice and came rushing to me.

Everything had ended well, but in my relief I had not noticed who Zhulka’s deliverer was. When I got home, intending to take up my usual occupation, the thought of the unknown deliverer prevented me from working. My love of hunting, of nature, of my dog, made it impossible for me to leave unthanked the deliverer of my splendid dog.... So I laid aside my work and went to the school, a few kilometres away, to see the teacher. From the size of the hand pushing Vitya aside, and the voice coming from the bushes, I knew it must be a boy.





And the well-reasoned words he had shouted made me feel sure that this boy went to school.

I told the whole story to the teacher and asked him to find for me the boy who had saved Zhulka, promising to give him a copy of my favourite book, *The Headless Rider*, in a splendid edition. The teacher said he would find the boy, and I took Zhulka to the marshes for further training, and stayed there for a long time.

The hunting season was drawing near and, having finished with Zhulka's training, I went home and took the first opportunity to go and see the teacher again. It appeared that it was not so easy to discover Zhulka's deliverer. But there could be no doubt whatever that he was one of the schoolboys.

"He did a very good thing," I said. "We are looking for him, because we want to thank him, why doesn't he want to come forward?"

"That's just it," said the teacher. "He doesn't want to boast about a thing that cost him nothing. He is ashamed, and it is a healthy shame—he only did what everyone should have done in his place."

"But not all boys are like that. We've simply got to find him, we must hold him up as an example to the others."

"That's true," agreed the teacher.

And after a pause, he added:

"I've got an idea! We'll find him. Can you tell me how many geese there were?"

"There were eight," I answered.

"Remember that—*eight!*" said the teacher. "Now write a story about the whole thing, write it just as it happened and be sure to make it clear that there were precisely eight geese."

The teacher did not tell me what he had at the back of his mind. And I did not insist, but went home to write

the story, and one Sunday the teacher and I arranged for a reading of entertaining stories by various authors to be held in the village school. It came to my turn to read my real-life story of the dog Zhulka and the geese. To make it still more actual I had Zhulka with me in the schoolroom, and showed how she obeyed the word "Down!" and came to a point. The merriment became intense when I read them about the goose down, and the way I had kept in my mind the position of each goose, like a real general.



"And how many geese were there?" put in the teacher at this moment.

"There were eight, Ivan Semyonich."

"No," said the teacher. "There were fifteen."

"Eight!" I insisted. "There were eight, I tell you."

"And I tell you," said Ivan Semyonich bluntly, "there were precisely fifteen, and I can prove it. Shall we go straight to the owner and count them? There were fifteen."

While this discussion was going on a tender, shy heart was aching in the cause of truth, and this heart was on the side of the man who wrote the story of the dog and the geese. One of my hearers, my future reader, my champion, sat on his bench, burning for the truth.

"There were fifteen geese, I tell you!" insisted the teacher.

"There weren't!" cried my friend. "There were eight."

Thus it was that my friend, red-faced, dishevelled, agitated, his eyes fixed angrily on the teacher, stuck up for the truth.

It was Vasya Veselkin, shy and diffident about his own good deeds, fearless in defence of the truth.

“Well, thanks, friend,” I said, and gave the deliverer of my Zhulka the favourite book of my childhood— *The Headless Rider*.

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