Nobel Prize candidate Gustaw Herling, lost and found in a pulp magazine

Misinformation, disinformation. What about lost information?

Management scholars develop models of large bureaucratic systems, showing how many elements can interact to reinforce and contradict each other: strategy, goals, policies, structure, operations, personnel, culture, resource constraints, external factors, executive decisions, and so on.

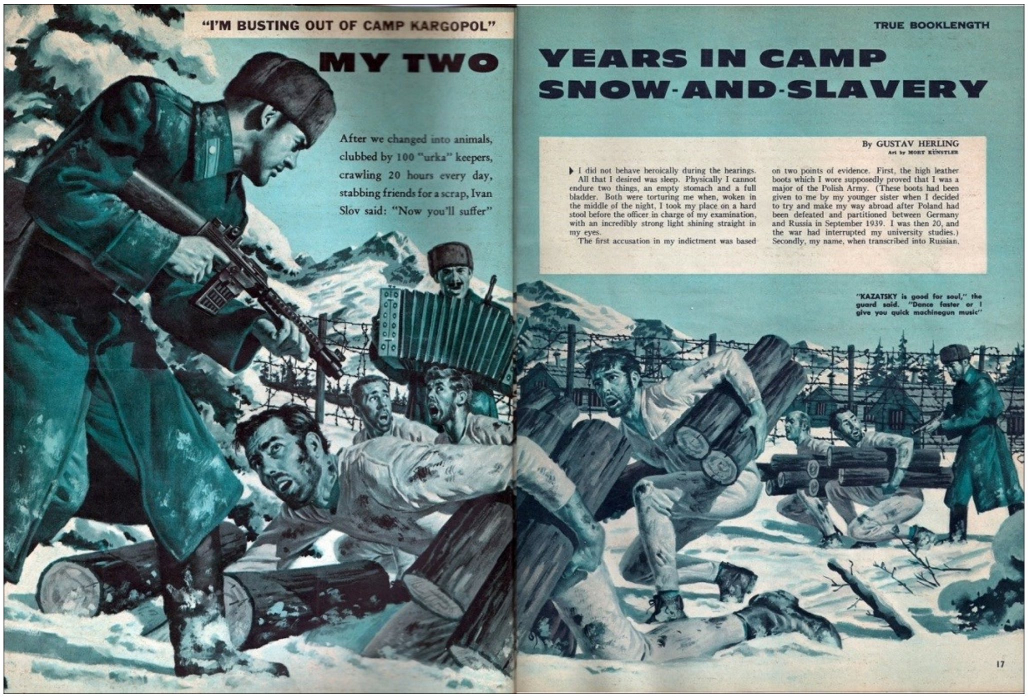
Here is a newly-discovered, long-lost example of such concepts.

Gustaw Herling would have been 101 this May. More than half a century ago, the Polish writer was a favored candidate for a Nobel Peace Prize, but he never received that honor.

His profound 1951 book, *A World Apart*, paints the picture of his arrest at age twenty, two terrible years in sub-Arctic slave labor camps in the Soviet Union's Gulag system, and an adept portrait of the function and malfunction of a complex bureaucratic system.

A long-lost version from 1959—a lurid, highly condensed (13-page) story in a now-obscure, long-dead American "men's adventure" magazine—offers a glimpse of his organizational insights. It appears here as a fair-use scholarship effort. No copyright infringement is intended. Perhaps this can help to re-ignite interest in *A World Apart.*

> Here there is a world apart, unlike everything else...the house of the living dead—life as nowhere else...
>
> *F. Dostoyevsky*



"I'M BUSTING OUT OF CAMP KARGOPOL"

TRUE BOOKLENGTH

MY TWO YEARS IN CAMP SNOW-AND-SLAVERY

After we changed into animals, clubbed by 100 "urka" keepers, crawling 20 hours every day, stabbing friends for a scrap, Ivan Slov said: "Now you'll suffer"

By GUSTAV HERLING
Art by MORT KÜNSTLER

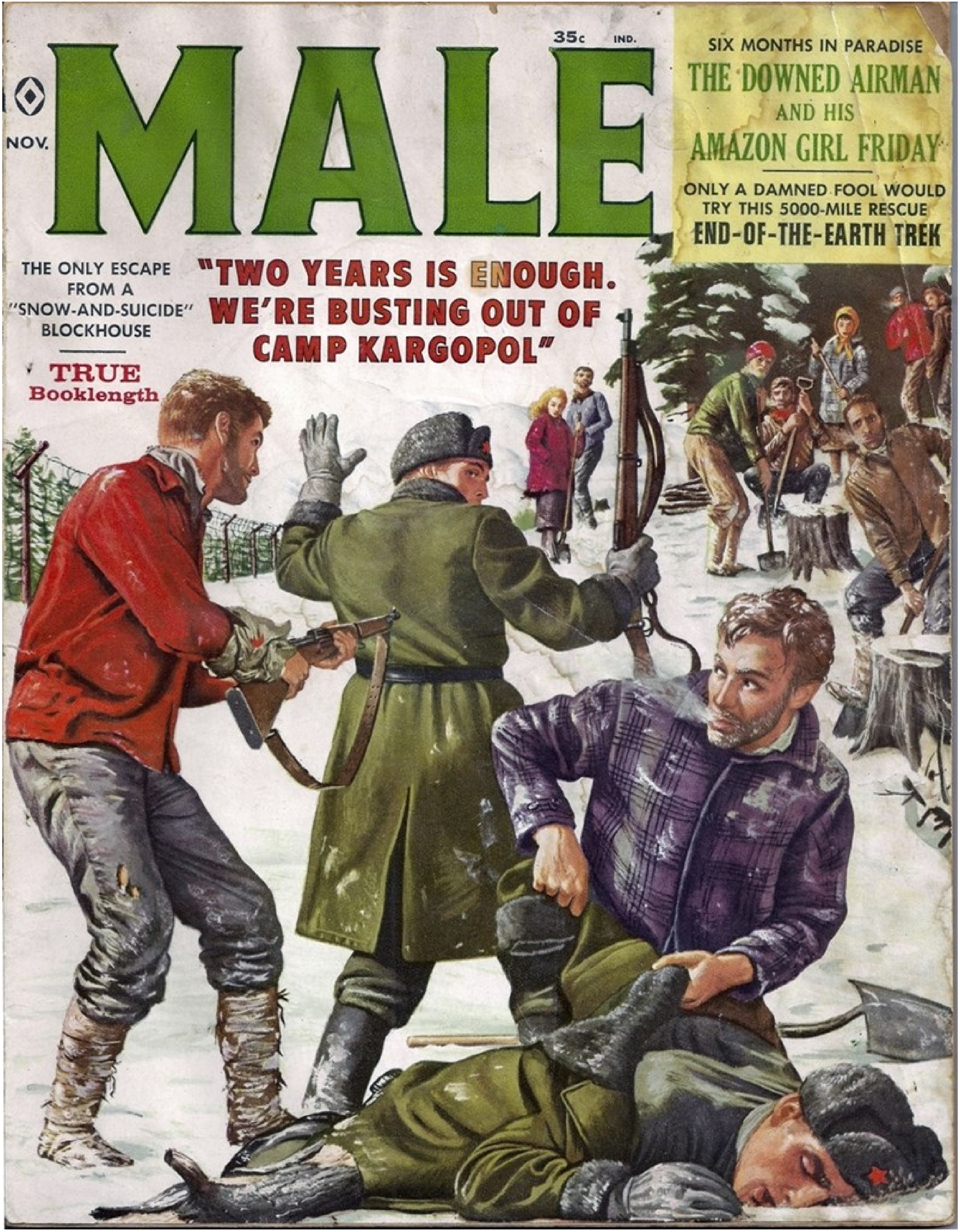
I did not behave heroically during the hearings. All that I desired was sleep. Physically I cannot endure two things, an empty stomach and a full bladder. Both were torturing me when, woken in the middle of the night, I took my place on a hard stool before the officer in charge of my examination, with an incredibly strong light shining straight in my eyes.

The first accusation in my indictment was based on two points of evidence. First, the high leather boots which I wore supposedly proved that I was a major of the Polish Army. (These boots had been given to me by my younger sister when I decided to try and make my way abroad after Poland had been defeated and partitioned between Germany and Russia in September 1939. I was then 20, and the war had interrupted my university studies.) Secondly, my name, when transcribed into Russian,

"KAZATSKY is good for soul," the guard said. "Dance faster or I give you quick machinegun music"

17

Male magazine, November 1959



35c IND.

NOV.

MALE

SIX MONTHS IN PARADISE

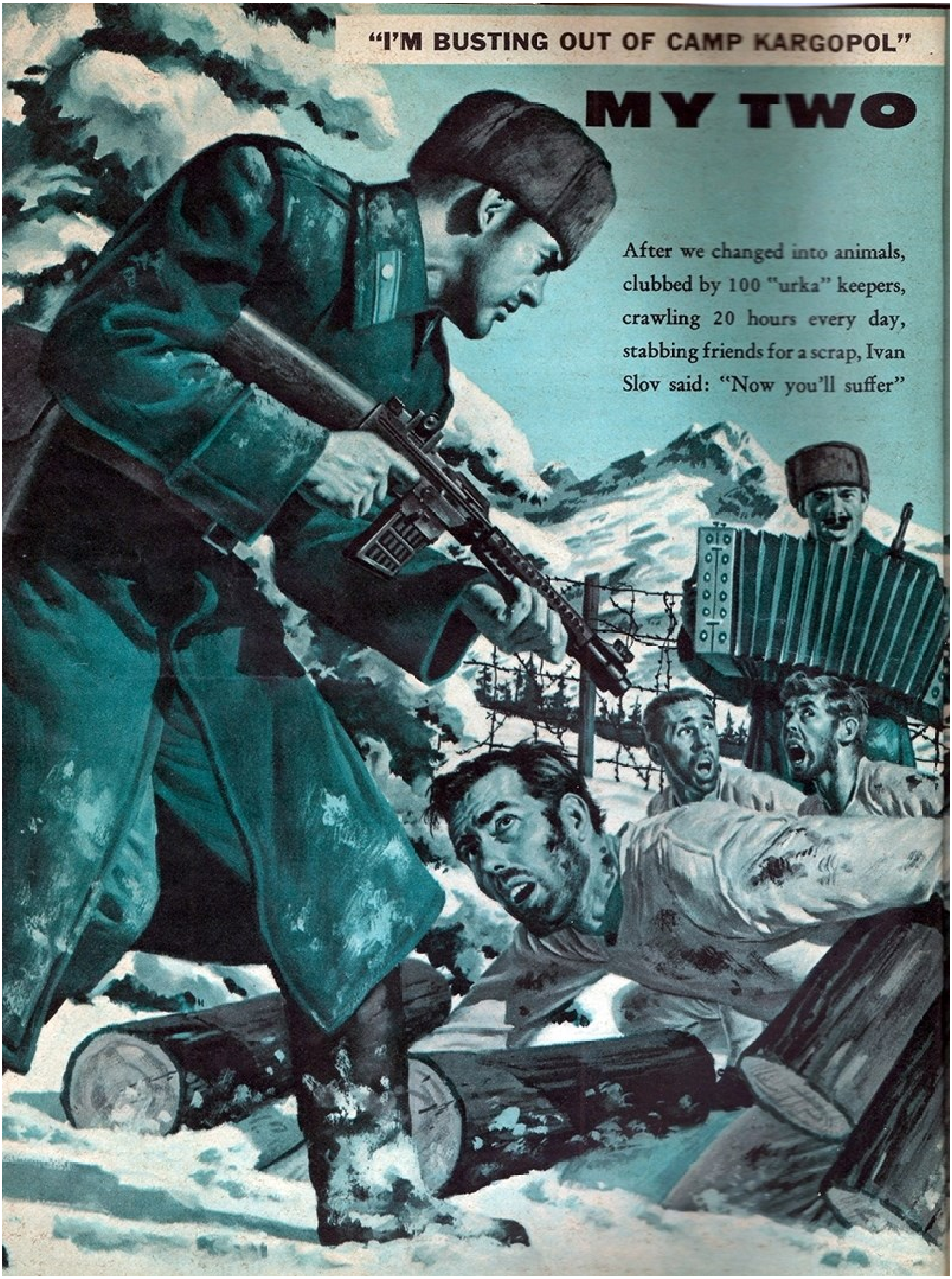
THE DOWNED AIRMAN
AND HIS
AMAZON GIRL FRIDAY

ONLY A DAMNED FOOL WOULD
TRY THIS 5000-MILE RESCUE
END-OF-THE-EARTH TREK

THE ONLY ESCAPE
FROM A
"SNOW-AND-SUICIDE"
BLOCKHOUSE

"TWO YEARS IS ENOUGH.
WE'RE BUSTING OUT OF
CAMP KARGOPOL"

TRUE
Booklength



“I’M BUSTING OUT OF CAMP KARGOPOL”

MY TWO

After we changed into animals, clubbed by 100 “urka” keepers, crawling 20 hours every day, stabbing friends for a scrap, Ivan Slov said: “Now you’ll suffer”

YEARS IN CAMP SNOW-AND-SLAVERY

By **GUSTAV HERLING**

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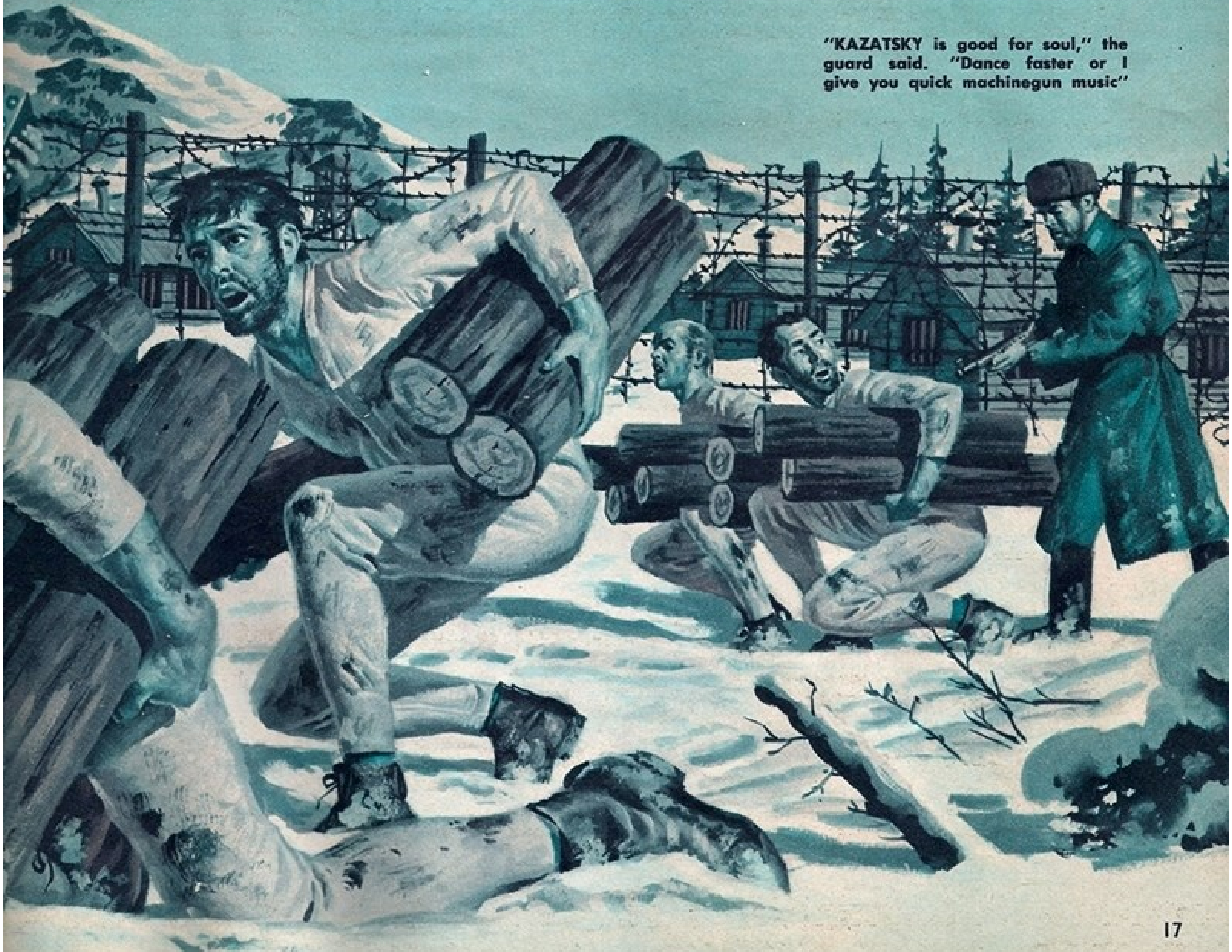

CAMP SNOW-AND-SLAVERY

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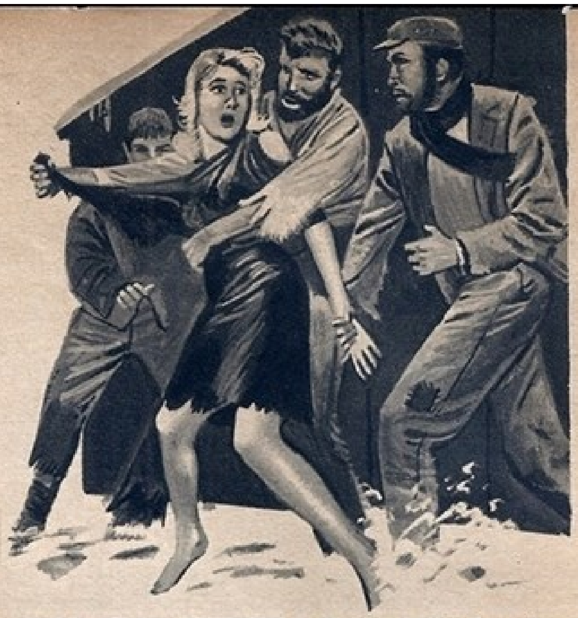


"SHE'S YOURS, BROTHERS," Koslov said when they got the girl down in the snow. "Be very good to her"

became Gerling and this supposedly made me the relative of a well-known Field-Marshal of the German Air Force. The accusation therefore read: "Polish officer in the pay of the enemy". But fortunately it did not take me long to convince the interrogator that these accusations were without any foundation. There remained the one undisputed fact—when arrested, I had been trying to cross the frontier between the Soviet Union and Lithuania. Then: "May I ask why you were trying to do that?"

"I wanted to fight the Germans."

"Yes. And are you aware that the Soviet Union has signed a pact of friendship with Germany?"

"Yes, but I am also aware that the Soviet Union has not declared war on France and England."

"That has not the slightest significance."

"Then how does the indictment stand?"

"Attempting to cross the Soviet-Lithuanian frontier in order to fight against the Soviet Union."

"Could you not substitute the words 'against Germany' for 'against the Soviet Union'?" A blow in the face brought me back to my senses. "It comes to the same thing, anyway," the judge consoled me as I signed the confession of guilt which had been placed in front of me.

In November, 1940, after a week's journey, I arrived in Leningrad with a convoy of prisoners. We knew we were going to a labor camp when we changed trains.

SHKLOVSKI and I traveled together in the same compartment on the new train. He spread his greatcoat on the bench and remained in the corner of the compartment during the whole journey. Besides us, there were three urkas, criminal prisoners, who immediately began to play cards on the upper, folding bench. One of them, a gorilla with a flat Mongolian face, told us before the train had even left the station that in Leningrad he had at last got a 15-year sentence for killing with an axe the cook at the Pechora camp, who had refused to give him an additional helping of barley. He said this with a certain pride in his voice, without interrupting the game. I forced a loud laugh from my mouth.

It must have been much later, for the train had left the forest, and the gray light of dawn was showing over the snow-covered slopes, when the gorilla suddenly threw down his cards, jumped down from the bench and came up to Shklovski.

"Give me that coat," he yelled, "I've lost it at cards."

Shklovski opened his eyes and, without moving from his seat, shrugged his shoulders.

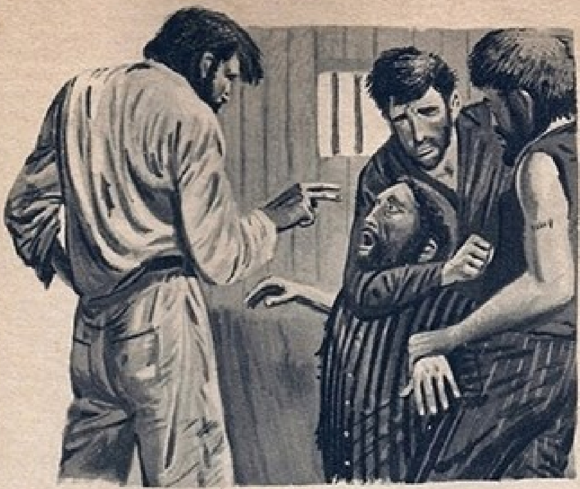
"Give it to me," the gorilla roared, enraged, "give it, or—*glaza vykolu*—I'll poke your eyes out!" The colonel slowly got up and handed over the coat.

Only later, in the labor camp, I understood the meaning of this fantastic scene. To stake the possessions of other prisoners in their games of cards is one of the urkas' most popular distractions, and its chief attraction lies in the fact that the loser is obliged to force from the victim the object previously agreed upon. In 1937, during the pioneer period of labor camps, they played for human lives, for there was then no more precious possession; a political prisoner, sitting at one end of a barrack, did not guess that the greasy cards, falling with a smack on the small plank spread across the knees of the players, were deciding his fate.

"*Glaza vykolu*" was the greatest threat which the urkas wielded: two fingers of the right hand, outstretched in the shape of the letter V, made straight for the victim's eyes. The only defense against this movement was to bring the edge of the hand up rapidly and put it against the nose and forehead. The menacing fingers of the attacker split against it like waves against the prow of a ship, harmlessly.

When the train reached Vologda I was the only one to be taken from the compartment. "Good-by," I said to Shklovski. "Good-by," he replied as we

Only Karinen, the steelworker, ever escaped from Kargopol. He walked for 10 days, slept in snow-holes, finally came to a village. "You are generous, little father," the peasants greeted him, "you bring us a 1000-ruble reward"



"TAKE HIS EYES" the *urka* shouted, as they held the old man. "A bet is a bet, and when I lose I pay off"

shook hands, "and may you return to the land of our fathers."

The next night I traveled with another transport and arrived at dawn at the station of Yercevo, near Archangel. We dispersed from the carriages onto the crackling snow amid the howling of bloodhounds and the orders of the guards. Around the first bend of the road, I could see on the horizon the silhouettes of four crow's-nests placed high on wooden stilts and surrounded by barbed wire.

The first two friends that I made in the camp both belonged to the remains of the "Old Guard" of 1937. The first, Polenko, an agricultural engineer, had been found guilty of sabotaging collectivization, and the other, Karbonski, a telephone engineer from Kiev, was imprisoned for maintaining contact with his relatives in Poland. From what they told me I learned that the Kargopol camp of several "camp-sections," distributed within a radius of about 35 miles, and containing altogether something like 30,000 prisoners, had been founded four years before by 600 prisoners, who one night were simply put out of a transport train near Yercevo station, in the middle of the forest. The temperature was frequently as low as 40 degrees below zero centigrade; their food did not exceed 300 grams of black bread and a plate of hot soup every 24 hours; they slept in shacks of fir branches which they built round a constantly burning fire, while their guards lived in small huts fixed on sledge runners. The prisoners began their work by making a clearing in the forest and putting up a small hospital barrack in the middle of it.

Then came the discovery that self-mutilation at work gave a prisoner the privilege of spending several weeks under a real roof which did not constantly send down a shower of melting snow, and near a small iron stove which was always red-hot; but the number of accidents at work became so great that the wounded were usually packed off on a sledge to the nearest hospital, at Nyandoma, about 25 miles away.

At the same time the death-rate among prisoners rose rapidly.

During the first few months, when the high mortality rate and the primitive conditions of the camp made it difficult for the guards to keep a careful check on prisoners, frozen bodies were sometimes concealed in the shacks while their rations of bread and soup were collected by other prisoners.

By 1940 Yercevo was already an important center of the Kargopol timber industry with a saw-mill, two branch lines from the railway, its own food supply center, and a separate village beyond the camp zone for the free administrative staff. All this had been built by the prisoners.

FROM these early pioneer days the tradition of the *proizvol*, or urka regime, has been handed down. When there were as yet no sheds which could be locked for the night, in which the prisoners were able to deposit sharp tools such as saws, axes, and billhooks after work, and when the control of the guards over prisoners did not go beyond the end of a bayonet or the beam of a searchlight, some of the tools found their way into the barracks in the evenings.

The first contingents of urkas, which came to the camp in 1938, took advantage of this state of affairs to proclaim within the camp zone, from dusk till dawn, a miniature "prisoners' republic," holding their own trials and meting out justice to the politicals at night. No guard would have dared to show himself inside the barracks after dark, even when the horrible moans and cries of political prisoners who were being slowly murdered could be heard all over the camp.

Complaints to the authorities in the daytime produced little result, so the political prisoners organized their own defense groups, and civil war resulted.

In 1940 the remains of the prisoners' republic existed only in order to facilitate the night hunts for newly-arrived women which the urkas organized in the camp zone. New women arrivals were usually warned by experienced women prisoners of the danger which threatened them, but it sometimes happened that they did not believe these warnings. If they complained in the guard-house the morning after the "accident," they were met with (*Continued on page* 87)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When Germany took his native Poland, Gustav Herling (*left*) tried to leave that country to fight for the Allies, walked into the Russians' arms, and, on a trumped-up charge, was sent to Kargopol labor camp, in the 40-below cold of Archangel. Few men could survive the special Russian brand of "honest labor," dispensed by Commissars Samsonov (*above*) and Blumen (*below right*). Herling did, fought with the Polish Army in WWII, now lives in a suburb of London.

MY TWO YEARS IN CAMP SNOW-AND-SLAVERY

continued from page 19

derision; and besides, what woman would have been willing to risk bringing on herself the merciless revenge of the urkas?

From the accounts of other prisoners I gathered that Yercevo was the best section of the Kargopol camp, while the others, especially the penal camp of the second Alexeyevka, were for the most part full of Poles who had been sent there to die by inches. Following the advice of Dimka, an old priest with a wooden leg who was the barracks orderly, and who became my good friend, I sold my high officer's boots for 900 grams of bread to an urka from the railway porters' brigade.

The same evening he gave me his answer: The camp command had agreed that I should join brigade 42, and recommended me to report at the camp store to draw out a "bushlat" (a long-sleeved jerkin lined with wadding), a cap with ear-flaps, wadded trousers, water-proof gloves made of sail-cloth, and "valonki" (shoes made of sheepskin, cowhide and horsehide) of best quality, i.e. new or worn only a little—a full set of clothing such as is usually issued only to the best "stakhanovite" (extra work) brigades.

I knew from Dimka what to expect from the work of a porter at the food supply center. The work itself was heavy, for an average 12-hour working day meant carrying 25 tons of flour in sacks, or 18 tons of rye without sacks, over a distance of 30 yards from the truck to the store: as the number of trucks on the siding was greater than usual, we had to work sometimes for 20 hours at a stretch. On the other hand, the supply center was beyond the camp zone, and it was possible to steal food there.

FOR the moment, then, I was saved. Lying on an upper bunk by the window, I looked round the 42nd "international brigade." The eight best places out of about 200 in the barracks were taken up by a gang of urkas, led by Koval, the pock-marked Ukrainian bandit to whom I had sold my boots. The rest were a mixture of communists from all over Europe, and one Chinaman.

That same evening, shortly before midnight —Dimka usually got up at that hour, to rummage in the refuse buckets for herring-heads which would make the soup for his next day's lunch—Koval, who was lying on his stomach by the window, his faced pressed to the glass, suddenly jumped off the bunk and with a few quick nudges woke up his companions. After a while they all gathered round a small space in the window where the frost had melted, looked out at the camp zone, whispered among themselves and walked out.

After the last urka had disappeared through the door, I quickly turned over on my stomach and breathed on the window over my bunk until I had cleared a small round in the frost. A hundred yards beyond our barrack the ground sloped to form a large hollow which continued on the other side of the barbed wire. The bottom of the hollow could be seen well only from the top of the highest watch-tower.

From the direction of the hospital a young well-built girl was crossing the deserted zone on her way to the women's barrack, and she would have to pass along the inner edge of the hollow, just in front of our barrack. Eight shadows rapidly dispersed among the barracks on the left side of the hollow, so that each outlet of the path was guarded. The girl was walking straight into the trap.

Before she reached the bend of the path, the first shadow stepped out from behind a barrack and stood in her way. The girl started and gave a short cry, which was stilled as the shadow jumped at her throat, caught the back of her neck with one hand and put the other over her mouth. The girl bent back like a bow, and raising her left leg from the ground, pushed her knee into the attacker's stomach, and at the same time grasped his beard with both hands, pushing the great fur-cap head away with all her strength. The shadow made a half-circle with his left foot, and with a sharp kick knocked her right leg from under her. They both fell into the snowdrift together at the very moment when the other seven ran up from all directions.

They dragged her, holding her by the hands and legs, while her hair tumbled loosely behind, to the bottom of the hollow, and threw her down on a snow-covered bench, about 25 yards from the barrack. She met the first with a furious kicking of her legs, freed for a moment from his grasp, but soon she was quiet again, choked by the hands which were encircling her neck, and Koval's great paw, which he placed over her face, forcing her head down on the bench.

While two others held her wrists, the first, half-kneeling, was trying to unfasten her clothing.

After a moment her resistance ceased and there were no further sounds from her for a long time. I turned over restlessly several times. I felt sorry for her but what good would it do to interfere? One man against eight, it was impossible odds. Looking the other way, I could still hear the scuffling noises—until she managed for a moment to free her head from Koval's relaxed fingers, and in the frosty silence she let out a short, throaty cry, full of tears and muffled by the night. A sleepy voice called from the nearest watch-tower: "Come, come, boys, what are you doing? Have you no shame?"

After about an hour seven of them returned to the barrack. Then I saw Koval taking the girl back to the women's barrack. She walked slowly, stumbling and tripping on the path, head drooping to one side, with arms folded across her breasts, supported round the waist by the strong arm of her companion.

The next evening Marusia came to our barrack. There were still traces of congealed blood on her cheeks, and her eyes were bruised, but she looked pretty in a colored skirt and a white, embroidered linen blouse, in which two large breasts swung loosely like round loaves of bread. She sat, as if nothing had happened, on Koval's bunk, with her back to the other urkas, and gently pressing close to him she kept whispering in his ear, kissing his pock-marked cheek with tears in her eyes. Koval at first sat grumpily by her side and from under his low forehead threw embarrassed glances at his companions, but in the end he let her persuade him. She stayed, and throughout that night we were constantly awakened from our feverish sleep by her tender exclamations of love, her whispers and Koval's rhythmical breathing. She stole out of the barrack before dawn, followed by the careful, wavering tread of her lover.

After that she came every evening and often sang before nightfall, in a strong voice which trailed off into a mournful squeal at the end of each phrase, Ukrainian songs about "the boy who used to come to my house" and "the fine life a man can have with a milkmaid." She became a water-carrier in the camp, and we all liked her broad, swarthy face, her fair hair loose and flying in the wind as she sat on the sled and spurred her horse with loud cracks of the whip or nervous tugs at the reins.

BUT the brigade was not working well since the memorable night of the hunt. Koval went to work half-conscious; his legs bowed under the weight of heavy sacks, he often missed his turn at the trucks, and several times fell off the loading-stage on to the rails.

One evening, when Marusia, who never spoke to anyone in our barrack, was sitting as usual next to Koval, her arms entwined round his waist, one of the urkas tapped her lightly on the shoulder and spoke a few words to her. The girl slowly unwound her arms, turned her head and looked at the man with loathing; suddenly she raised her whole body and, with the gleam of a mortally wounded animal in her eyes, spat straight in his face.

The blinded urka took a step back, wiped his face with his sleeve, and spreading out the two fingers of his right hand, drew back for the dreaded blow. At that moment Koval sprang up from the bunk and threw himself at the other. They struggled for a moment, and when they were separated, Koval found himself facing seven pairs of hostile eyes. He turned to the girl, who was cowering in the corner, pulled his torn shirt round him and through clenched teeth said in a voice which chilled my blood: "She's yours, brothers."

First came the urka at whom she had spat. Marusia now took them without any resistance. Her head hung down over the end of the bunk, and her wide eyes looked persist-

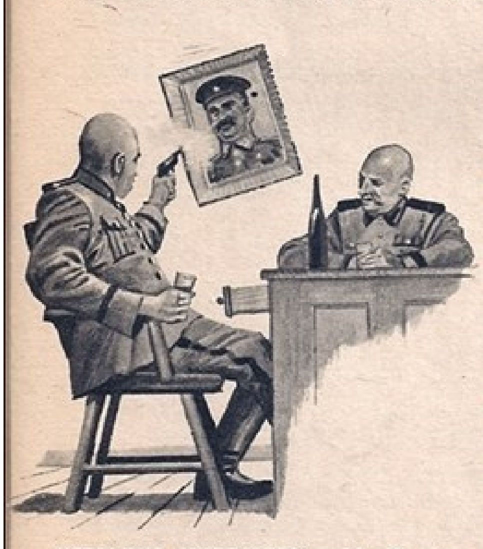
"BREAK HIS BONES, brothers," I said. "But carefully, so it doesn't show"

"Come, come boys," said the guard who was watching from the tower. "One at a time"

with his presence, and with a smile of satisfaction felt the biceps, shoulders and backs of the new arrivals.

The length of a working day was basically 11 hours in all brigades, increased after the outbreak of the Russo-German war to 12. But in the porters' brigade which worked at the food supply center, and in which I spent most of my time in the camp, these limits were non-existent—the duration of work depended on the number of railway-wagons, and the wagons could not be delayed overtime, as the camp had to pay the railway executive for each additional hour beyond the prescribed time. In practice we worked sometimes as long as 20 hours a day, with only short breaks for meals.

If we returned to the zone after midnight, we were not forced to rise with the others, but returned to the food supply center only about eleven in the morning, working again as long as was necessary in order that the empty wagons could return on time from our siding to Yercevo station. It was thus that by overtime alone our output was usually between 150 and 200 per cent of the norm. And yet dozens of prisoners were waiting eagerly to take the place of any one of us who would leave, because, working at the center, we had many opportunities of stealing a piece of salted fish, a little flour, or a few potatoes.



"STALIN'S MURDERER" said: "I shot him like a dog. Kept frowning at me"

By 6:00 P.M., from all sides of the empty, white plain, the brigades converged on the camp, like funeral processions of shadows carrying their own bodies across their shoulders. In the deep silence of the evening we could hear only the tread of boots on the snow, broken by the whip-lashes of the escort's "Faster! faster!" But it was beyond us to walk faster; silently we walked, almost pressed against each other, as if, by growing together, we could more easily reach the lighted camp gates.

And yet this was still not the end. The last three—two—one hundred yards to the gate required enormous effort: the brigades were searched at the guard-house as they arrived. Sometimes, at the gate itself, one of the crowd of prisoners would fall to the ground like a sack thrown off one's back; we would lift him up by his arms so as not to delay the search. If some forbidden object or a stolen scrap of food was found on a prisoner, the whole brigade was marched aside and in the frost, on the snow, stripped naked for the search. There were searches which were prolonged with sadistic slowness from seven till ten at night.

A month after my arrival a new transport, containing 100 political prisoners and 20 *bytoviks* (petty criminals), came to Yercevo. The *bytoviks* remained in Yercevo, and the politicals were transported to the other camp sections, with the sole exception of a young, well-built prisoner with the blunt face of the fanatic, called Gorcev, who was detained in Yercevo and directed to the forest.

Various strange rumours were current in the camp about Gorcev, for he himself, disregarding the prisoner's time-honoured custom, never spoke a word about his own past. It was whispered that Gorcev had been an N.K.V.D. officer before his arrest.

He himself—unconsciously, or else through simple stupidity—did everything to confirm this suspicion in our minds. Whenever he opened his mouth as the prisoners sat round the fire in the forest, it was to pronounce short, violent harangues against "the enemies of the people" imprisoned in the camps, defending the action of the Party and the Government in placing them out of harm's way. The other prisoners began to treat him with open and undisguised hatred.

One evening the veil concealing Gorcev's past was lifted slightly. He had quarrelled over some trifle with a group of Mongol *nacmeny* (tribesmen) in the barrack, and fell into a rage such as we had never seen in him before. He seized one of the old Uzbeks by the collar of his robe and, shaking him furiously, hissed through clenched teeth: "I used to shoot you Asiatic bastards by the dozen—like sparrows off a branch!"

Some time about Christmas a transport from Krouglitza to the Pechora camps passed through Yercevo. The prisoners spent three days in the Peresylny barracks, walking round our barracks in the evenings and looking for friends. It was one of these who stopped suddenly and went pale as he passed Gorcev's bunk.

"You—here?" he whispered.

Gorcev raised his head, shivered, and backed against the wall.

"Here?" repeated the new arrival, approaching him slowly. Then suddenly he jumped at Gorcev's throat, threw him down on his back across the bunk, and pressing his right shoulder into Gorcev's chest, started hammering his head furiously against the planks.

"So you fell too, did you?" he shouted, punctuating almost every word with a thud from Gorcev's head. "You fell at last, did you? You could break fingers in doors, push needles under fingernails, beat our faces and kick us in the groin and the stomach . . . couldn't you . . . couldn't you? My fingers have grown again . . . they'll choke you yet . . . they'll choke you."

Although younger and apparently stronger than his attacker, Gorcev behaved as if he was paralysed and did not attempt to defend himself. His face twisted with fear, he got up and started to run towards the barrack door. But there he found a barrier of Uzbeks who had left their corner to prevent his escape.

The attacker now walked towards him, holding an iron bar which someone on an upper bunk had thrust into his hand. The circle began to close. He opened his mouth to shout, but at that very instant one of the *nacmeny* hit his head with the wooden cover of a bucket, and he fell to the floor, dripping with blood. With the remnants of his strength he raised himself on his knees, looked at the slowly advancing prisoners and shrieked horribly: "They'll kill me! Guard! They'll kill me!"

In the deep silence, Dimka crawled off his bunk, limped over to the barrack door and bolted it. A jerkin, thrown from an upper bunk, fell on Gorcev and immediately the furious blows of the iron bar rained on his head. He threw the jerkin off and, stumbling like a drunkard, rushed towards his own brigade. There he was met by an extended fist, and he bounced off it like a rubber ball, vomiting blood, his legs giving way. He was passed from hand to hand, until he slid to the floor quite helpless, instinctively folding his hands round his head and protecting his stomach with drawn-up knees. He remained crouching like that, crumpled and dripping blood like a wet rag. Several prisoners came up to him and nudged him with their boots, but he made no movement.

"Is he still alive?" asked the one who had unmasked him. "Examining judge from the Kharkov prison, brothers. He used to beat good men so that their own mothers wouldn't know them."

DIMKA came up with a pailful of *kvoya* and threw it over Gorcev's head. He stirred, sighed deeply, and stiffened again.

"He's alive," said the forester-brigadier, "but he won't live long."

The next morning Gorcev washed the dry, congealed blood off his face and crawled to the medical hut, where he was given one day's dispensation from work. He went beyond the zone, with another complaint to the Third Section, and returned empty-handed. It was now clear to us that the N.K.V.D. was giving up to the prisoners one of its own former men. A strange game, in which the persecutors entered upon a silent gentleman's agreement with their victims, was played out in the camp.

After the discovery of his past Gorcev was given the hardest work in the forest brigade: the sawing of pines with the "little bow." For a man unaccustomed to physical labor, and to forestry in particular, this work means certain death unless he is relieved at least once a day and given a rest at burning cleared branches. But Gorcev was never relieved, and he sawed 11 hours a day, frequently falling from exhaustion, catching at the air like a drowning man, spitting blood and rubbing his fever-ridden face with snow. Whenever he rebelled and threw the saw aside with a gesture of desperate bravado, the brigadier came up to him and said quietly: "Back to work, Gorcev, or we'll finish you off in the barrack," and back to work he would go. The prisoners watched his agonies with pleasure and satisfaction.

Gorcev tried to fight back, although he must have known that it was as hopeless as the resistance of his victims had once been at

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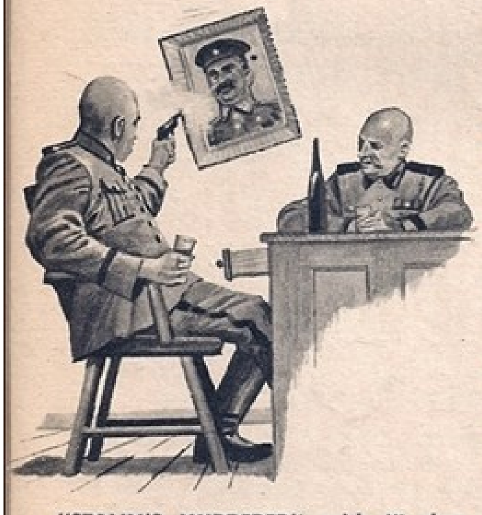
with his presence, and with a smile of satisfaction felt the biceps, shoulders and backs of the new arrivals.

The length of a working day was basically 11 hours in all brigades, increased after the outbreak of the Russo-German war to 12. But in the porters' brigade which worked at the food supply center, and in which I spent most of my time in the camp, these limits were non-existent—the duration of work depended on the number of railway-wagons, and the wagons could not be delayed overtime, as the camp had to pay the railway executive for each additional hour beyond the prescribed time. In practice we worked sometimes as long as 20 hours a day, with only short breaks for meals.

If we returned to the zone after midnight, we were not forced to rise with the others, but returned to the food supply center only about eleven in the morning, working again as long as was necessary in order that the empty wagons could return on time from our siding to Yercevo station. It was thus that by overtime alone our output was usually between 150 and 200 per cent of the norm. And yet dozens of prisoners were waiting eagerly to take the place of any one of us who would leave, because, working at the center, we had many opportunities of stealing a piece of salted fish, a little flour, or a few potatoes.



"STALIN'S MURDERER" said: "I shot him like a dog. Kept frowning at me"

By 6:00 P.M., from all sides of the empty, white plain, the brigades converged on the camp, like funeral processions of shadows carrying their own bodies across their shoulders. In the deep silence of the evening we could hear only the tread of boots on the snow, broken by the whip-lashes of the escort's "Faster! faster!" But it was beyond us to walk faster; silently we walked, almost pressed against each other, as if, by growing together, we could more easily reach the lighted camp gates.

And yet this was still not the end. The last three—two—one hundred yards to the gate required enormous effort: the brigades were searched at the guard-house as they arrived. Sometimes, at the gate itself, one of the crowd of prisoners would fall to the ground like a sack thrown off one's back; we would lift him up by his arms so as not to delay the search. If some forbidden object or a stolen scrap of food was found on a prisoner, the whole brigade was marched aside and in the frost, on the snow, stripped naked for the search. There were searches which were prolonged with sadistic slowness from seven till ten at night.

A month after my arrival a new transport, containing 100 political prisoners and 20 *bytoviks* (petty criminals), came to Yercevo. The *bytoviks* remained in Yercevo, and the politicals were transported to the other camp sections, with the sole exception of a young, well-built prisoner with the blunt face of the fanatic, called Gorcev, who was detained in Yercevo and directed to the forest.

Various strange rumours were current in the camp about Gorcev, for he himself, disregarding the prisoner's time-honoured custom, never spoke a word about his own past. It was whispered that Gorcev had been an N.K.V.D. officer before his arrest.

He himself—unconsciously, or else through simple stupidity—did everything to confirm this suspicion in our minds. Whenever he opened his mouth as the prisoners sat round the fire in the forest, it was to pronounce short, violent harangues against "the enemies of the people" imprisoned in the camps, defending the action of the Party and the Government in placing them out of harm's way. The other prisoners began to treat him with open and undisguised hatred.

One evening the veil concealing Gorcev's past was lifted slightly. He had quarrelled over some trifle with a group of Mongol *nacmeny* (tribesmen) in the barrack, and fell into a rage such as we had never seen in him before. He seized one of the old Uzbeks by the collar of his robe and, shaking him furiously, hissed through clenched teeth: "I used to shoot you Asiatic bastards by the dozen—like sparrows off a branch!"

Some time about Christmas a transport from Krouglitza to the Pechora camps passed through Yercevo. The prisoners spent three days in the Peresylny barracks, walking round our barracks in the evenings and looking for friends. It was one of these who stopped suddenly and went pale as he passed Gorcev's bunk.

"You—here?" he whispered.

Gorcev raised his head, shivered, and backed against the wall.

"Here?" repeated the new arrival, approaching him slowly. Then suddenly he jumped at Gorcev's throat, threw him down on his back across the bunk, and pressing his right shoulder into Gorcev's chest, started hammering his head furiously against the planks.

"So you fell too, did you?" he shouted, punctuating almost every word with a thud from Gorcev's head. "You fell at last, did you? You could break fingers in doors, push needles under fingernails, beat our faces and kick us in the groin and the stomach . . . couldn't you . . . couldn't you? My fingers have grown again . . . they'll choke you yet . . . they'll choke you."

Although younger and apparently stronger than his attacker, Gorcev behaved as if he was paralysed and did not attempt to defend himself. His face twisted with fear, he got up and started to run towards the barrack door. But there he found a barrier of Uzbeks who had left their corner to prevent his escape.

The attacker now walked towards him, holding an iron bar which someone on an upper bunk had thrust into his hand. The circle began to close. He opened his mouth to shout, but at that very instant one of the *nacmeny* hit his head with the wooden cover of a bucket, and he fell to the floor, dripping with blood. With the remnants of his strength he raised himself on his knees, looked at the slowly advancing prisoners and shrieked horribly: "They'll kill me! Guard! They'll kill me!"

In the deep silence, Dimka crawled off his bunk, limped over to the barrack door and bolted it. A jerkin, thrown from an upper bunk, fell on Gorcev and immediately the furious blows of the iron bar rained on his head. He threw the jerkin off and, stumbling like a drunkard, rushed towards his own brigade. There he was met by an extended fist, and he bounced off it like a rubber ball, vomiting blood, his legs giving way. He was passed from hand to hand, until he slid to the floor quite helpless, instinctively folding his hands round his head and protecting his stomach with drawn-up knees. He remained crouching like that, crumpled and dripping blood like a wet rag. Several prisoners came up to him and nudged him with their boots, but he made no movement.

"Is he still alive?" asked the one who had unmasked him. "Examining judge from the Kharkov prison, brothers. He used to beat good men so that their own mothers wouldn't know them."

DIMKA came up with a pailful of *hvoya* and threw it over Gorcev's head. He stirred, sighed deeply, and stiffened again.

"He's alive," said the forester-brigadier, "but he won't live long."

The next morning Gorcev washed the dry, congealed blood off his face and crawled to the medical hut, where he was given one day's dispensation from work. He went beyond the zone, with another complaint to the Third Section, and returned empty-handed. It was now clear to us that the N.K.V.D. was giving up to the prisoners one of its own former men. A strange game, in which the persecutors entered upon a silent gentleman's agreement with their victims, was played out in the camp.

After the discovery of his past Gorcev was given the hardest work in the forest brigade: the sawing of pines with the "little bow." For a man unaccustomed to physical labor, and to forestry in particular, this work means certain death unless he is relieved at least once a day and given a rest at burning cleared branches. But Gorcev was never relieved, and he sawed 11 hours a day, frequently falling from exhaustion, catching at the air like a drowning man, spitting blood and rubbing his fever-ridden face with snow. Whenever he rebelled and threw the saw aside with a gesture of desperate bravado, the brigadier came up to him and said quietly: "Back to work, Gorcev, or we'll finish you off in the barrack," and back to work he would go. The prisoners watched his agonies with pleasure and satisfaction.

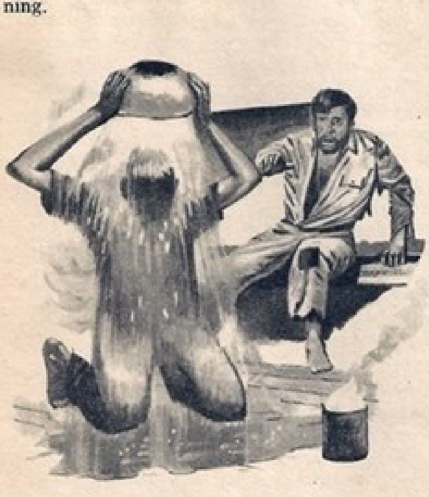
Gorcev tried to fight back, although he must have known that it was as hopeless as the resistance of his victims had once been at the interrogations. He went to the doctor for a further dispensation, but old Matvei Kirylovich refused to put him on the sick list. Once he refused to march out to work, and was sent to solitary confinement on water alone for 48 hours, then driven out to work on the third day. The understanding was working well. Gorcev crawled out every day at the end of the brigade, he walked about dirty and half-conscious, he was feverish, moaned terribly, spat blood and cried like a baby at night, and begged for mercy in the daytime.

Finally, towards the end of January, after a month had gone by, he lost consciousness at work. The prisoners were worried that this time they could not avoid sending him to the hospital. It was agreed that the water-carrier who drove out to the forest every day with the stakhanovites' extra portion, and who was friendly with the forest brigades, should take him back on the sledge after the day's work. In the evening the brigade marched slowly off towards home, and several hundred yards behind crawled the sledge with Gorcev's unconscious body. He never reached the zone again, for at the guard-house it was found that the sledge was empty.

Gorcev was found in a snowdrift two yards deep which was covering one of the frozen streams—his legs hanging out of the sledge, must have caught in the rail of the wooden bridge. The body, frozen like an icicle, was taken straight to Yercevo mortuary. . . .

An additional hindrance at work was night-blindness, an illness which sooner or later afflicts the majority of prisoners in the labor camps of the north as a result of bad feeding and lack of fats in particular.

A man with night-blindness stops seeing only at dusk, and must therefore accustom himself anew to his disablement every evening.



"HOT WATER will clean my head," he sighed and dumped the boiling stuff

The sight of the night-blind, walking slowly through the zone in the early mornings and evenings, their hands fluttering in front of them, was as normal in the zone as that of the water-carriers. The night-blind were naturally not assigned to work which sometimes lasted far into the night. They were never found in the porters' brigade, even though only in that brigade, with a possibility of stealing a rare piece of pork fat, could they have any chance of being cured—it was in its way a perfect vicious circle: with us they could have been cured of night-blindness, but they never came to us because they suffered from night-blindness.

I remember, though, that once a new worker walked out to work with my brigade, a small, silent man with a severe face and red-rimmed eyes. He was serving a 10-year sentence for a ludicrous misdemeanour. Once, as a high official in one of the people's commissariats, he had had a few drinks with a friend in his office, and made a wager that with one revolver shot he could hit Stalin whose picture was as usual hanging on the wall, "right in the eye." He won the bet, but it cost him his life when, a few months later, after he had forgotten all about the incident, he happened to quarrel with the friend. The next day he found two officers of the N.K.V.D. waiting for him in the office, where they examined the portrait and immediately drew up an indictment. He was assigned to our brigade after much pleading, in order to "improve his health a little," as he told us, making a wide circle in the air with his hand.

He walked slowly, but surely enough, like a pedigree horse with bound fetlocks—until it was dark.

At dusk, the two prisoners inside the wagon handing the sacks out later told us, he begged them to place the sack upon his shoulder, with a short, trembling "for pity's sake." Finally he appeared in the door of the wagon and for a moment searched for the gangway with his outstretched foot. When his leg found it, he walked halfway across in a few long steps and suddenly stopped. Then he raised his right leg into the air and waved it several times in mid-air like a ballerina, but every time it landed again in empty space—the plank was very narrow—and he put it down again and froze in expectation.

It was all obscurely funny and did not arouse our sympathy. Only later we understood that we had been watching a grotesque dance of death. But at the time Karinen only laughed shortly, and Ivan shouted angrily: "Hey, you, Stalin's murderer, what sort of a circus do you think this is?"

Then we heard a strange sound, something between a sigh and a sob, and Stalin's murderer turned slowly round on his heels in the direction of the wagon—he had evidently decided to go back.

"Have you gone mad?" I shouted at him. "Wait, I'll help you!" But it was already too late, for he suddenly straightened himself, jerked his body, tried for a moment to regain his balance on the plank, and then fell with the sack on the snow-covered rails.

We all ran from the platform and surrounded him in a closed circle. He brushed the flour off his jerkin and wiped his bleeding forehead. "Night-blindness," he explained and added: "I thought I'd got over it."

I have no idea how he had succeeded in concealing his night-blindness and how he imagined that he would "get over it." Our brigadier led him back to the zone after work. The next morning he went to the forest with a penal brigade. . . . For a man who had survived seven years in a labor camp, the forest was a slow, lingering death.

He died of exhaustion a few months later. When I met him, a few days before his death, he had stopped washing a long time before, his face had the appearance of a wrinkled lemon, but underneath his pus-encrusted eyelashes the fever-consumed eyes, which hunger was beginning to cover with a film of madness, still gleamed defiantly at the world. It did not need an experienced prisoner to tell that only a few days separated him from complete madness, and now the last remnants of his human dignity were burning out within him. He stood, with an empty can in his hand, leaning against the balustrade on the kitchen platform, and I bumped into him just at the moment when the cook was pushing my canful of soup through his serving-hatch. He smelt so abominably that I instinctively moved away; he had probably lost all control over the simplest mechanisms of his body, and slept without undressing, weak and feverish, surrounded by the shell of his dried excrement. He did not recognize me, but looking in front of him only whined: "Give me some soup." And then, as if justifying this request, he added: "Even the dregs."

I poured all I had into his can and watched him. With trembling hands he brought the can to his mouth, and burning his lips, gulped down the hot fluid, while a rattling noise came from his throat. Two thin streams of soup trickled from the corners of his mouth and froze almost instantly. When he had finished he went up to the kitchen window, as if I was not there at all, and flattened his stubbly face against the window. On the other side of the window, leaning against a steaming cauldron of soup, stood the Leningrad thief Fyedka laughing at him. "There aren't any extras for counter-revolutionists!" he shouted.

"Robbers," he finally brought out, "robbers, robbers . . ."

"Who?" I asked thoughtlessly.

"You, you, all of you here," he cried in a heart-rending voice, and started to run. He looked like a huge sewer rat covered with slime, caught suddenly in a beam of light. He turned round several times on one spot as if there was no escape from it, then suddenly stopped, facing me.

"I killed Stalin!" His voice changed into the throaty whine of the madman. "I shot him like a dog . . . like a dog . . ." He laughed with bitter triumph. . . .

Mikhail Alexeyevich Kostylev was a prisoner assigned to my brigade after his arrival from the camp section of Mostovitza.

To force him to confess, Kostylev had been repeatedly beaten unconscious in prison, then beaten again after a bucket of cold water had brought him round; he was hardly able to see through the chinks in the plaster of dried blood over his eyes, and his mouth was swollen with torn jaws and loose teeth. He would not admit his "guilt," and his determination grew in proportion to the increased intensity of his sufferings.

Kostylev remembered only that he had hissed with determination through clenched teeth: "I'm innocent, I've never been a spy." He fainted for a long while at the moment when, having cried "No!" for the last time, he felt the convulsive clashing of his jaws dislocating his front teeth and spat them out, choking, together with a stream of warm blood and vomit which broke through his closed gullet and gushed at the wall like oil from a pierced shaft.

Then Kostylev was awakened at night, taken back to the cell after a few hours, awakened again at dawn, called to hearings during meals and during the time reserved for the daily visit to the latrine; he was forbidden to wash, and deprived of his daily

"You are my best friend," Makhapetian said. "I am sorry I must turn you in to the NKVD"

walk in the prison courtyard. Kostylev walked about stunned and bewildered; his eyes were red from lack of sleep, his head burned from the still unhealed wounds, and the blood inside it roared like boiling water at the bottom of a pan. There were times when in full daylight, on his way to the hearing, he would stagger on his legs and lean against the wall of the corridor like a blind man; other times when he would faint on the stool before the judge's table.

HE now spent most of his hours in the small room where, day and night, dark blinds were drawn across the bars, shutting him off from time, which flowed beyond the windows, and making him easy prey for cunning questions in the fierce circle of electric light. At times he felt as if his head was an enormous pin-cushion, stuffed with horsehair and bristling with a thousand needles. He felt their painful, repeated stabs, and in an access of despair he would try to smother the pain by tearing at the bandages on his forehead, brow and cheeks, or by putting his hands to his ears, where the pricking of sharp needles was transformed into the crumbling sound of steel shavings falling to the bottom of an empty shell. He lost all consciousness of the passing of time, he was weakened by frequent emissions in his sleep, he would jerk up on the bunk at the sound of his name, suffocated and half-conscious, staring all round with burning, uncomprehending eyes.

He was now in principle ready and willing to admit some abstract guilt, and he even tried to suggest the idea to the judge. But the inquisitor, whose expression had changed as if a mask had dropped off his face, needed more facts. Who belonged to the secret organization? Where and when did its meeting take place? What were the organization's practical aims? What contacts did it have outside? Who was its leader? Kostylev denied everything with a last effort of his will, but he knew that if the hearings continued much longer he would begin to invent names and circumstances, escaping from the menace of an empty reality by recourse to fiction. This stage of the hearing continued for three months, which approached in their tension and mental agony the short episode of physical torture.

In January 1939 he was given a sentence of 10 years and sent to Mostovitza camp.

In March 1941 he came to Yercevo, with his right arm in a sling, and was formally included in the porters' brigade.

It was because I seldom managed to sleep after the general awakening that I discovered the secret of Mikhail Kostylev's bandaged right arm on the day after his arrival in the camp. Dimka, having made the formal declaration that the kitchen had finished issuing breakfast, had gone out as usual into the zone. The barrack was empty, except for the sleeping porters and a young man who sat by the fire, reading a book with evident emotion.

The day before we had been told that a new prisoner from Mostovitza had joined us, and that he would go out to work with us as soon as his arm was healed and his dispensation from work withdrawn. He was tall, but his head was somehow too large and angular, as if chipped from living stone; two bushy eyebrows sprouted from the low, overhanging forehead and almost hid the tiny, blazing eyes, sunk like two pieces of coal in his famine-swollen cheeks.

Suddenly he looked round to make certain that no one was stirring in our corner, then laid the book aside and began to unwind with his good hand the bandage on his arm. It took him two or three minutes, and during that time he stopped once or twice to throw more wood on the fire. Before finally pulling the crusted layer of cloth and dried matter off his wound, he looked again in our direction and, turning his head away so as not to see the hand, gave a violent tug at the bandage. I thought that he was looking at me, but he did not see me, for his eyes closed suddenly as he drew in his cheeks, and his teeth bit into his lower lip from pain.

Still without turning his head, he crawled nearer to the fire and blindly thrust the arm into the flames. Through his face passed a spasm of pain, his eyes seemed to be retreating into his head, his teeth released the bottom lip, his jaws met with a grating sound, and large drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. During those few seconds I saw not only the face, pierced with pain, but also the arm—a swollen block, wrapped in strips of burnt and peeling skin and dripping with blood and pus which fell in small drops on to the hot logs, hissing like burning oil. Finally he drew it out of the fire, then fell heavily on to the bench, and hiding his head between his knees, wiped the perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his left hand.

I climbed down from my bunk and sat down at the table, but he noticed my presence only when I picked up the dirty, saturated rag to help him bandage the arm. He looked at me with surpise and anxiety.

"Did you see?"

I nodded without a word.

"You won't tell?"

No, I would not tell. I did not disclose his secret to anyone for many years, even though Kostylev died a month after our meeting.

He told me the story of his life in detail. One day, in the forest at Mostovitza, he was drying a piece of bread over the fire, and carelessly let it fall into the flames; terrified by the prospect of hunger, he plunged his hand in the fire without any hesitation. That evening he was given seven days' dispensation, and then he continued to burn his hand at every opportunity.

IN the first days of April we suddenly heard that a transport for Kolyma was being prepared in our camp. Now that I have read something about German concentration camps, I realize that a transfer to Kolyma was in Soviet labor camps the equivalent of the German "selection for the gas-chamber." The prisoners for Kolyma were taken from among those in the worst state of health, though in Russia they were being sent not to an immediate death but to hard labor which required exceptional physical strength and endurance. The secret of this nightmarish paradox is that every camp chief is responsible first of all for his own camp, and for the fulfilment of the production plan assigned to it; when he receives an order to supply so many of his prisoners for a convoy, he gets rid of the weakest and retains the strongest.

On the evening of April 10th Kostylev was informed that his name had been included in the Kolyma list and told to report at the bath-house the next morning for what was known as a "sanitary preparation." He took this blow calmly, but seemed to be stupefied, and only whispered: "Now I shall never see my mother."

The next evening, as I came back from work, I found Dimka waiting for me at the guard-house.

"Gustav Yosifovich," he whispered, catching my hand, "Kostylev has poured a bucket of boiling water over himself in the bath-house. He's in the hospital."

They would not allow me to see him in the hospital, and there was nothing that I could have done there. Kostylev was dying in slow agony, and until the end he did not regain consciousness. . . .

MONTH after month passed and we worked every day without a break, deceived by the hope that we should soon be given a "rest-day." According to regulations, prisoners were entitled to one whole day's rest for every 10 days' work. But in practice it transpired that even a monthly day off threatened to lower the camp's production output, and it had therefore become customary to give rest days only when the camp surpassed its production plan.

I have heard of camps with a rest-day once in every three or four weeks; during the whole year and a half which I spent in Yercevo we had only 10 of them, one—as in all Soviet camps without exception—on May 1st; but I have never met a prisoner who could boast that in his camp the brigades remained in the zone on one day in every 10.

Toward the evening of the rest-day, when the time of our main meal was approaching, we dispersed to our own barracks and seldom went out again. For several rest-days in succession, at least half our barrack listened, with rapt attention and without the slightest signs of boredom, to the repeated story of Ruso Karinen's unsuccessful attempt to escape from the camp in the winter of 1940.

Karinen was a Finn from the 42nd (porters') brigade who had come to Russia illegally in 1933. As a qualified steel-worker, he had at once found well-paid work in Leningrad, where he lived comfortably, having learned to speak Russian quite well, until the purge which followed the assassination of Kirov. Then he was arrested and accused of bringing secret instructions from Finland to the assassins. It would be difficult to think of a more improbable accusation, for all the investigations in the Kirov case never led to a public trial.

In January, 1936, Karinen spent three weeks in the condemned cell, and in February, quite unexpectedly, a sentence of 10 years' hard labor was read out to him. He came to Yercevo in the middle of 1939, having spent three years in the Kotlas camp.

His attempted escape at the time of the Russo-Finnish war had become a legendary exploit in the camp. Every prisoner "plans" his escape from the camp in periods of self-confidence, and tries to include his best friends in the attempt. But these plans contained more naïve self-deception than any chance of success.

Projects of escape were especially popular among Polish prisoners. We would often meet

The guard caught Kostylev sticking his arm in the stove to get out of the work detail.

in one of the barracks, an intimate group of Poles, to discuss the details of the plan; we collected scraps of metal found at work, old boxes and fragments of glass which we deluded ourselves could be made into an improvised compass; we gathered information about the surrounding countryside, and the distances, climatic conditions and geographical peculiarities of the north—and we were not discouraged by the knowledge that we were like children, fighting their battles with tin soldiers. We all felt that our preparations were ludicrous, but we did not have the courage to admit it to each other.

I remember a junior officer of the Polish cavalry who during the worst periods of hunger in the camp found enough strength of will to cut a thin slice of bread from his daily ration, drying it over the fire, and save these scraps in a sack which he concealed in some mysterious hiding-place in the barrack. Years later, we met again in the Iraq desert, and as we recalled prison days over a bottle in an army tent, I made fun of his "plan" of escape. But he answered gravely: "You shouldn't laugh at that. I survived the camp thanks to the hope of escape, and I survived the mortuary thanks to my store of bread. A man can't live if he doesn't know why he's living."

Karinen first decided to escape when the Russo-Finnish war changed from a short armed expedition into a prolonged tactical war. He could not say what caused him to make up his mind, whether it was some patriotic response or the hope that military activities had weakened the watchfulness of the frontier guards even on the Russian side. He knew the frontier country, for he had crossed it to reach Russia, and he planned to steal through the forests in the daytime, sleeping in wayside villages; it was a journey of several hundred kilometers, from the White Sea to the southern shore of Lake Onega, and from there to the northern shore of Lake Ladoga, which leads in an almost straight line to the Finnish frontier.

Only the other four prisoners of his team in one of the forest brigades knew of his intentions. He set off during the lunch break, unnoticed by anyone except his companions. He had dressed with particular care that morning, and under his wadded prison outfit he wore all his underclothes and the suit which he had brought with him into the camp in which he intended to show himself in the villages.

HE carried a small sack with a few dried slices of black bread, a piece of fat contributed by one of the prisoners in whom he had confided, a bottle of vegetable oil purchased from a free official for a pair of shoes, and some onions; in his pocket he had three boxes of matches and about 200 rubles (although he refused to tell us where he had obtained the money, it is most likely that he had smuggled in and hidden some foreign currency when he first came to the camp, and later exchanged it for rubles with one of the camp officials). Instead of a compass he had a deep conviction that "it's enough to keep walking west—in the morning with your back to the sun, with your face to it in the evening."

He walked fast during the first few hours, not stopping even to quench his thirst, but as he walked he gathered handfuls of snow from the trees and moistened his parched lips. Towards evening he heard the distant, muffled sound of several rifle-shots, and he guessed that the guard had discovered his absence and was giving the alarm, though he doubted whether the shots could be heard in the camp itself. He had the whole night before him, for the pursuit would not start out until morning. But when darkness fell he lost his sense of direction, and could not go on.

He found a place in a large hollow, dug a hole in the snow, covered the top thickly with branches and spent the whole night curled up inside. At the very bottom of his lair, between his outstretched legs, he lit a small fire and kept it going all night, blowing at it with all his strength and sheltering it from above with his frozen hands. He did not sleep that night, but he did not feel as if he was awake.

At dawn he crawled out of his hiding-place, washed his face with snow, waited until the sky was light enough to see the sunrise, and then started off in the opposite direction. He walked slowly, for his bones were aching, his body was painfully hot, he felt fever and hunger alternately. About noon he took a piece of bread from his sack, poured a little vegetable oil on it, and cut a tiny morsel of fat with his penknife—that was the daily ration he had decided on before setting out, estimating that his whole stock of food would last 30 days. He walked briskly, inhaling deeply, looking at the green outlines of branches under thick layers of snow.

Every hour he stopped to hear if the pursuit was catching up with him. He supposed that the police-dogs had lost his scent, for when he trod lightly his felt boots left almost no trace in the dry, powdery snow.

That evening his heart was full of hope, and having dug another hole in a snow-covered hollow he lit a larger fire than the night before. For the first time since his escape, about midnight, he fell sound asleep, and woke only at dawn. He intended to approach no human habitation until he had covered a distance of at least 50 miles from the camp, after a week's march. On the fourth evening, as he was digging his usual hole and covering it with cut branches, he noticed a glow on the horizon, then the lightning-stroke of a searchlight pierced the night and vanished immediately. He was terrified, for it meant there was a camp nearby.

That night he did not light a fire and almost froze to death, sitting in the snow with his jerkin drawn over his head, his hands inside the sleeves and his legs resting on a branch. In the morning he rose with a great effort of will from his snowy arm-chair, stretched himself with difficulty, and slowly began to rub snow on his frozen hands. He started walking a little later, hoping that he was passing the most westerly of the Kargopol camp sections, at a distance of about 13 miles from Yercevo, perhaps Nyandoma. But he could not dispel his feeling of anxiety, and forgetting his original rule to follow the sun he turned off to the side, away from the place where he had seen the searchlight beam, and made his way north-west.

He was walking slowly now, falling and stumbling on the way, had difficulty in swallowing his daily ration, and often had to rub snow on his burning forehead. He was near breaking-point, and though he did not remember this exactly, he thought that tears were streaming from his eyes although he was not crying. All around there was silence, his every step resounded and echoed infinitely. He was so frightened by his solitude that he started talking to himself in Finnish, for the first time in six years. Soon he ran out of subjects and words for this monologue, and he could only repeat a few phrases.

In the evening, as he could see no glow in the sky, he lit a larger fire and slept the whole night through, waking whenever the flame died down. He woke up with a sensation of strange discord within himself: he was and he was not himself, he remembered that he had escaped and yet he fancied that he was going out to work, he felt fever and numbness in his whole body, he knew what he had to do but could only stumble ahead like a sleepwalker. One thing is certain, that he forgot the principle of orientation that day, and simply walked on. In the afternoon he sat down under a tree and immediately fell asleep. He woke up in the middle of the night, suddenly frightened, and shouted loudly. He thought he heard an answering call, jumped up and began to run, but after a few steps tripped and fell with his face in the snow. He lay like that for a while, then rose slowly and tried to marshal his thoughts.

ONE idea recurred persistently in his brain: He must light a fire at all cost. It was the sixth night of his escape. By the fire he thawed a little, and decided that at dawn he must find some human settlement where he could rest and get better. The next morning he ate a piece of bread and fat, and started off again, without any idea where he was going. Late in the afternoon he saw, far beyond the forest, several pillars of smoke rising into the air. He walked faster and impatiently, but it was not until evening that he saw lights gleaming on the edge of a clearing. Without taking off his prison clothes, he walked into the first hut that he came to and there, on a bench by the fire, passed out.

The village which Karinen found after seven days' wandering in the forest was only eight miles away from Yercevo. The peasants drove him back to the camp and there the guards took him to the internal prison, where, still unconscious, he was beaten so cruelly that for three months he was near death, and even after his life had been saved he had to remain in the hospital for another two months. It was said that Commissar Samsonov had never sent out a pursuit, knowing that Karinen would either die in the forest or come back to the camp. He had come back. "You can't escape from the camp, my friends," so Karinen always ended the story, "freedom isn't for us. We're chained to this place for the rest of our lives, even though we aren't wearing chains. We can escape, we can wander about, but in the end we'll come back."

"Let's go to sleep," the prisoners would say, looking at each other immovably. "The rest-day is over. Back to work tomorrow!"

Believe me, true hunger, more frequently than anything else, broke down the resistance of women, and once it was broken, there was no obstacle to stop them on the downward path which led them to the very depths of sexual bestiality. Some gave in not only with the hope of improving their conditions or finding a powerful protector, but

"Ha," the Russian laughed. "Good you keep the barracks warm. Now try the other arm"

also with the hope of maternity. This must not be taken too sentimentally. Pregnant women in camps are freed from work for three months before and six months after the baby's delivery. Six months was the period considered sufficient for the suckling of a child until it was old enough to be taken away from its mother and transported to some unknown destination. The maternity barrack in Yercevo was always full of women who with pathetic gravity pushed the burden of their swollen bellies in front of them as they walked to the kitchen for their soup.

But it is difficult to talk of genuine human feelings when we were forced to make love before the eyes of our fellow-prisoners, or at best in the store of old clothing, on piles of sweaty and stinking rags. After all these years one retains a memory of disgust like rolling in slime, and a deep distaste for oneself and for the woman who once seemed so close.

In January 1941, when I had been at the camp several weeks, a young Polish girl, the daughter of an officer from Tarnopol, arrived with a transport. She was really lovely: slim and supple, with a girlishly fresh face and tiny breasts whose outline could only just be guessed at behind the blue blouse of her school uniform. An informal jury of urkas rated the "young mare" very highly and, doubtless to whet their proletarian appetites, called her "the general's daughter." The girl, however, held out very well; she walked out to work with her head raised proudly, and repulsed any man who ventured near her.

In the evenings she returned from work rather more humbly, but still untouchable and modestly haughty. She went straight from the guard-house to the kitchen for her portion of soup, and did not leave the women's barrack again during the night. Therefore it looked as if she would not quickly fall a victim to the night hunts of the camp zone. There was also little possibility that she would be broken by hunger, for she was assigned to the 56th brigade, made up of women and invalids, which patched torn sacks and sorted vegetables at the food supply center, and though the prisoners of the 56th did not have the same opportunities for theft as we had in the porters' brigade, yet the work was comparatively light.

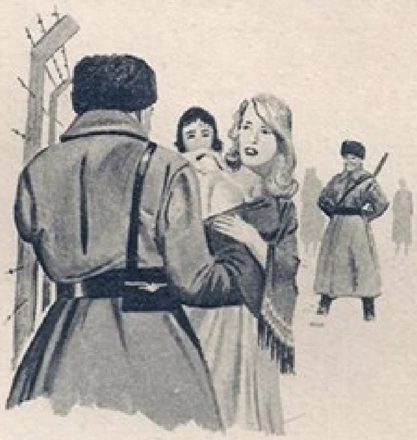
I was not then familiar enough with camp life to foresee the outcome of this silent struggle, and without hesitation I accepted the proposition of the engineer Polenko, supervisor of the vegetable store at the food supply center, and bet him half a loaf of bread that the girl would not give in.

ABOUT a month after we had agreed on the bet he came one evening to my barracks, and without a word, threw a torn pair of knickers on my bunk. Carefully, and in silence, I cut him half a loaf of bread.

From that time the girl underwent a complete change. She never hurried to get her soup from the kitchen as before, but after her return from work wandered about the camp zone till late at night like a cat on heat. Whoever wanted to could have her, on a bunk, under the bunk, in the cubicles of the technical experts, or in the clothing store.

Once, entering the potato store at the center, I found her on a pile of potatoes with the brigadier of the 56th, the hunchbacked half-breed Levkovich; she burst into a spasmodic fit of weeping, and as she returned to the camp zone in the evening she held back her tears with two tiny fists. I met her again in 1943, in Palestine. She was already an old woman. A tired smile on her wrinkled face revealed the holes in her yellow, decayed teeth, and her sweaty cotton shirt was bursting under the weight of two enormous hanging breasts like those of a nursing mother.

A similar episode was well-known in Yercevo, not because in itself it was anything but usual and commonplace, but because its heroine had also put up a long resistance by camp standards. It concerned Tania, a black-haired singer of the Moscow Opera, who, according to custom, had been invited with other artists to a ball given for the foreign diplomatic corps, where she had disobeyed the preliminary instructions of the N.K.V.D. by dancing more than the prescribed amount with the Japanese Ambassador—the suspicion of espionage earned her a sentence of 10 years in the labor camp.



"PRETTY PIGEON," Bunen said. "Let me see what you have under there"

As a "political suspect" she was immediately assigned to the foresters' brigade. What could that filigree princess with thin, delicate hands do in a forest? Throw twigs on the fire, perhaps, if she had the luck to be under a human brigadier. But, unfortunately for her, she was desired by Vanya, the short urka in charge of her brigade, and she was put to work clearing felled fir trees of bark with a huge axe which she could hardly lift. Lagging several yards behind the hefty foresters, she arrived in the zone at evening with hardly enough strength left to crawl in the kitchen and collect her first cauldron—needless to say, the urka had assessed her working capacity below the 100 per cent norm. It was obvious that she had a high temperature, but the medical orderly was a friend of Vanya's and would not free her from work.

This went on for two weeks, a record of endurance under the conditions of the forest brigade; then one evening Tania quietly entered the foresters' barrack, and not looking Vanya in the face, dropped heavily on to his bunk.

Hunger . . . hunger is a horrible sensation, which becomes transformed into nightmares fed by the mind's perpetual fever.

Only the porters, when the supervision at the food supply center was relaxed, and those prisoners who, armed with special passes, left the camp zone to work outside without a guard, had any opportunities of satisfying their hunger. But even beyond the zone the situation was just as bad. From the guard-house we could sometimes see queues in front of the small wooden hut at the end of the village outside the zone.

THE whole garrison and administrative staff of the camp were entitled to buy there, above their normal rations, two kilograms of black bread and a length of horse sausage every day, and once a week half a liter of vodka. Within the village there was, it is true, another shop, called the "speclarok," but it was open only to camp dignitaries.

I remember Blumen best of them all, as the whole food supply center trembled with fear whenever he came round on a tour of inspection. This fat beast, with an enormous gold watch on his right wrist and innumerable rings on the fingers of both hands, was always preceded in the dusk by a faint cloud of perfume. He said little, and then always the same thing: "You must work hard, prisoners, this is not a health resort."

I can still see his flushed, angry, fat face when he noticed a rotten carrot hidden in the bosom of one of the women workers and, ripping her blouse open across her breast, slapped both her cheeks with a podgy hand.

The outbreak of the Russo-German war was responsible for some essential changes in my life: on June 29th, together with other foreigners and Russian political prisoners, I was taken off work at the food supply center and sent to the newly-created 57th brigade, which was to work at haymaking in the forest clearings during the summer, and in autumn and winter to help in the saw-mills and with the loading of felled trees on to open railway trucks.

My position altered greatly with the signing of the Polish-Russian pact of July 1941, and the declaration of a general amnesty for all Polish prisoners in Russia.

The guard of the 57th brigade, who, I was told, before that time had not spared Poles many insulting reproaches for their defeat in 1939, patted me on the back when the news of the amnesty came and said: "Well, my boy, now we'll fight the Germans together."

This sudden reconciliation did not please me for two reasons: first, a prisoner can never forgive his warder, and second, it turned against me my fellow-prisoners, both Russian and foreign, who were not fortunate enough to have been born Poles.

One stifling July evening in 1941, I sat playing chess in the technical barracks with Weltman, an engineer from Vienna.

The technical barrack at Yercevo was inhabited exclusively by prisoners whose professional qualifications made them indispensable to the authorities, who assigned them to special functions in the camp. Most of them were technical experts and engineers with higher education and training.

The technical barrack was more comfortable than the others, with spaces between the individual bunks and a solid table at either end; the "technicals" received waterproof blouses of sailcloth and high jute boots, and the special *iteerovski* cauldron, equal in amount to the third stakhanovite cauldron, but strengthened with a spoonful of vegetable fat and a portion of "cyngotnoye," chopped-up raw vegetables. In the undeveloped social structure of the camp the technicals were thus an aristocracy.

All the technicals had been sentenced to 10 or 15 years for counter-revolutionary activities, and from the moment war was declared they were "assisted" in their functions by uneducated free assistants. Zyskind, a Red Army lieutenant, who was serving only two years for stealing regimental funds, remained in charge of the solitary confinement prison within the camp zone.

THE special cauldron carried with it a tacit obligation to spy and denounce for the N.K.V.D. No one was surpised at this and no one was shocked—after all, night follows day. Every Wednesday evening a handsome Russian woman with a bulging brief-case made her appearance in the barrack—this was Senior Lieutenant Strumina of the N.K.V.D.'s Third Section. Like a priest who visits a lonely, distant village to say a quiet mass, she greeted all passing prisoners with a gentle, polite "zdrastvuytie" which from her sounded like the old country form of greeting, "God be with you." In a small room adjacent to one of the barracks she would install her traveling confessional.

I had several friends in the technical barrack. Fienin, a well-known hydro-electric engineer, often talked to me with sympathy of conditions in Poland under German occupation; I played chess with Weltmann; Makhapetian, an Armenian engineer, was my closest friend and like a brother to me; Yerusalimski, a historian, became my friend through Makhapetian.

Thanks to Makhapetian, I had a standing invitation to the technical barrack at any time of the day or night. I took advantage of this, perhaps straining the laws of hospitality, to visit it almost every evening, so eager was I for conversation.

Weltmann would always beat me mercilessly at chess, but he liked playing with me, for, like every bungler, I calculated several moves in advance, aloud and in German, and this gave Weltmann the illusion that he was in his coffee house with a group of friends.

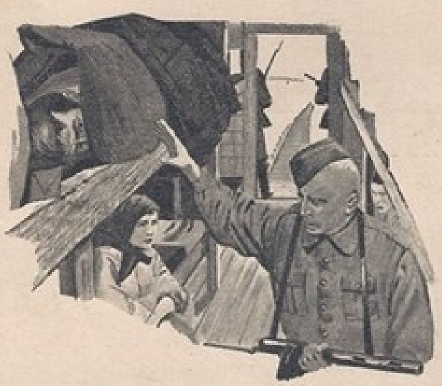
Punctually at midnight the wireless loudspeaker was switched on to broadcast the news bulletin. We did not interrupt our game until the barrack door opened with a clatter, and a young engineer, whose name I have now forgotten, staggered into the room, clutching the bunks for support with uncertain hands. The speaker had to tell us only that Soviet planes had brought down 35 of the enemies', and that infantry, in a courageous counter-attack, had recovered two villages in the Ukraine. The newcomer listened to this, leaning against a vertical beam, one leg crossed over the other. When the loudspeaker was disconnected, he shook himself all over like a wet dog, and with the reckless daring of the drunk, shouted loudly: "It would be interesting to hear how many of our planes the Germans have brought down!"

The barrack became so still that I could hear the sound of a chessman sliding on the board. Zyskind closed his book violently, jumped off his bunk, and went out of the barrack. The young engineer pushed himself away from the beam, threw himself on to the bench by our table, and laid his head on his folded arms. From the neighboring board a chessman, shaken by the sudden jerk of the table, fell off on to the floor. Mironov picked it up and quietly hissed: "If you're fool enough to get drunk, stuff a gag in your mouth." The drunk lifted his head for a moment and waved his hand heedlessly. A quarter of an hour later he and Makhapetian were taken away by two junior officers from the Third Section.

We played on as if nothing had happened, stopping only when Makhapetian returned, to hear his story. In a voice breaking with emotion, he told us that, in the presence of Zyskind, he had to verify and sign the text of the words spoken by the accused. Zyskind came back about one o'clock and, without looking at anyone, lay down in his former position on the bunk, his face hidden from us by the open book. Weltmann was just about to mate for the second time that evening, when we heard the sound of a shot beyond the zone, instantly lost in the woolly wrappings of the night. I felt stifled and sick: Weltmann's face looked old and shrivelled with fear.

"A war tribunal," he whispered, holding by the mane a wooden knight ready to jump.

"I resign—your game," I said, scattering the pieces on the board with a trembling hand.



"DOWN BELOW am I," she coaxed. "Sit and sing to me a marching song"

Zyskind read on unperturbed. . . .

One evening a few months later I was carefully making my way along the slippery planks of the path to the barrack, when I was stopped in front of the camp craftsmen's shed by a short stocky prisoner. I recognized him even before he led me into his workshop—it was an old Armenian cobbler whom I had seen before with Markhapetian, when, on free days, they whispered quietly together in a foreign language. He was known in the camp as an extremely honest and helpful man, and it was even said that he refused the customary bribes of extra bread for mending the boots of camp chiefs.

"Listen," he said, "is it true that you talk in the camp about a Russian victory over the Germans?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, it's like this," he sat down next to me, "you know Lieutenant Strumina's office is next to the corner of the barrack where the tailors sit?"

"Yes, I know," I said, and a feeling of foreboding passed over me.

"Well then," the cobbler went on, "a tailor I know has pierced a small hole between the planks in the wall. In the daytime he covers it with a layer of plaster, and on Wednesday evenings he listens to what the informers have to say to Strumina. Yesterday he called me to the hole, but not only because they were talking about you."

"About me?"

"Yes. Strumina first asked the informer what sort of morale there was in the camp. He answered that, apart from a handful of good citizens of the Soviet Union, who only in the camp came to realize the error of their ways, all prisoners long for a German victory.

"'That's understandable,' says Strumina, 'and what about the Pole?'

"The man said that he had come specially to tell her that 'the rotten Pole Gerling' is of a complete different opinion.

"'No wonder'—says Strumina—'we have signed a pact with the Polish Government and declared an amnesty for them.'

"But the informer would not give up there. 'All Poles,' he said, 'even though they are going back to freedom, talk in the transit barrack—in whispers—of the defeat of Russia and desire it just as eagerly as those who remain in the camp.'

"'Well, so what?' asks Strumina.

"'Well, so this Gerling is certainly not the simple student that he makes himself out to be, but probably a Trotskyist, or else someone very important. For, oh comrade Strumina, you don't know how well he can discuss politics.'

"'There is the Russian-Polish pact,' Strumina hesitated.

"'Yes, surely, but in every pact there are reservations and special clauses. Just let him get out, and you will see what happens if they send him to America. Wouldn't it be better to take him in a transport to a special tribunal of the N.K.V.D. in Moscow and unmask him as a spy?'

"'We'll see,' Strumina said."

"Listen," I asked breathlessly, "couldn't you see who it was through the hole?"

"I didn't need to. I recognized his voice."

"Who was it?" I said, gripping his arm.

"I wasn't sure if I should tell you. . . ."

"Tell me," I shouted furiously, "for Christ's sake tell me!"

And quietly, not looking me in the eyes, he said: "Makhapetian. . . ."

It was undoubtedly this that stopped me from being released with all the other Poles.

Towards the end of November 1941, four months after the general amnesty for Polish prisoners in Russian camps had been announced, when I knew that I should not survive until spring and when I had given up all hope of being released, I decided to go on a hunger-strike in protest.

ONLY six Poles remained in Yercevo of the 200 who had been there. Every day dozens of them passed through on their way out from all the main sections of the Kargopol camp. Yercevo seemed suddenly to have become empty for us, and unless we died soon, we would be marooned in the camp.

My hunger-strike was not so much an act of courage as a desperate step which had every appearance of common sense. I was in the final stages of scurvy, physically exhausted, and according to experienced prisoners I had only six months to live.

But what finally decided me was the thought that when I came to die in a few months' time, it would be with the bitter knowledge that I had given in without a struggle.

Among the six Poles who had joined

"My hungry body kept swelling like a balloon. Soon my skin touched the cell walls . . ."

together in a hunger-strike relations were developing badly. Despite the appearance of friendship and solidarity which a common struggle had created, we did not trust each other, and waited only to see which of us would be the first to break down or betray the rest.

"Who told you to strike?"

"No one. It was my own decision."

"Why are you striking?"

"I ask to be released from the camp in accordance with the terms of the general amnesty for Polish citizens imprisoned in Russia, or else to be allowed to communicate with the Polish representative to the Soviet Government."

"HAVE you heard of the special tribunals which in wartime can shoot prisoners for refusing to work? Do you know that a hunger-strike is rebellion against Soviet authority and Soviet law?"

"Yes, I know."

"Sign this declaration to say that you do know."

"I won't sign anything. From the moment that the Soviet-Polish agreement was signed in London, I have been the citizen of an allied country, and I owe no allegiance to Soviet law."

"Silence! Zyskind, lock him up!"

Zyskind ran energetically into the room, crying, "Yes, Citizen Chief," and led us outside in front of the barrack. The first hearing was over.

We were all six in the camp prison, each in a separate cell. The internal prison of Yercevo was a small house, with barred windows the size of a human head, and surrounded by a barbed-wire fence so that no doubt might exist that this was the prison within a prison.

My cell was so low that I could touch the ceiling with my hand, and so narrow that with one step I could walk from the wall of T.'s cell to that of Gorbatov's. Half the space was taken up by a two-tiered bunk, made of rough, unplaned wood nailed together, and turned with the head towards the window. It was impossible to sit on the upper bunk without bending one's back against the ceiling, and the lower one could only be entered with the movement of a diver, head first, and left by pushing one's body away from the wood, like a swimmer in a sandbank.

The distance between the edge of the bunk and the bucket by the door was less than half a normal step. After some deliberation, I chose the upper bunk, even though a bitter wind blew in continually through the open window, piling up a thin layer of snow on the ledge. I thought that if I walked backwards and forwards, as one does in a prison cell, on a scrap of bare earth measuring a step by half a step, I should soon go mad.

That night I slept badly. Shivering with cold, I squeezed myself into a corner of the bunk, as far as possible from the window, with my legs drawn up to my stomach, my head almost entirely covered by my jerkin, and my hands in its sleeves. In this position I could lie on one side only for an hour at a time, but because it seemed the most sensible, and because it protected me from the wind, I did not change it during the whole time that I stayed in prison. The next morning the hunger had receded, but the feeling of loneliness grew. I climbed down from the bunk and for a few minutes walked about on the small space of floor to warm myself, beating my hands against my sides. When at last I felt my blood running faster through my numbed limbs, I knocked on the wall of T.'s cell.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

Behind the wall I heard a loud noise like the falling of a body, then a gentle scratching at the cement, and finally T.'s calm voice:

"Bloody cold, but I'm managing. And you?"

"I'm all right. What about the others?"

"They don't answer."

I stepped across to the other wall and knocked.

"How long have you been here, Gorbatov?"

"Five days. And as many more to come."

"How is it going?"

"I'm starving. The scrap of bread they give you here. . . . You're mad to try this hunger-strike, you won't last out. . . ."

"That's none of your business, Gorbatov. . . ."

I heard steps on the path in front of the prison and the opening of the main door. Zyskind walked along the corridor for a while; finally the key turned in the lock of my door. He came inside, and without a word placed a whole ration of bread on the upper bunk. He must have done the same thing in the other cells, for I heard the turning of the key and the regular slamming of doors receding down the corridor. I looked at the fresh bread for a long time, but I felt no hunger; and although Zyskind brought me a fresh ration every day at the same time, I greeted his visits with increasing apathy, and the pile of bread grew on the bunk, untouched.

In the evening the door of my cell was again opened. Someone was kicked inside through the door, rolled across the floor like an enormous ball, and disappeared in the lower bunk. After about a quarter of an hour the door opened slightly, and Zyskind pushed through first a plateful of steaming soup, then a slice of bread, on the floor. The unknown prisoner jumped up, hit his head on the bottom of the upper bunk, swore, and threw himself on the floor. He ate loudly and greedily—smacking his lips, gulping down the hot fluid, and rapidly crushing the bread in his jaws. This went on for more than a minute, and then I heard the familiar sound of a tongue licking round the plate, the clang of the empty tin dish thrown on the floor, and an animal grunt of satisfaction.

I suddenly felt the sickly taste of a lump of phlegm in my throat, beads of sweat on my forehead, and a weakness in my whole body like a total loss of consciousness. When I came to, the other was already asleep, snoring and breathing out with a penetrating whistle, and muttering in his sleep. In the morning he was taken away to work, and in the evening brought back again to my cell.

And though we spent five nights together we never exchanged a word, and I did not even once see his face. I knew that his function in my cell was that of a tempter.

On the fourth day of hunger I was so weak that I could only with difficulty climb down to use the bucket, and the rest of the day I spent without movement on my bunk, dozing restlessly even in the daytime. I was neither hungry nor cold, but I would wake up suddenly to find myself shouting, not knowing at first where I was and what I was doing there.

About midday the door opened and a high-ranking officer of the N.K.V.D. whom I had not seen before walked in, in a uniform crossed by a belt, an unbuttoned leather coat and a red-and-blue cap with a gilded Soviet emblem. Commissar Samsonov was looking into the cell over his shoulder, in a fur cap and with his fur greatcoat buttoned up to the neck.

The unknown officer opened his overcoat and I could see his hand resting on his revolver holster. "Name?" he asked sharply.

With difficulty I raised myself on the bunk and slowly pronounced my name, but suddenly I imagined that I saw the officer unbuttoning the holster and taking the black, gleaming handle of his revolver into manicured fingers. My heart beat faster, and all my blood seemed to rush into my unbearably overfilled bladder. I closed my eyes, and heard the next question like the explosion of a bullet: "Will you stop this strike?"

"No," I answered, shouting hastily and desperately, "no, no!" and fell back on the bunk, drenched with sweat, while my bladder collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"War tribunal for you!" I heard as if in my sleep. The cell door slammed shut again.

Towards evening Zyskind brought me the daily portion of bread, and instead of leaving without a word as usual, he pressed a scrap of paper into my hands. I crawled over the bunk nearer to the bulb to read the message. It was from B.: "We are all three in hospital. Stop the strike. It won't get you anywhere."

The next morning I awoke with a strange feeling that I was choking. I caught the air into my lungs with difficulty, my hands and legs seemed to be bursting out of my clothes and hanging out in rolls of flesh, and my whole body felt as if it was firmly tied down to the bunk. Without changing my position, I raised one hand before my eyes, and found it so swollen that the wrist joint had disappeared from sight under a layer of flesh, and two soft, fat cushions had formed on either side of the hand. I sat up slowly and looked at my feet, which were bursting out of my rubber shoes above the ankle. So it was true: one did swell from hunger.

I unlaced my shoes, freeing my feet from the straps, and with difficulty I began to unpick the seams of my thickly-wadded trousers.

EVERY movement was a streak of pain, for I had to tear the cloth away with the crust of dried blood and pus, but I did not stop until I saw my two legs, naked, red blocks covered with open sores from which a yellow-pinkish fluid trickled slowly. I felt the legs as if they were not mine—the finger plunged into the soft dough of flesh, and bounced off as from an inflated rubber tire.

But to pull off my jerkin I had to get down from the bunk, and when the whole operation was accomplished I sat down on the floor exhausted, with my back against the wall. Now I could swell freely, I had enough living-space. I was not even cold, I felt only sick and giddy. And without noticing it I fell asleep with my head on the cushions of my knees, soft and wet with blood.

It cannot have been later than four in the afternoon, for the light still streamed in thinly through the window, when I heard

Tania wouldn't give herself to Vanya, the *urka*, so he began the hunger treatment

not so much a knocking, as a violent noise, from Gorbatov's cell. Without changing my position I knocked back and listened.

"I'm going out this evening. All the best."

My head weighed on me like a ripe pumpkin, the sores on my legs had dried while I was asleep, but were itching so mercilessly that I began aimlessly to pick at them, playing with the thin scabs. I was stifling and I felt my bladder burning again, but I had not the strength to get up. I felt a hot wave flowing through my trousers and saw a small puddle forming on the floor.

The next day Dr. Loevenstein, who came to see me in the prison during Zyskind's absence, did not attempt to conceal the truth from me:

"My friend, your heart is quite healthy, but the healthiest heart cannot go on for long pumping blood to legs as rotten and diseased as yours. I advise you to give up your illegal hunger-strike"—here he smiled gently—"and to return to the lawfully prescribed hunger. You will live three months in the peace and warmth of the mortuary, and during that time things may, after all, take a turn for the better."

I shook my head in answer. I was feeling better now, I even climbed down to see the old doctor to the door. But that night—the seventh of the hunger-strike, my sixth in the prison—I felt a sharp pain in my heart and I was suddenly frightened. There is nothing worse than fear of something unknown.

I slipped quickly down to the ground. I knocked hard and dreadfully long—a whole eternity!—on T.'s wall, convinced all the time that at the distance of an outstretched arm a dead body was lying on the bunk, until I felt something sticky trickling between the fingers of my clenched fist and stopped knocking. There was no answer. Could he be dead too? I was gathering my breath for a last deseprate shriek, when by my side I heard first a knocking and then the question:

"What's the matter?"

"You're alive! Thank God!"

"I don't feel well, I'm weak."

"Let's give up the strike, we lost anyway when the others gave in. . . ."

"No. *I* won't," he answered with unexpected force.

On the evening of the eighth day the unknown prisoner did not appear as usual, but Zyskind opened the door and told me to get ready to come out.

"Where to?" I asked.

"The guard-house."

In the corridor I waited while Zyskind called out T.

"I suppose this is the end?" he asked quietly.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know. There aren't any guards."

At the guard-house, in the presence of an officer from the Third Section, we signed the text of a telegram to Professor Kot, the Polish Ambassador then officiating in Kuibyshev, and then, still escorted by Zyskind, we set off for the small hospital which had recently been opened at the other end of the zone. We walked supporting each other, yet lightly, as if we could take off from the earth at any moment.

In the hospital our lives were saved by the silent "old Pole" from the Ukraine, Dr. Zabyelski, who, contrary to explicit instructions, gave us each two milk injections instead of the usual bread and soup. Thanks to him, we avoided instantaneous and fatal cramp of the intestines, and on the next evening, having eaten my first solid food for nine days—a plate of thin boiled barley—I went out to the latrine. In the small, hastily erected closet, with only a few planks in place of a door, I suffered the worst physical torments of my life. I must have been a sorry sight, crouching over a frozen plank, my jerkin blowing in the wind, looking out at the snowstorm which blew over the plain, with eyes full of tears of pain and pride.

The last stage of a prisoner's life in the camp was the mortuary, a large barrack situated between the kitchen and the maternity hut, where prisoners no longer capable of working were directed before their names were finally crossed off the list of the living.

My feelings as I walked to the mortuary for the first time from the hospital must have differed from those of my Russian fellow-prisoners in the same situation. Five days in the hospital had not cured the swelling of my whole body or healed the sores on my legs; my nerves were relaxed after the tension of the hunger-strike, my whole organism open to a fresh attack of scurvy; but the taste of victory was still fresh enough to revive my hopes of survival.

Just before Christmas all of us six Poles were given to read and acknowledge by signature a short verdict: "Detained in the camp by order of the Special Council of the N.K.V.D. in Moscow." This decision violently cut short our hopeful expectations of the future. I began to look at the mortuary in a different light, for it seemed that I would have to make my home there for a long time, if not for the rest of my days.

Even so, the six Poles left in Yercevo decided to celebrate Christmas together because the feeling of utter despair with which we greeted it was a common bond between us. Late in the evening our conversation became more animated, and to this day I can remember the story of B., a former officer of reserve of the Polish Army, who was arrested in his barrack in Yercevo on the day after the outbreak of the Russo-German war and detained in the central prison.

B.'s Story

"I could not sleep on the night of June 22nd. The bunk seemed to be harder than usual. I could not stop thinking about the changes which the outbreak of war might bring in my life. I didn't go to sleep until it was nearly morning. As soon as I had fallen asleep, I was woken by a movement unlike the normal morning push. Samsonov's deputy was standing by my bunk and told me to get dressed quickly.

"In the N.K.V.D. office Lt. Strumina was waiting for me with two armed soldiers. I was still sleepy, but I woke up with a start when I saw the indictment which she gave me to sign. I was accused of twofold treason against the Soviet Union, but despite pressure I did not sign it. Strumina told the soldiers to take me to the central prison. They did not allow me to collect the rest of my things from the barrack, but promised to let me have them in prison.

"They pushed me into a small cell, about three yards by five.

"After an hour the door opened and five new prisoners from Yercevo came in. They were terrified. It's the war—they kept repeating—we'll all be shot. Why should they shoot us? I asked. As an example to others, they said. By morning there were already 22 prisoners in the cell, the remaining 16 from other camp sections.

"We spent the day discussing various possible reasons for our arrest. I was the only Pole there. Next to me lay Selezyonka, an Ukrainian lawyer from Poland. From other camp sections came two Soviet generals, four lawyers—one of them, Grosfeld, Professor of Law at Moscow University, claimed to have 'taught Stalin'—two journalists, four students, one high-ranking officer of the N.K.V.D., a former camp chief, and a former camp supply officer.

"The cross-examinations began soon after. Every night two or three of us were taken out to the N.K.V.D. office. They would come back toward morning, beaten up and dreadfully shaken. They were forced to make fictitious confessions and to sign faked 'protocols' of the hearings which had been prepared beforehand. One prisoner, when the bread ration was lowered after the outbreak of war, had remarked: 'If they're short of bread already, what'll happen to us in a month's time?' He was accused of treason to the Soviet Union.

"Then it was my turn. I was taken at night to the N.K.V.D. office, about a mile from the central prison. A captain of the N.K.V.D. came in with a thick file of documents—it turned out to be the dossier of my first interrogation in prison. It took him two hours to read through the documents. The examining judge gave me a long lecture about the war with Germany, the power of the Soviet Union, and the wisdom and infallibility of Stalin. When he had finished, he told me to read and sign an indictment and confession which had been prepared in advance.

"I wouldn't sign. The judge got up and kicked me suddenly so hard that I fell off the chair. Then he told me to squat on my heels and began all over again. I still wouldn't give in, so he kicked me once more, and threatened me with a revolver. The hearing went on till seven in the morning, and during the whole time I wasn't allowed to sit on the floor or to stop squatting. In the morning the judge told the soldiers to take me to the guard-house and to see that I didn't go to sleep. I sat at the guard-house, without food and water, till 10:00 P.M. I was taken back before the judge, and the whole procedure of the previous night was repeated. He kicked me and hit me in the face continuously and sent me back to the cell towards morning.

"Then they left me alone for two weeks. All the others in the cell had finished their hearings.

"After two weeks I was again told to sign the confession. This time there were four witnesses from the camp in the judge's office, two of whom I had never set eyes on in my life. Their testimony was hopelessly incriminating, but I still wouldn't sign. The judge lost all control over himself, beat me blindly and furiously, and threatened to 'shoot me like a dog' whether I signed or not.

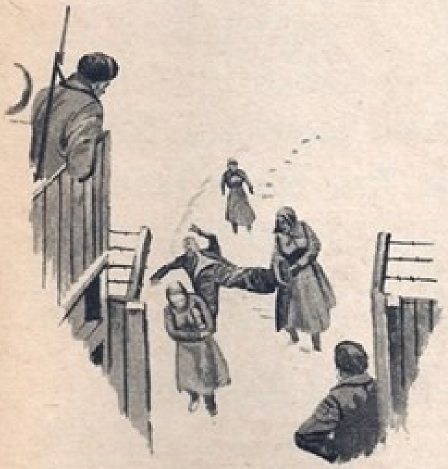
On the 30th day, she dropped into his bunk and he said: "You are too skinny now"

“Several days passed. The prisoners were called out of the cell at night, two at a time. Those who had been tried and sentenced did not return to our cell, but were placed in one opposite. From their side we heard shouts announcing death sentences.

“After a few days there were only five of us left in the cell; one of the generals, Grosfeld, the self-styled ‘tutor’ of Stalin, one student, Selezyonka the lawyer and myself. After a week we were woken one night by unusual movements in the corridor. The door of the condemned cell was opened and our neighbors opposite told to come out. Those who resisted were dragged out forcibly.

“I heard them sobbing and screaming. After a few minutes we heard the sounds of single shots and screams coming from the prison courtyard. After another few days my four companions were taken from the cell, and did not come back. I was alone.

“Several weeks went by. One night I was woken up and taken before a tribunal which was sitting in the village school at Yercevo. Two women were the judges, the prosecutor was also a woman. I was expecting a sentence of death, but the prosecutor got up and announced that, in view of the agreement signed in London between the Polish and the Soviet Governments, I would not be tried at all. I couldn’t at first understand what it was all about. On the judges desk lay an open calendar, and I saw that the date was August 29th. I suspected a trap, but the court’s decision was repeated to me and I was taken back to the cell.



"WHY DOES HE CRY?" the guard asked. "We have a nice 'welcome home' grave prepared for him"

“In the first days of September I was told, through the opening in the door, to get ready to move out in 10 minutes’ time. In the courtyard six prisoners and five soldiers of the N.K.V.D. were already waiting. We marched off, towards an unknown destination.

“In the evening our convoy reached the Second Alexeyevka. The penal camp there is divided into two zones. In one, the so-called free zone, the prisoners live normally in common barracks. In the other, called the isolation zone, and enclosed by a high fence and barbed wire, the penal brigades are imprisoned. We, of course, were directed to the isolation zone.

“In the morning, when we were being driven out to work, I had an opportunity of learning more about conditions in the Alexeyevka. Despite severe frost the prisoners were almost all barefoot and dressed in rags, and they could hardly move, they were so exhausted. Before my eyes two prisoners fell down and died on the spot as they were going out of the gate. In accordance with the orders of Soroka, the camp chief, the prisoners marching out to work did so to the strains of an accordion. On my first day three prisoners in the brigade dropped dead at work. Within the isolation zone stronger prisoners murdered the weaker and took their food with perfect impunity.

“I WORKED hard, and after two weeks I managed, by promising to behave well, to obtain a transfer to the free zone. One day we Poles all decided to strike and we refused to go to work, demanding to be released from the camp in accordance with the terms of the amnesty. The very idea of an amnesty was something so unprecedented in the annals of Soviet labor camps that Soroka, instead of taking his usual course in such cases and sending a platoon of soldiers with a light machinegun to the barrack to shoot every one us down, hastily sent us off to Krouglitza. From there I, and I alone, was sent to Yercevo with a detachment at the end of September. I don’t know what happened to the others but, believe me, when I saw Yercevo I felt as if I was coming home.” . . .

Life in the mortuary was approaching its end. In January my body began to swell again, and I stayed on my bunk most of the time, eating only what Dimka brought me. I was not hungry, though, but lay for days on end without moving, with the greatest consolation that a dying man can enjoy—the comfort of memory.

Many storms troubled life in the mortuary. One evening an old collective farmer from the region of Kalouga jumped down from a bunk, and frantically beating with his fist on the bottom of an empty tin, proclaimed “the end of all this suffering,” with his own Second Coming—“I am Christ in the rags of a prisoner.” When this was greeted with derisive laughter, he stood with his face to the bunks and his back to the fire and looked at us for a moment—imposing, all, almost splendid with his outstretched arms and the blunted face of a madman—then rapidly turned round and jumped into the open fire. His body terribly burnt, he was taken to the hospital the same evening. . . .

On January 19th the junior officer of the Second Section, who used to walk round the timber depot when I worked there, with a list of releases in his hand, finally remembered my existence, and told me to report the next morning at the office for a certificate of my release from the camp. It came just in time; I crawled off my bunk with difficulty and, together with M., went round to say goodbye to all my Polish friends in the camp.

That evening I saw the camp from a hill near the station; it looked so small that I could have put it in the palm of my hand.

In Vologda our train ran into a siding and the guard calmly announced that for the moment the journey was over. I had not come far, and if I went on traveling at this pace, I could have little hope of reaching the nearest detachment of Polish troops before spring. But at least I had arrived at Vologda station early enough to reserve a sleeping-place on the bare earth floor of the station waiting-room. Several hundred released prisoners had been living here for a month. Apart from a handful of Poles, they were mostly short-term criminal prisoners, released from the camps as volunteers for the front before their sentences were finished. In the daytime they were driven out into the town, where they spent their time looking for food, and in the evening the enormous waiting-room, by permission of the N.K.V.D., served as a dormitory for them.

We slept next to each other, lying on our sides packed together like herrings in a barrel, and giving out an inhuman stench. In the yellowish-green light of the night bulbs, the faces of sleepers, their open mouths gaping like holes, looked like the death-masks of drowned men. Every attempt to wade through the mass of bodies at night to reach the nearest bucket usually ended in someone’s death. If the foot landed on someone’s chest, rising and falling with the unquiet breath of feverish sleep, a short choking moan gave warning that one should step aside, but I myself, still half-conscious after waking up suddenly, once stepped on someone’s face. One of my legs was wedged between two bodies, and trying to free it I moved my whole weight on to my other leg, and felt a spongy mass splintering and crackling under my heavy boot, while blood spurted from under the sole. A moment later I was sick into the bucket, though I had not come to it for that. Every morning at least 10 bodies, stripped naked by their fellow-guests in the waiting-room, were carried out and laid on the open trucks.

I had nothing to wait for in Vologda. On the morning of the fifth day, instead of going out into the town as usual, I walked out along the railway tracks, and about midway I jumped on a train, whose destination was then quite unknown to me, which had stopped for a moment about half a mile outside Vologda station.

I FELL asleep almost instantly, and as I thawed in the warmth of the corridor, my dreams became pleasant and peaceful. I was woken by a hand which reached out from within a dark compartment, inviting me inside. Unwillingly, rather nervous, I entered the compartment. By the light of a shaded blue bulb I could just make out the forms of six sleeping women. The woman who had asked me in woke her companions, and a few minutes later I was sitting back on a bench strewn with cushions, drinking sweetened tea from a thermos flask and eating bread with dripping on it.

My hospitable fellow-travellers turned out to be workers from a Moscow steel works which was being evacuated wholesale into the Urals; their machines stood on open trucks at the rear of the train. They were indeed kind to me—they concealed me on the upper bunk of the compartment until we reached Sverdlovsk and they shared their food with me the whole way; but I shall never forget that they respected me as a human being, refusing to be put off by my filthy, lousy rags, and bearing bravely the stench of my dirty, festering body. ***