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STEPAN RAZIN

# STEPAN RAZIN

A Novel

*by*

A. CHAPYGIN

*Translated from the Russian*

*by*

CEDAR PAUL

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# PART ONE

# CHAPTER ONE

## MOSCOW

### 1

THE clock over the Spaski Gate struck the hour and Moscow answered its chimes by endless drumming on iron gongs in the houses of the boyars and merchants. Though the clock pealed forth, it remained invisible in the gloaming. Here and there lamps glimmered; a clatter of horses' hoofs resounded, a boyar rode by. Summer was nearly over and the dusk became thicker; rain fell intermittently. Mists trailed along the dark and tortuous streets. In some places the roads were paved with planed logs, which were wet and slippery as if they had been smeared with black soap.

Any who happened to be abroad carried a traveller's pass and a lantern. The black forms of musketeers shouldering their arms occasionally loomed out of the murk as they made their way cautiously towards the Kremlin for sentry duty.

"Devil take this road! Many a time have I been to sea, but here I'm like a blind man," grumbled a man in a sheepskin cap and wearing a long Cossack overcoat. His steps slithered and he tripped on the wooden paving. "Damnation!" he cried as he butted into a pole slung as a barrier across the street.

"You rascal! I'll wager you never reported at the *Zemski Prikaz*,"* called out one of the watchmen.

"I know nothing of your Muscovite regulations, but I know how to crack a skull," grunted the man. A pistol gleamed.

The watchman stepped back, while the man, bending his broad back, slipped under the pole, straightened himself, and hurried forward.

The watchman had been alarmed at the pistol, but now he plucked up courage and shouted: "You limb of Satan, may you break both legs and your ribs into the bargain!"

Another watchman came up.

"Why did you let him get through?"

"There are strangers from Pskov wandering about Moscow and I thought that maybe this fellow was a Cossack robber with pistol and sword."

"Idiot! You should have struck a bargain with him for a share in his loot."

"He scared me, may the ague strike him! His eyes glared like a wolf's."

"You silly old woman!"

In the centre of a huge square that seemed boundless in the mist a stout post had been erected. An image was deeply carved into the wood and a perpetual flame glimmered through the mica which was framed in a carved setting. Two

* Office of General Administration.

shadowy forms sprawled on the ground and a couple of sentries stood erect near the post. Leaning on the butt ends of their weapons, the musketeers were apparently dozing to the accompaniment of a monotonous wailing which rose from the ground.

"Oh, mercy me, young man! Graveyard worms are gnawing at my breast and devouring me. Why did the unrighteous judge condemn me? My husband was a poisonous snake. He drove red-hot needles under my nails. He tore half of my hair out. He had been castrated, had lost his manhood, so he had no further use for a woman. That's why he tortured me."

The man in the Cossack dress glanced down and saw a dishevelled woman buried in the ground up to her shoulders.

The sound of approaching footsteps made one of the musketeers lift his head.

"Who goes there?"

Reversing his weapon, he gripped it by the handle.

"What devil's business brings you here?" shouted the second sentry.

"I'm of your kind. Why raise the alarm?"

"We know the likes of you."

"I am of your kind, falcons. I bring you drink."

"What sort of a man are you?"

"A stranger, eh?" said the other sentry. "By the time you've had a good hiding you'll know the kind of tune they play in Moscow."

"We shall find a way to settle all that."

The man pushed back his cap and then produced an earthenware vessel from under his coat.

"A drink wouldn't come amiss—but suppose it's poison?"

"Why should I poison you?"

The sentry put his mouth to the neck of the vessel. His comrade eyed him and, smacking his lips greedily, said: "Here, let go. Don't swill it all."

"Drink as much as you like, brothers, this isn't a tavern. No payment needed."

"Oh, woe is me!" wailed the woman. "Never more shall I see the bright sun or the silver moon. Ah! Ah!"

"You've killed your husband, you she-devil, so you'd better hold your tongue," bellowed one of the musketeers.

Said the man in Cossack dress: "Maybe, friends, her husband deserved all he got."

"That's not the point in dispute. Likely as not he did. Still, that is none of our business."

"Why don't you drink yourself?"

"There is more to come. I'll get my share all right."

"Come on, then. Hand it over if you've got any more."

"Don't be close now you've started treating us. It's cold and foggy."

"A vile summer it's been; nothing but rain."

"There you are—swill away!"

Chatting among themselves, they passed the bottle round.

"How comes it, lad, that you're not afraid of going about?"

"He may be young, but he's a tough one."

"We of the Don fear nothing."

"We have been musketeers since our grandsires' times and yet . . ."

"Afraid?"

"Not exactly, but . . ."

"You, brother falcons, are the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the boyars."

"When the time is ripe we'll give our boyars a shaking. . . ."

"Till that day—patience!"

"But how long will it be before that day dawns?"

"All in good time."

"For the moment we are not afraid of the devil himself."

"Not afraid?"

"No!"

One of the musketeers thumped his chest with his fist.

"Look at me, freemen; here am I fearing neither Satan, patriarch, nor boyar."

"Is that so?"

"By God and the Cross, it is."

"Brother falcon, I fear me you are boasting."

"Boasting, indeed! Not I."

"But how can you prove your words?"

"In any way you choose."

The liquor had gone to the musketeers' heads.

"Very well, then," said the Cossack, "if you are really not afraid, let's dig out this wench and carry her to a tavern, where we'll have another drink ourselves and warm her up into the bargain."

"Hell or no hell, that's what we'll do."

"No, lad, that we cannot. What sort of sentries would we be to do that?"

"You see, brother falcons, you say you're not afraid and yet you dare not run the risk."

"But in this case our honour as musketeers is at stake."

"Nonsense, man! Fine sort of honour to be at stake when you have been placed on guard over a wench!"

"True enough. Let's dig her out."

"Where shall we take her to?"

"To the nearest pothouse."

"Very well, we'll dig out the wench."

"What with?"

"You have your weapons. I'll help with my sword."

"That you shall. Come on, then, and let us dig."

Approaching the place where the woman was buried, they dug her out and pulled her up by the arms.

"Why, lad, she's naked!"

"Never mind, I'll give her my cloak. A jerkin is all I need. Here you are, young woman; up with you now!"

"This fellow's got a head on him," said one of the musketeers. "Fit for a priest he is."

"And the damsel is plump."

"Fine breasts. . . ."

"Hi, you devils," called a lusty voice across the square.

"A murrain on him, the son of a bitch! It's the captain of our fifty."

"This will mean a taste of the cudgels for us."

"Or the knout! What's to be done now? Bury the jade again? He'll notice there's something amiss."

"No, falcons. You rescue the woman and I'll deal with the boyar's son."

"Go, young man. Parley with him. Try and pacify the demon."

"Hi, musketeers!"

In reply came the sound of footsteps and a voice, saying:

"Present!"

"Present, are you, you stinking goat! Where's the other rascal?"

"In his proper place."

"You son of a bitch, where's your weapon and why are you without a coat?"

"My sword is at my side and my jerkin is on my shoulders."

"So that's the sort you are? Hi, guards!"

A sword-blade flashed in the mist. The last word "guards" whimpered into the air. The captain's body sank to the ground, cleft in twain. The stranger rejoined the sentries.

"Where's he gone to?" asked one.

The other sniffed the air and said as though to himself:

"He shouldn't have done it."

"Done what?"

"Don't you understand, you fool? He's killed the captain. It's brigandage!"

The second musketeer, who was by far the tipsier, giggled, choked, and then recovering himself said:

"Serves the devil right! Now we have started, let's chop him to pieces."

They dragged the two halves of the captain's bleeding corpse into the light shed by the ikon.

"A stalwart fellow! 'Twas a deuced fine blow that of yours, freeman. Not everyone could have performed such a feat."

"Pull off his clothes, cut him to pieces and throw the bits into the pit where the wench was. And then for the pothouse."

"By the Cross, Cossack, you should have been a priest. What a head!"

"Have you met nobody higher than a priest? Mayhap I am aiming at becoming a patriarch."

"Ha! Ha! What a regular dare-devil you are, to be sure!"

"A patriarch, indeed!"

The musketeers had lost control of tongues and feet, so the Cossack did all that was needful and then they departed.

Watchmen at the barriers by the cross-roads let them through. At other places the latticed gates were unlocked and the men were questioned.

"Where are you going, soldiers?"

"We are taking thieves to the *Zemski Prikaz*."

"We are thieves ourselves."

"Well, don't go bellowing about it for all the world to hear. Hold a still tongue between your teeth."

"Just think of it," muttered one of the musketeers, "the captain! And we with his blood on our heads!"

The Cossack came to a halt.

"Your way will lead you to the Don, brother falcons—if you manage to escape. . . . Many are the freemen gathered on the Don. The boyars' arms are too short to reach you there."

"And what about yourself?"

"I come from there, and so I return again."

"Nonsense!"

"Here, Dema, let's drag him to the Criminal Office."

"To the Criminal Office? Come along, then. See, there's blood on my hands."

"Here's some more vodka for you. Drink, and then sleep on it. Tomorrow morning you'll know what to do."

"Vodka? Pass it along."

"Swill away to your heart's content."

The musketeers, their faces smeared with blood, staggered off down the street, now and then falling and scrambling to their feet again. The Cossack drew the woman, wrapped in his cloak, down a side street and peered round the corner. The musketeers had forgotten all about the couple. They tottered, fell, picked each other up, and went on their way.

"You'd better take the lead, my girl. Save yourself from the grave," said the Cossack, drawing his cloak more tightly around her.

The woman was shivering and scarcely able to keep on her feet, which were black with mud and cold. The tin-plate domes of Moscow's numerous churches gleamed white. From somewhere a church bell sounded. A hubbub of voices rose from the nearest market-place as the women haggled over the prices of cloth and yarn. The birch-bark and timbered roofs of unkempt little houses became clearer and more variegated against the sky.

"Pull yourself together. Come along, the taverns are open now."

"I am coming, little pigeon. But it's hard going."

## 2

There was an uproar in the tavern. The broad oaken door stood wide open. The acrid smell of fusel oil, spirit, sweating bodies, damp rags and tattered clothing made you gasp and catch your breath. Light was beginning to filter into the spacious log hut with its filthy walls and its earth floor squelching mud. On the wall behind the bar hung a yellow sheet of paper inscribed in bold black characters. Beside it was a spluttering tallow candle in an iron dip fixed in a rusty holder. Its puny flame, pale in the growing light of morn, cast faint shadows on the paper. Any newcomer could readily read the text.

By Order of the Tsar and Grand Prince Alexei Mihailovich of All Russia Great and Small—No Customers are to be Discouraged or Turned Away from the Taverns, Neither Husband by Wife, Nor Son by Father, Nor by Brother, Sister or Other Kindred, Until the Said Consumer has Drunk Away Everything save his Cross.

The Cossack cast a keen glance round the vast room. In the ceiling there was a smoke outlet shaped like a cornkiln. His eyes penetrated to the back of the tavern, where, beyond an open partition, gaped the aperture of an immense stove.

The Cossack looked about for secret police. He was relieved by his inspection, and, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, placed money on the counter.

"Half a pint and some white bread."

The woman who sat beside him dozed off; the Cossack held her tightly, but the overcoat fell open, disclosing her plump, earth-begrimed, naked body. The tavern-keeper, looking askance at the Cossack's sword and blood-stained hands, tendered him the tankard and the bread thickly powdered with flour.

"Where did you unearth this trollop?"

The woman started and dropped the bread she had picked up. The Cossack frowned moodily, but answered calmly:

"She drunk away all she had. Then she fell in with some ruffians, who trifled with her and undressed her. I picked her up, as you see, and am trying to warm her."

The tavern-keeper screwed up his eyes and added gruffly:

"God save us, life's not worth living with all these scoundrels prowling around. Not a night passes without there be a fire somewhere in the city."

Sparrows chirped outside the rotten mica windows; the rumble and clatter of something heavy being rolled or driven along could be heard.

"That'll be the Germans again dragging a cannon to the tsar's courtyard."

"Tell them to go back to the suburb of Kukui, where they belong."

A group of tattered drunkards were chaffing and guffawing at the back of the premises near the partitioning door. They lounged about on enormous puncheons, making free with hussies as loathsome as themselves. The gossips quarrelled and sparred with one another. The tavern-keeper yelled at them:

"Outside with you! There's no room for quarrelsome drabs in here."

"What are you standing there gaping at?" one of the women was saying. "She lured Mikeshka from my arms, and Mikeshka stole my lovely horned headgear."

"But, look you, she's no townswoman."

"Who? Matrenka? Everyone knows she's a pot-house creature."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"And is your headpiece trimmed with pearls or garnets?"

"It belonged to my grandmother."

"Now I know. It must be a very fine one. Look you, brothers, Grisha, that poor idiot who wanders about the market-place—well, he found it and placed it in a foul spot. He wears it in his trousers and calls it his truss."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"You unbaptized monster!"

Some of the casks lay on the floor; others stood on end in columns; and the people behind them appeared and disappeared like figures on a stage. At the back someone was twanging the strings of an instrument, while in front of the kegs danced a thin-shanked, unfrocked priest in a long black cassock tied about the middle with a piece of rag. He sang in a nasal voice:

"The deacon with the deaconess,
The devil with the deviless—
The sacristan took up the cat,
He broke poor pussy's leg at that.

"Three years did pussy wail and wait,
Could not call and love his mate.
Cat from grief did fall,
And smashed the pots and pans and all."

The man who had been twanging the strings stretched on a box now sprang out from behind the casks.

"Eh, you! Why didn't you stay where you were?"

The musician started to caper and twirl round, flapping the bedraggled tail of an old gown which had obviously been stolen from his wife's wardrobe. His naked, resin-stained backside showed through the gap. He now began to thump the box and to pluck at the strings nailed across it as he hummed:

"Beneath the pine-tree
And the birch
A gnat lived with a fly.
The fly he sang free:
'Thank ye, gnat,
For suiting me so well.'
'My thanks for that,
You buzzed in my ears like a bell.'"

"What good-for-nothings you are! Do you not know that all your lutes and trumpets were burned by order of the patriarch and that singing in taverns is now strictly forbidden?"

The musician ceased playing, but retorted:

"On my soul, Father Trifon, wait till Moscow starts burning, then you too will dance!"

"You bare buttocks! You'll sing another tune when the minions of the law come to arrest you."

The tavern-keeper, whip in hand, rushed from behind the bar. The drunken gossips were at it tooth and nail.

The Cossack led his woman away. The tavern-keeper separated the brawlers and went back to his place behind the bar. On seeing that the Cossack and his companion had disappeared, he shook his head regretfully, hiccoughed, and muttered:

"The catchpolls are not coming and I let that fellow and his wench slip through my fingers; he wore a sword; his hands were blood-stained; he must be some sort of a brigand. . . ."

The woman walked as in trance. The Cossack enquired: "Do you know the way, wench?"

"I am taking you to the right place, darling."

They crossed a rickety plank bridge across the Moskva and crept along the lanes of the musketeers' settlement. The woman led him through out-of-the-way places where scarcely a passer-by was to be seen. She then took him across an old burned-out locality. They stepped upon nail-studded planks, over scorched rafters and beams, now treading on the ground and now climbing over piled-up logs.

"I scarce believed you when you said you knew the way."

"Oh, sweetheart, how could I not know it? Worn out I was after spending so long a time in that hole. I wailed 'farewell, bright world'; day in, day out, I moaned aloud I know not what. Whence could a man like you have come? Heaven, I reckon."

"From the earth. The clerk read the whole case out in the market-place. Then I saw you being led away naked."

They reached an old fence overgrown with willows and hazels. By bending low the woman found a passage, and as they crawled through she continued:

"I am not taking you home, my dove. We'd be caught there. But here none shall find us. My things are hid here and a feeble, cracked-brained old man makes it his dwelling, poor soul."

"I'm coming. Lead on!"

The Cossack brushed his lean, slightly pock-marked face against mildewed fencing and wiped it with the sleeve of his overcoat. The woman asked:

"Have you hurt your head?"

"Only dirtied my face. Mud is worse than blood."

Beyond the fence was a dense undergrowth of heather. In the midst of it, almost level with the ground, sprawled a long, ugly hut. On the threshold which led underground sat an old, half-naked hunchback. Iron chains enmeshed his dirty body, while an iron cross dangled upon his humped chest. The hunchback did not make way nor stir a limb. He merely observed in a hollow voice:

"Irenetsa? Back from the other world and with a youngster in tow! What if the boyars order you to return?"

He stretched his long shanks across the doorway to prevent them from entering.

"Oh, dear, my feet have given out. Let me pass, grandad."

The hunchback withdrew his legs.

The Cossack and the woman entered the hut; in the darkness they butted into coffers and cases, but the woman soon groped a way to a low-browed door through which the two of them crawled. Three steps lower still they found themselves in a warm room. The woman rekindled the fire in a small tiled stove with a built-in bunk. The Cossack found he could stand erect here, and, though he was above middle height, there was still a good space between the top of his head and the ceiling.

The woman, picking up a wax taper, lit three lamps in succession in front of the ikons. She crossed herself and then turned to her guest.

"Why stand, dear love? Sit down. You've saved me from a martyr's death. And if it should please you to lie down, pray do so. There's a bed, a feather coverlet, pillows. Rest; nobody is likely to come here."

She flung his cloak on to a seat and went out naked. The Cossack felt weary and the room was as quiet as the grave. He tugged off his jerkin, laid aside his sword and pistol, kicked his heavy boots on to the floor, and then dozed in the comfort of the feather bed on top of the coverlet.

Treading softly in slippers trimmed with marten, the woman returned. She was neatly clad in a dark blue damask sarafan and silk jacket. Her thick hair was braided and pressed into a net cap adorned with pearls. She came close to the couch, sat down very quietly on the edge, and whispered softly so as not to wake her guest:

"Sleep, fair love. I shall never forget you. You've come closer to my heart than either father or mother. . . ."

The Cossack opened his eyes.

"Oh, how restless I am!" she said. "My eyes are dropping with sleep, yet I am drawn to have a peep at you, my love."

"Lie down," said the Cossack.

"If I do, I shall make love to you. But first let me put out the lamps and veil the ikons."

"Give up believing in God. Do not veil anything. It is better to live in the light."

"Ah, that makes me shudder. Besides, it is sinful."

"Sinful? Many are the sins of this world. Pray do not put out the lamps. Lie down."

"You bundle of sins, you! Give me room. Will you allow me to fold you in my arms and kiss you? Or would that not please you? I have washed and yet I smell of earth."

"That'll wear off."

"Everything wears off in time, love; but what about death?"

"Cling closer to me and speak no more."

"I'll throw off my sarafan."

"Jacket, sarafan, everything! Kiss me. Why worry one's head with thinking?"

"My own, my fond love. . . ."

"God's blood, Irenetsa, you're a fine girl! 'Twas not for nothing that I followed you."

"Darling, let me veil the face of God were it only with an old cloth. It would be all the sweeter to me. . . ."

"Hush, girl!"

## 3

The Cossack was wakened by the brilliant light of candles. The crack-brained hunchback, naked to the waist, was seated at the table in the place of honour under the ikons. The woman had disappeared. The Cossack addressed the fool:

"Why are you sitting in the place of honour?"

The fool replied as he poured vodka into a large copper goblet:

"I am sitting in my proper place, reserved for priests and fools—and I've been called a fool ever since I was an urchin."

"I've no doubt you're right. Stay where you are while I get up. Where's Irenetsa?"

"She's gone to the baths. Why, see, 'tis herself comes crawling in now!"

Rosy, plump and perspiring, the woman came in. Over her blue sarafan she wore a green silk open coat trimmed with fox fur. Her shift was of pink silk, the sleeves embroidered with pearls like teardrops.

"Have you had a good sleep, my own dove?"

"Soon to fly away!"

The guest rose, while the oaken bedstead groaned beneath his massive weight.

"There's a fine fellow for you! So young and yet so heavy. . . . I have never been so sturdy," mumbled the old man.

"I've brought you wine and cherry cordial. Before you fly away, fair dove, tell me your name so that I shall know whom to pray for and call in my sleep."

"My name is Stepan, and I come from afar."

"Dress yourself, Stepanushka. Why, whose blood is this? Wash it off your hands and sprinkle your fair face with cold water. I've been to market and found out everything. The guards who stood sentry by the hole I was buried in are being searched for by the police. Though Moscow has been turned inside out,

they've not been found. Their wives and children have been dragged to the *Zemski Prikaz* to be questioned."

"Have a care, my girl. If you are recognized it will go hard with you."

"Sweetheart, it is no easy matter to recognize one woman from another in Moscow. I rouged my face, traced my eyebrows, and attired myself as a merchant's wife. Beggars bowed low to me. No one is likely to search for a wench who as likely as not has been devoured by dogs while buried in a hole. Such would have been my portion had not the guards driven the curs away, saying: 'Let her suffer a while longer.'"

"It would seem that out of evil has come good," muttered the fool.

"Rumour has it that the wench was rent by dogs and that the captain of the musketeers was a robber who, together with his men, has deserted his post. Investigation is afoot on the captain's behalf, my dear," persisted the woman in a sing-song voice.

"How long will it be before they find him? The longer the better. If he be unearthed shortly, then beware! Well, my sword is sharp and the hilt fits my grip. Whoever shows so much as his nose will have to deal with Stenka."

"Ah me, what can I be about! I have forgotten the water." The woman withdrew and returned jingling a copper basin. In her right hand she carried a silver ewer of water. "Will you wash, my dear one?"

"Heigh-ho, we'll sing and dance and carouse. What say you to that, Irenetsa?"

"As you please, my love."

"There, I've washed the blood away. Down with the boyars of Muscovy!"

"Indeed, down with 'em all! To a man, the people are against the boyars related to the tsar. They are against Boris Ivanovich, against Chistov, clerk to the Council, against Plestcheiev, the unrighteous judge. Many have languished in prison through him and have found their death in these noisome holes. Plestcheiev is kinsman to the tsar. 'Tis he who controls the salt trade, and he's placed so high a price on it that the common folk have almost to go without salt."

"I've heard about that. Irenetsa, have you a Tatar garb hereabouts by a lucky chance?"

"That I warrant you. My husband, cursed be his name, and I used to keep a clothing shop. Presently I shall have a look in the coffers. But I think we did have one of these infidel suits, cap, soft embroidered boots and all."

"You are full of good sense, girl."

"The people would have fallen on their foes long before this were it not that they go in fear of the Germans. They are that skilful with firearms. Besides, they are no friends of the people."

"Pay no heed to the Germans. Fill the goblets, my girl. Once Russia bestirs herself the Germans will crawl underground."

They drank, embraced, and drank again. The guest held his curly head high. He meditated for a while, then his eyes became strangely alert.

"And should the boyars, henchmen, and catchpolls make a search for me, will you give me shelter, Irenetsa, or would you be afraid?"

"Hush, my darling! I'll shelter you, and if they find us—well, I'll willingly go to the rack for your sake."

"Let's drink and hold our tongues, my lass."

"That's a bargain," said the fool. "It seems to have slipped your memory to cheer an old 'un like me with some drink."

"We haven't forgotten you, grandfather, that we haven't."

The Cossack poured mead into the old man's large copper tankard.

"That's the stuff! It's both sweet and potent."

"Grandfather, you'd better put on your shirt."

"Nay, Irena, my holiness does not show when my shirt is on. Besides, I too am in a mood for dancing. When you've blistered your lips on the wench, boy, and your neck aches from having a woman's arms about it, come and have a talk with me."

"At your service," said the Cossack. He came over to the fool.

"Have you come from afar?"

"From the Don. The folk there do not till the soil; they fish, hunt, take prisoners, traffic in men, and go roaming from Panshino down the Volga. That's their manner of living."

"Now, young man, when you become chief, do not countenance the sale of men."

"Why?"

"You risk being sold yourself. Do you care for treasure-hunting?"

"Here is a treasure I dug out," said the Cossack, patting the woman's broad back.

"For the present, this treasure of yours sings in tune, but when she gets out of tune she'll send the shivers down your back. Capricious, that's what she is. Now, should you wish for gold, pearls, or silver treasure—I'll tell you of flowering herbs and of lilies, white and dark coloured."'

"You rouse my curiosity, grandad. Talk on!"

"Well, then, listen! There is speedwell which grows in burial grounds. It's not very tall and has blue blossoms. This is a befitting object for treasure-hunters. Wrap this little plant in a cloth. Of its own accord it will unwind itself and jump. You must whirl the cloth round in the open. On the spot where the herb falls a flame will spring up; there you must dig for treasure."

"My treasure is lying on the seat yonder. I do not believe in miracles, and my sword will win me pearls, gold, and a wife."

"So you don't want to hear any more?"

"On the contrary. Go on, I am listening to every word."

"Well, then, hear what I have to say. There's another herb, wild hops, so it's called. It grows on marshy land and it has yellow knobs for flowers. Its blossom differs from those of the hops grown in plantations. If you pound the seed of these knobs into powder and put it into wine or beers you'll never get drunk however heavily you indulge."

"It'll be useful to keep that flower in mind, grandfather, for I am fond of strong liquor."

"Remember, gallant guest, that in the long run a potion made of that seed, though it leaves a man sober, makes him mighty pugnacious, bold, and ready to go through fire or water and face the poignard."

"I certainly must not forget that plant. So it grows on marshland and has yellow knobs."

The woman drained her cup of mead and ceremoniously held it upside down over her head.

"Grandfather is fond at times of talking like this in the streets or on his way to church. Then I am all of a tremble lest in a twinkle the catchpolls be upon us and drag us off."

"Once they actually did take me, but I was let off because they judged me to be a crackbrained old fool. Now lend me your ears again. There is a plant named spurge-flax. It flowers on hillocks amid bilberry bushes in thick woods. It is small, very fine and looks very clean. Its needles and tiny twigs are green. The stalks are knobbly and gnarled. The berries are small and green, though they are sometimes black. The liquor obtained from the berries should be drunk as an infusion by those suffering from impure blood or from worms, snakes, toads, and other reptiles. It'll cleanse the innards from everything. Maybe you'd rather hear about the planets?"

"Tell me all your lore, grandfather."

"There was a time when I read the book of the Jew Zacharias and the heretical sayings and writings of other wise men. I reckoned the dates from the Moorish calendar and practised divination by the stars which were described in these books. I discovered that this earth of ours, which the patriarchs and other Orthodox fathers deem to be flat as the palm of a man's hand, is really round. They say that there cannot be seven, six, five, two or three heavens, but that the sky we see overhead is a single one, that the earth is a globe encompassed on every side—right and left, above and below—by the sky. According to them it would seem that our earth goes round and round. Mind you, all this is for your ears alone, because you, like Irenetsa, are after my own heart. I fear to tell others. My miserable old body would be burned at the stake were I suspected, but the time has not yet come for it to be consigned to the flames."

"Be silent, you heretic!" cried the woman, banging her cup on the table, the mead seeping over the cloth.

"How violent you are, Irenetsa, when you're in your cups! I'll say no more."

"But I say go on, grandad! What the priests forbid us to tell one another needs be told among ourselves. Besides, may there not be the great truth in those Jewish books? I want to know everything. I wish to examine all the miracle-working ikons and turn them inside out. That's what I have in mind to do. I have as deep a grudge against unrighteous priests as I have against the boyars."

"A man should know everything, worthy guest."

The foo was tipsy; yet, strangely enough, his brain grew clearer the more he drank, and he spoke with fluency. He rapped his bony fist on his humped chest; his thin, grey beard trembled, the chains rattled on his lean, scrofulous body, and the iron cross swayed against his deformity.

"Ay," he resumed, "one must know all, and for that knowledge I am willing to go to the stake. I mean to learn everything. And, as it is pointed out in the heretical writings, centuries hence this planet of ours will become as pale and cold as the moon. The moon, also, is a whirling globe, but it is a ball of ice. Then there are the stars, worthy guest, of immense size, and each star is a globe, and everything, all the spheres, whirl round, and darkness succeeds light, and light follows darkness, and there are winds and storms."

"You hunchbacked old carp! This is my own man; are you not my sweetheart, Stenka?"

"Yours, Irenetsa—so long as I am in your company."

"Carry me to bed."

"Stay here."

"Carry me, I say! Or I shall throw off my clothes and run about Moscow and shout for everyone to hear: 'I'm the one he snatched from the graveworms;

I'm the one, and this is he whom I love more than the bright sun.' Carry me, Stenka!"

"Stop this pestering, Irenetsa. Grandfather is speaking and I want to hear what he has to say and to learn all I can from him."

"She is a nuisance and so headstrong you'd hardly believe it. Do as she bids or you'll never be rid of her."

The Cossack rose to his feet, lifted the woman, who was dazed by vodka and mead, and bore her away to the bed. She kissed and bit him lasciviously as he carried her.

"Lie down quietly or I'll beat you."

"Strike me by all means. I am in love with you. Strike! Strike! The more you beat me, the more I shall run after you. Love is the sweeter when the beloved one strikes."

"Sleep! I shall come to you presently."

He left her and the woman calmed herself and seemed to sleep.

As the guest paced the room the wine he had plentifully drunk went to his head, his clear eyes became bloodshot, and he clutched the hilt of his sword. The little grey-haired hunchback, his chains jingling, cut capers in front of him. The Cossack for a moment forgot how, but a short while since, he had been listening to the humpback's marvellous stories. He stamped his heavy boots, crying imperiously: "Dance, you limb of Satan!"

The fool started in a bungling way to spin round the room, his grey beard shaking, his cross jigging up and down on his humped chest. The old man hummed in a voice that jarred the nerves:

"Two brothers once there were,
A tattered coat and half to wear;
A head upon a block was girt,
Beflecked with blood is now the shirt;
Flogged and flogged till backs were bare
Of flesh; the self-same lot they share.
Eh, the cruel tongs and shears!
Off with hair and skin and ears;
Everything is soaked in blood;
An ugly mug in a gory flood!
Look, their guts are being drawn;
D'ye feel it?—Acracking is their brawn."

Then very softly he went on:

"Two guerdons came from those above;
They'd give 'em each three pair o' glove . . .
To the official and to the clerk too—
A diamond ring these have in view . . .
Count the executioner's blows—
Straight from the shoulder, down they close;
Human flesh upon the wall,
Racked, the bodies overfall . . .
Bones, bones everywhere,
Ravens flying to the tryste,

A loaded cart with blood is soaked,
The ground with human dung is choked;
As into water, they step in blood—
Thus boyars honour the folk with mud!
Amen!"

"By my faith, how vilely you dance!"

The Cossack, who had thrown his sword on to the seat, now wrenched it from the scabbard. His iron-shod heels clattered in a spirited cadence on the floor. He swished his sword as he sang:

"Hey, Nastasia,
Ho, Nastasia,
Throw open now thy gates!
Oh, open wide and from the porch
Pray welcome the young stalwart.
For at thy house, oh my Nastasia,
Today there is a feast.

"The voivode is coming
From the foot of yonder hill.
Till midnight let's be busy,
Make our axes sharp and strong!
Right welcome we'll make voivode,
Leaving ravens bones and pickings . . .
Hey, Nastasia,
Ho, Nastasia!"

The sword, keeping in perfect rhythm with the Cossack's song, whirled round and round in circles. Terrified by the brigand song and the glint and glimmer of the sword, the old man crept under the table. The Cossack circled the entire room, keeping up the dancing step he had started with, and as he completed the round he returned to the table. Furiously he swung his sword aloft and then struck with tremendous violence at the table. The oak split, and the table, cloven lengthwise, groaned and cracked in every joint. The board fell asunder while the blade cut deep into the wood. The din and clatter of smashed crockery flying in all directions woke the tipsy woman. She raised herself on the bed and asked: "Grandfather, where are the bells ringing from?"

The terrified fool, who liked to crack his little jokes, replied: "From Christchurch, Irenetsa."

Smoking candle-ends were strewn on the floor; the only light, soft and tremulous, came from the lamps before the ikons.

Bringing his foot heavily to the ground, the Cossack thrust his sword into the wall; the blade gleamed as it swung to and fro. He sat down, wiped his brow and rumpled his curly hair. The fool crawled from beneath the table and started to pick up the candle-ends, the broken platters, drinking-vessels and the cups. He peeped into the jug of mead, which had escaped the general destruction.

"There's still enough left to befuddle the head," said he, "and to play the deuce with the heart." Then, turning to the guest, he observed: "Good sir, I am not skilled in such songs."

The visitor sat with bowed head tearing off his clothes and casting them on the floor. Cautiously, as though he were approaching a wild beast, the old man sidled up and pulled off the Cossack's boots, mumbling the while:

"Look you, that infatuated wench in her joy brought vodka and this tobacco weed. That sort of vodka causes loss of memory."

The Cossack lumbered to his feet, his eyes became blurred, his young face distorted, and he ground his teeth. Without standing upon ceremony, the hunchback withdrew. The Cossack crossed the room and hurled himself upon the bed. The fool from his nook listened for a space. The guest was issuing orders to someone in his sleep. Suddenly he started up and began humming a tune to the words:

"The lightning fell, the thunder crashed . . ."

The old man groped his way out of the room, but soon returned, shuffling along in his square-toed felt shoes, and got back into his corner. He sat down to finish what had remained of the mead.

"A bold young fellow, to be sure, and stern. Yet it is not he who treads on iron that lives. Quite otherwise; the one who lives wears the iron as I do my chains. Thus it is not the military, but the humble, who survive all down the ages. . . ."

## 4

It was early twilight. Trade was flourishing in the bazaar facing the Kremlin across the Red Square, wherein market carts laden with wares were ranged. The clerk of the market, accompanied by two musketeers, strolled about among the wagons. He wore a long, full kaftan, trimmed with cord. On his head was a velvet cowl adorned with a band of fox fur. The clerk collected the tax on goods on behalf of the tsar and the Church. A portion of the cart tax went to the monasteries. Coins jingled.

In front of the bazaars and nearer to the Kremlin stood the executioner in a sleeveless black plush coat with the sleeves of his red shirt rolled up to the elbow in readiness to flog a thief.

The criminal, shirtless and wearing only his blue homespun trousers, crouched and shivered. In the early-morning freshness steam was seen to rise from his emaciated body, sweating with fear. A copper cross bobbed on the man's sunken chest.

"Make way there, folks," cried the executioner, a bearded young fellow recently promoted from being a butcher's assistant. With a leisurely gesture he pushed his felt hat to the back of his head; then with his strong hands he gripped the whip already blackened with blood, and set his jaws, while his beard bristled. His shirt was open at the neck, thus exposing his hairy chest and the cord from which his cross dangled. "Here, you thieving rogue, let out your useless breath."

The criminal puffed and panted, while his face became livid. The crowd murmured:

"He's croaking; that is bad."

The henchman raised the lash, with a twist of his hand disentangling the cluster of ox-gut at the end of it.

The sound of kettledrums rent the air; the people made way, some of them doffing their caps.

"A boyar!"

"On his way to bid the tsar good morrow."

"Hi, you there, make way."

A boyar, his beard tinged with grey, rode across the square. He struck the kettledrums attached to his saddle with the handle of the whip he held in his hand. His face was sombre from under black eyebrows, his hawklike eyes surveyed the multitude. He wore a ceremonial coat of blue velvet which appeared to be dull grey in the twilight; his head was covered by a cowl, trimmed with sable.

To either side of him and to the rear he was escorted by menials. The flames from the torches they carried shimmered and danced as they played upon the precious stones adorning the boyar's coat and the pearls plaited into the horse's mane.

"He's a voivode."

"What's his name?"

"Prince Yuri Alexeivich."

"Isn't it Dolgoruki, the one who——"

"Yes, he's the one who hates the people."

"Out of my path, scum!"

The lash whistled through the air. After ten strokes the criminal tottered. The waistband of his trousers was soaked with blood.

"If you cannot bear your punishment standing, then lie down," the executioner remarked coolly, pulling up the sleeves of his shirt, which had slipped down during his exertions.

The criminal was hoarse with screaming; he lay down submissively and was so weak that he could scarce move his lips. A bearded clerk with a quill stuck behind his hairy ear and an ink-horn at his belt, counting the strokes, said: "Enough! That will do."

A cart was brought alongside. The executioner's assistant, in his black shirt girdled about the middle with an untanned belt, raised the man and heaved him into the cart.

The criminal blinked his tear-drenched eyes and moved his parched lips.

"Dri-i-ink. . . ."

The executioner stepped forward, shouting sternly at the crowd: "Fall back!" Then, with a pair of shears, he snipped off the criminal's right ear.

Insensible to this additional pain, the criminal again whispered clearly: "Dri-i-ink!"

The clerk waved his hand towards the peasant who was seated in the driver's place in the cart and said to the culprit: "Don't steal, or you'll lose your left ear as well."

"And just for pilfering a fowl, fellow Christians!"

"Ay, such are our courts of justice! Tyrannizing the people!"

## 5

Not far from the whipping-post two women were fighting. Each had held a loaf of bread. Now the bread lay trampled in the sand, and the harridans,

having wrenched off each other's kerchiefs, were pulling one another about by the hair while they stumbled and tottered amongst the crowd that egged them on:

"You tallow-haired jade, clutch her by the skirt, by the skirt!"

"Yes, show the people her bottom!"

"You, the dark wench, throw her down. Get your knee into the pit of her stomach. Into her navel with your knee, you she-devil. Now then!"

"Nay, lads, it's the yellow-haired who will win."

"See who comes! Run!"

" 'Tis only the market-clerk!"

"He's not the one to bite, so why run away?"

With his escort of musketeers, the clerk advanced at a leisurely pace. The two brawling women sprawled upon the ground clutching each other by the hair, spitting and putting out their tongues.

"Hi, you cats, let go!"

The women took no notice of his words, so the clerk turned to his guard, saying: "Take them to the police station."

On the instant the women sprang to their feet, smoothed their hair, and pulled down their skirts. The lean and jaundiced-looking one bowed low and said:

"May I speak, sir?"

"Well, what have you to say?"

"What am I to do, sir?—she's always flaunting herself before my husband, and the man's quite bewitched."

The other woman bowed likewise.

"Master Clerk, her man is sick of her, for she slanders everyone; yet her own belly's full of toads croaking and gurgling all the time. She's to be feared, she stinks of bog-slime, she is ever hiccoughing——"

"You hellcat, may your innards burst! I'll give it you by and by——"

"You can see for yourself, Sir Clerk, how she clings like a limpet."

"Here, lads, drag them apart," he ordered the musketeers. Then he walked into the crowd belching prodigiously.

"Good health to you, Sir Clerk!" a voice exclaimed.

The clerk, sensing a gibe, answered severely: "I reckon you aren't observing the fasts. I do, and my stomach's all upset by eating radishes."

He proceeded to inspect the carts, but finding nothing taxable, he disappeared. The crowd of loiterers grew apace. A Tatar made his way into the thick of the throng. Keen eyes burned in his lean, pock-marked face; he wore a dark blue skull-cap under his turban, a yellow velvet coat, soft boots of green leather with turned-up toes, and carried a bag in his hand.

"Buy my salt, Russ, buy my salt!" he cried as he shook the bag.

The people pressed towards the Tatar, buying and marvelling at the cheapness of his wares.

"Where did you get the salt from, infidel?"

The Tatar dipped his large hands into the bag and measured the salt out by the handful, charging a halfpenny a pound.

"Where we live, in Kazan, there are no boyars, no Plestcheiev, no Morozov . . . in Kazan salt is three handful for a halfpenny. Once there was a prince in Kazan, a Tatar prince; then salt was very dear; he would not let the people have it. They cut his head off, and salt became cheap."

"Why, you Orthodox Christians, this Tatar speaks the truth."

"Let's wring Plestcheiev's neck, then the salt would become——"

"Morozov's neck——"

"Both their necks. . . ."

Two men in long cloth coats and fez-like caps elbowed their way through the throng and accosted the Tatar: "Come along with us, infidel."

The Tatar cried out in so loud a voice that it carried right across the square: "Hi, you people of Moscow, the tipstaffs are after me because I stand for truth and justice towards yourselves."

"Whatever for? Where are the catchpolls?"

"Down with the boyars' curse!"

"Drive 'em away! At them, the devils!"

One of the law officers drew a kind of tambourine from under his coat, but the Tatar gave him no time to sound the alarm. With the butt end of a pistol which he had concealed up his wide sleeve he clubbed the constable on the head. The black cap was driven into the skull and the officer fell. His companion fled, calling on the musketeers for aid. But he was seized, overwhelmed, and trampled to death by the heavy boots of the crowd. The skull-cap and turban fell off the Tatar's black locks. The people milled in their swarms in the square. Police were seized and summarily dealt with. Somebody called out:

"Infidel or Christian, whoever you may be, lead us against the boyars!"

The dark, curly headed man in Tatar dress shouted:

"Folks, am I fit to be a leader?"

"Ay! Ay!"

"Lead on and we'll follow."

"Yes, lead us onward, we've had our bellyful of their robbery!"

"Seize Morozov!"

"Young man, lead us!"

"To the jail! Free the captives!"

"Come on, let's salt the boyars."

The tocsin sounded from all the churches in Moscow, their copper roar seeming to issue from a thousand brazen throats.

"The priests are on the alert. Listen to the bells in the Frolov Tower."

"Be of good cheer, let them ring! The musketeers are on our side."

"Morozov has got wind of our doings. He's taken to his heels."

The solid, carved porch of Morozov's house in the Kremlin began to yield as the mob, like a grey avalanche, hurled itself with axes, sticks, and stakes upon the structure. Putting their shoulders to the door, they forced it open in spite of the strong bolts with which it was secured. Here and there among the crowd the faces of Morozov's own servants could be seen.

In the gloomy, frescoed vestibule, with windows of coloured mica, the threatening mob was met by a grey-haired major-domo in a dark blue dolman and a spear in his hand.

"What do you want, you scum! State your business, serfs." He waved his unwieldy weapon, which merely struck against the walls, for it was too heavy for his feeble old hands. "Boyarina, little mother, save yourself! Here's calamity!"

A sturdy artisan in a grey apron sprang towards the old man and struck the spear, used on ceremonial occasions, out of his hand with a short axe, whereupon the weapon fell to the ground.

"You cur, you!"

The old man stood at the entrance to the inner chambers with arms outstretched to bar the way. The same artisan seized him around the body, ran out on to the porch, and threw him down. The mob surged through into the inner precincts. The floor shook with the weight of their stampede, the planks creaked, and there came the sound of wood being splintered by hatchets. Windows were wrenched from their carved frames and crushed underfoot, and the mica spluttered into fragments, which stuck to the boots.

"Jewels, friends!"

The lid of a silver-bound coffer was smashed open, but it contained only a variety of wearing apparel. They rummaged in the coffer and stuffed their pockets with coifs embroidered with rubies and pearls belonging to the boyar's wife.

"Here's where our salt goes!"

The entire contents of the coffer were emptied on to the floor; people trod on satin and tore cloth-of-gold to shreds. The frontlets of the coifs were beaten against the window-sills in order to extract the gems.

"Pickle 'em, brothers!"

They fell upon a trunk containing masculine apparel and began dressing up after discarding their own coarse cloth and homespun coats so hurriedly that the seams gave way. Kicking off their shoes of bast or felt, they pulled on the boyar's soft boots made of morocco leather, throwing out of the window those which proved too tight.

"That lot'll do for Grisha, the fool!"

Clothed now in velvet, they strutted about the rooms with their ordinary felt caps on their heads, thus revealing their erstwhile status as servants and serfs.

No sooner had one group dressed itself to its own satisfaction than another fell to round the trunk.

"Fine figure of a lad there. Dressed just like a boyar!"

"A veritable chieftain. Let's dress him in brocade."

"Here's a coat trimmed with lace."

"Won't fit—he's too hefty."

"Hi, you there! What's your name, chief?"

"Dress up!"

"Isn't there a Turkish long coat here?"

"Yes, and one of their high hats, too, with a slit and a clasp."

The cautious among the crowd retained their heavy boots, saying:

"If we have to make a bolt for it, all we'll have to do is to throw off the coat, for at least the boots are our own."

Cherubs, amid crosses, spirals and blue and crimson flowers, stared down stolidly from the golden walls and the ceiling at the motley assembly the likes of which had never before been seen in the apartments of the tsar's brother-in-law.

"Heigh-ho, friends, what about a stoop of wine?"

"Ho, ho, ho! You roisterer, already tired of salt-hunting?"

"Let's find the wine."

"Look you, here's a bird."

"What a curious bird! It talks like a human being!"

"What do we want with it? I shouldn't wonder if it were a falcon."

A group of men gathered round the silver cage and shoved their knotted fingers into the green parrot's beak.

"It pecks sturdily, the old tail-wagger!"

"It nips!"

"Found a parrot, lads? Chuck it out of doors!"

Cage, bird, and all were hurled through the window. The mob heaved against a heavy oaken door with a bronze design on the panels. But the door held firm.

"Hatchets! Bring hatchets!"

At a blow the oak panelling gave way.

Down went the door with a crash. The bedchamber they broke into was hung with shimmering cloth-of-gold up to the arched ceiling. The window-curtains were drawn. Lamps of coloured glass hung from the ceiling by bronze chains, and there were candles still burning within them. The curved ceiling was decorated with red and blue arabesques. A four-poster stood beneath a yellow satin canopy; upon it lay a very young woman with hair in great disorder.

"The tsaritsa's sister!"

"What the devil do we want with her? Besides, there are girls here!"

At the head and foot of the bed, two fair-haired girls in blue sarafans sat on stools upholstered with crimson velvet.

The mob shoved them aside. Quickly and roughly their horny fingers tore off the silk sarafans and the pearl-embroidered headgear, rumpling their hair. The invalid boyarina raised herself painfully on her pillow and begged in faint voice:

"Oh, please leave them in peace."

"Ha, ha, ha! Were it not that you are the tsaritsa's sister we'd give you a good hug."

"Come on, lads!"

"The floor's that soft. . . ."

"Greedy pig, he's snatched 'em both!"

The girls, dumb with terror, their teeth clenched, their eyes cast heavenward, wriggled in the ruffians' arms, stumbled, fell down and were forced to their feet again. Heavy footsteps sounded; someone else entered the little chamber and tore aside the window-curtain. A flood of summer sunshine triumphed over the twilight within. The resonant voice which had carried across the huge square was now heard again.

"You proclaimed me your leader. Then you must do as I say! It is not for you to be violating girls. Our job is to be done with the battle-axe!"

The voice was obeyed. The bedraggled girls were thrown across the boyarina's bed like so much straw. The mob turned out to other apartments, tearing numerous ikons from the walls, smashing ikon cases, snatching away the gold and silver ornamentations with their settings of rubies and pearls and flinging the painted wood out of the windows.

The leader remained behind in the bedchamber. Stepping heavily, he approached the bed. The sick lady, wrapped to the chin in a satin quilt, trembled at his approach.

"Listen, I'm not going to molest you. Tell me the truth. Where are the jewels?"

Morozova raised her blue eyes, but forthwith closed them again with a shudder.

"Turn your eyes away. For heaven's sake do not look at me like that!"

He came nearer so that he almost touched her. The two girls beneath the

coverlet were sobbing silently. Slowly laying one hand under the boyarina's chin, he clumsily stroked her hair with the other; from terror and weakness beads of perspiration appeared on her forehead. A thought flashed through his mind: "I could easily kill her."

"I am not a boyar. I do not torture people by fire. I am asking you this in a kindly spirit."

The boyarina's reply was scarcely audible:

"The casket . . . here, under the pillow. . . ."

"That's good."

He pulled forth the heavy casket, turned back to the window, struck the casket against the toe of his boot, shoved the jewels into his pockets, and went towards the door without so much as a glance round. But the sound of the lady's voice gave him pause.

"Are we to be slain?"

He answered loudly to the feeble whisper:

"No one will come to this apartment now."

"Are they going to set fire to the house?"

His voice inspired involuntary confidence as he spoke:

"Sleep! None shall touch you."

Once outside her bedchamber door, Morozova again heard his voice:

"Hi, you rascals! To the courtyard with you for a drink."

The whole house shook as though a heavy weight had been rolled downstairs. The distant roar of many voices mingled with the blow of axes penetrated through the windows from the courtyard below; then every noise merged into one single terrifying bellow:

"W-i-n-e!"

In a roomy underground cellar there were one-hundred-gallon barrels of raspberry, cherry, and ginger cordial suspended from the vaulted ceiling by chains. Hundreds of arms were raised, axes struck open the barrels.

"Off with your caps! Let's drink——"

"I want to drink out of my boot."

"Out of your breeches if you like!"

The barrels were spiked near the lower ends and a sticky, sweet-smelling liquid gushed forth like a fountain. The rioters drank, breathed heavily, spat, and swore in rapid undertones from sheer joy. Some sat down on the floor, which was of beaten earth. One of them kept on shouting in a strained voice over and over again:

"It's too sickly. Give me some vodka!"

The sticky fountains continued to flow from hundreds of casks. The floor became boggy as the intoxicating liquor rose higher and higher.

"We set out to find salt and here we are drowning in cordials."

The liquid was already knee-deep.

Bang, bang!

"What's that?"

"They are broaching the vodka casks."

A tipsy bass voice yelled:

"Don't touch the spigots. Smash in the bottoms, the bottoms!"

"Why the bottoms?"

"Yes, the bottoms. Otherwise you'll only wet your bellies and get nothing down your throats."

"I reckon, lads, he must be a cooper, so he'd be sorry if the casks got damaged."

"Smash away! There's plenty of vodka."

They ladled out the vodka with their boots, morocco leather shoes, caps, anything that came handy.

"Drink, I say, don't roll about."

"Oh, oh, I am drowning!"

The air was now full of fumes—enough to send one reeling without even a drop of liquor passing one's lips. Men dropped into the viscous liquid and fell asleep gurgling their contentment.

Others, sprawling on this tipsy grave as on a feather bed, joked among themselves.

"The—hic—sweetest—hic—death for an—hic—Orthodox Christian—hic—is to be drowned—hic—in wine."

Presently there entered the cellar some men wearing long coats of grey cloth and black conical caps resembling those worn by the clergy.

"Look out, lads, here come the catchpolls."

"Down with the devils!"

The roisterers made speedy work of dispatching the suspects. One townsman who wore a rough coat because he had nothing else, his cap gone, was kneeling chest-deep in the liquor, crossing himself continuously while pointing to the cross hanging from his neck and to his roughened hands.

"He's one of them. Strike!"

"The tsar's devils all wear crosses."

The drunken men tottered about the cellar dealing indiscriminate blows with their axes. But their club law was short-lived: a green flame sprang up from a hundred-gallon barrel; the fire spread to a second which contained vodka; then to a third and fourth, and the conflagration crept through the cellar, turning the men's faces to a pale green hue.

"Is it the tipstaffs who have done this?"

"Catch the devils!"

"Let's run for it!"

They crawled out into the courtyard, but many were drowned or burned to death in the cellar. The crowd of survivors was strong and in a threatening mood. They came across a coach adorned with silver, and grabbed off the gilded crests, which were of German workmanship.

"That's one of the tsar's gifts to Morozov."

"Ay, the tsar gives away coaches to the boyars, but we are honoured with the gibbet in the open field."

"Or with the rack and the whipping-post in the square."

"Now then, smash it to pieces!"

In no time the coach was hacked to bits. They then went off somewhat apprehensively to the Kremlin.

"There's not many of us left."

"We'll have to see what can be done in the suburbs."

At the foot of the hill by the Moskvoretski Bridge they met another crowd.

"Here are more of our men."

Under the hill stood a group of men clad in short-tailed coats and high-crowned hats, and they were girt about with short swords. Long, curved spurs adorned their yellow boots. They spoke in an alien tongue. Pointing now to the

mob and now to the taverns, whence came the cracking of splintering doors and breaking crockery, these aliens observed:

"*Diese Leute sind barbarischer, als die Turken.*"

"*Slaven—, ja, in jedem Slaven steckt so etwas wie ein Rauber.*"

"*Seht doch!*"

"*Sie wollen uns wohl drohen!*"*

The mob massed in the Red Square bellowed:

"Come, lads, let's beat the Germans in their suburb."

"They complain to the tsar and yet live at our expense."

"Many's the man who got the lash because of them."

"I was flogged on a German's account."

"So was I."

"Hey, axes! Let's begin!"

A voice thundered out:

"Am I not your chosen leader? People, the Germans are not the cause of your plight. Take revenge on the boyars."

"That's the truth."

"Give us the judge."

"Plestcheiev the unrighteous!"

"Grisha, the fool, has been sweeping up. He went about dealing out besoms. He said, 'Make a clean sweep of 'em.' "

"Beat up Chistov, the clerk."

"Head and all, the hunchbacked monster!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SALT RIOTS

#### 1

EVER wider over Moscow the clang of the tocsin spread; lurid red clouds billowed above the ancient city; the tin-plate domes of churches were tinged with gold.

"The musketeers are with us to a man."

"They, too, were oppressed. Now's the time for their revenge."

The executioner was unearthed. He dared not oppose the people's will.

"Your lash has often tickled us, now let it tickle the boyars."

The executioner repaired to the Kremlin with the crowd, or at any rate the more sober members of it, in his wake. Though the musketeers were still in their cups, they, too, accompanied the mob.

"Give us Plestcheiev!"

"We'll judge the judge himself."

The fate of the tsar's favourite had evidently been decided upon within the wooden palace.

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* "These people are more barbaric than the Turks."
"Slavs—, but at heart every Slav is something like a robber."
"Look! Look!"
"Ah, so they are threatening us!"

Upon a broad porch with a gilded balustrade stood a well-grown, broad-shouldered young man in a blue coat with pearl-embroidered shoulder-pieces. He was the tsar. At his side was the voivode Dolgoruki, his black beard sprinkled with grey, his bilious, hawklike eyes staring from beneath heavy brows; his attire conformed to old style—a long, wide mantle, secured on the right shoulder by a golden clasp. Behind the prince were gathered many boyars.

A paunchy, puffy-faced boyar with a grey beard was crawling on his knees before the tsar, bowing his bald pate every now and then to the very ground; his black kaftan trailed behind him and was slipping off his shoulders.

"Sire, Sire! I have served you and your father before you with never a thought of sparing myself. Recall to mind all the worthy services I have performed on your account. Why do you allow me to be delivered into the hands of serfs? I may still be of use to you. I shall serve you as faithfully as before, in whatever place and office you choose to appoint me."

The tsar turned away and uttered no word.

Dolgoruki spoke harshly and loudly: "You are a thief, Judge. You have abused your powers of office. You know the penalty."

"I make obeisance to you, Prince Yuri. Speak but a word to our sovereign in my behalf. Remember I have a soul to save and I . . ."

Prince Yuri's eyes were sternly fixed on the judge.

"You slandered me before the tsar and now you ask me to intercede for you."

"Oh, Prince, why should I have slandered you? It is a lie, Prince!"

"Give us Plestcheiev! Give us Plestcheiev!" many voices bellowed.

In a resonant voice, full of fury, Dolgoruki called out: "Send the executioner here!"

Downcast, his face buried in the flap of his coat, Plestcheiev wept. . . .

The executioner strode up the porch. He carried Plestcheiev roughly down the steps and then turned to ask: "Who's the clerk in attendance?"

"Execute the judge! Execute him! His guilt is known!"

"Boyars, friends, kindred, I implore, implore, implore! . . ." cried Plestcheiev, scrambling to his feet and making what resistance he could.

The musketeers helped the executioner by pushing Plestcheiev along. The tsar and his boyars watched the wretched man as he was dragged to the whipping-post. The young sovereign was in tears. One of the boyars remarked:

"Once we allow the rabble to take the law into its own hands there'll be worse to come."

The boyars clustered round the balustrade as they peered down and raised their voices in lamentation. Suddenly a man in a coarse grey cloth coat ran with stealthy steps up to the porch and fell on his knees before the tsar. He bowed and said:

"Blame me not, Sire. Permit me to have speech with you."

Though the tsar withdrew slightly, he answered:

"Speak!"

"Sire, the agitation among the people is not being caused by disaffection among the musketeers, but by a stranger to these parts. Whence he comes I do not know, but I know what he looks like. He has broad shoulders, a slightly pock-marked face, and his voice is like a bell."

"Let this ringleader be seized forthwith!" With this order the tsar moved towards the door leading into the vestibule. The man in grey endeavoured to

escape from the porch unnoticed, but he was grabbed by the coat-tails. A tambourine slipped from beneath the police-informer's coat and rolled down the steps of the porch. An old boyar, carrying a cane in his hand, clutched at the minion of the law as they simultaneously descended the steps together.

"Capture the ringleader and carry out our sovereign's order. Set fire to the vodka in the taverns. Rioters have a liking for vodka. Keep your eyes open!"

"Sir, many of our men were beaten up at the hands of the rioters in boyar Morozov's wine cellars."

"They were fools to allow themselves to be beaten up. Fools are created to be beaten. Take off your grey coats and change your caps. Dress as if you were artisans and serfs."

The informer tried to move away, but the boyar held him fast, giving him a furtive glance from his wolflike eyes and warning him:

"Knave, if you ever so much as venture to show yourself in the tsar's presence you'll get a taste of the cudgel and have your thievish tongue cut out. You were lucky today that, by Prince Yuri's order, the executioner was allowed to defile the porch with his presence. Go! Search!"

Not daring to stop and retrieve his official tambourine, the police-informer made haste to get away.

"The tsar has delivered this man up to you," shouted the executioner as he led Plestcheiev forward. Many hands seized the executioner and the judge as they emerged from the Kremlin gate into the square, and from thousands of throats arose the cry: "We have got him now!"

The throng surged towards the executioner, rending his shirt and treading heavily on his toes. He lost his cap in the *mêlée*. He pushed the judge away, saying:

"You'll be the death of me."

The judge was roughly handled; axes gleamed; sticks rained down blows on Plestcheiev's head; the judge's blood spurted into his assailants' faces.

The air was rent with cries: "He's in penitential garments!" "Spawn of Satan!" "Left his fineries at home, eh?" . . .

In a twinkling Plestcheiev's clothes were wrenched off, and his naked body was being dragged across the square. Attached to the body was something bearing a horrible resemblance to a head, and scraps of a pink silk shirt stuck to the corpse, trampled into its flesh by the mob.

Savage exclamations were flying hither and thither: "Nazar Chistov has been polished off." "Tverskaya Street is ablaze." "The Neglini Bridge is on fire." "The constables have set fire to the big tavern." "Come along, lads, there's too much good stuff going with the wind."

## 2

The church of Saint Basil the Blessed stood out clear in the twilight as though it were still daytime. The golden domes of the Uspenski church took on a greenish hue. The Kremlin walls were now lit up by flickering flames, now plunged into gloom.

A vertical pillar of flame, driving asunder the billowing masses of dove-coloured clouds, towered above the great tavern.

A crowd jostled along towards the place of the conflagration. Their caps were smouldering, and it seemed as if boyars, and not the common people, were rolling barrels of vodka into safety. Though the casks were outwardly affected by the fire, their contents appeared to have remained intact, for the people in their borrowed finery were hard at work broaching them with their axes.

"Straight from the fire, brothers!"

"Now for a good drink, lads!"

"Moscow will be burned to the ground. . . ."

"Then there will be nowhere to drink, eh?"

"Let the city burn! It's the boyars' inglenook."

"Brothers, it is said that the tsar has donned the penitential garments."

They drank out of caps and boots as they had done in Morozov's cellar. Even the earth itself had caught fire. Drunken bodies lay on the smoking ground. The people in their own and their borrowed clothing were ablaze. They twisted round, jumped in the air, ran and fell again, while some writhed and mumbled. An unfrocked priest picked his way over the legs and heads of the prostrate. He was an incorrigible tavern-haunter and spent most of his time there dancing in a tattered cassock. He and a boon companion were lugging Plestcheiev's mutilated corpse along with them. The ex-priest paused on the glowing brands; his ragged girdle was smouldering, and the hem of his cassock had started to smoke.

"Heave-ho!" he shouted, and with a mighty swing sent the body of the judge hurtling into the thick of the flames. "Let him die a second death," he shrieked. Then he intoned in a deep bass:

"This man, he was foul . . .
The Devil rest his soul,
Alle-alle-lujah!"

"You're on fire, father!"

"Once a father, ay!"

Not far distant, but conspicuous in his short white coat and velvet cap, stood a broad-shouldered Cossack. He kept his right hand under his coat where he could feel the hilt of his sword. He was cogitating . . . "Many of our folk have fallen, but what about the boyars? Only a small number of them . . ." As he turned about, he added aloud: "Oh well, their time will come."

With a swing in his gait he walked down the smoky streets. His eyes smarted, a smell of burned flesh filled the air. Dead bodies lay around burning like huge firebrands. The leader had also drunk heavily, but his legs had not been affected. His soul, however, yearned for space and freedom as he convulsively gripped his sword.

He was approaching the familiar fence, had already stepped into the burnt-out yard, when he noticed that he was being followed at a short distance by three men.

"These men are sober. That means they are constables."

One of the three accosted the leader. He wore a black felt hat and the grey apron of a tradesman.

"Hullo, you boyar's son!"

The chief, pushing his cap to the nape of his neck, eyed him askance.

"There is not much light left, but your face is a striking one. Don't roll your eyes so—I am a simple man."

"Well, what's your business?"

"You should not have such a cap. It belongs to Morozov, and the coat is of Turkish cut."

"You devil!"

He drew a pistol from under his coat and cocked the trigger, but the flint missed fire. The two other men ran up. Quickly the tradesman was felled by a blow from the butt of the weapon. The fellow subsided without so much as a groan.

"What about you?" the Cossack shouted threateningly. The couple fled. For a long time the chief pursued them, grinding his teeth, but the men of law were fleet of foot. He watched them cross the Moskvoretski Bridge, then returned to the body of the slain man and shoved it into a hole left by a burnt-down post. For no particular reason, he piled two charred logs over the hole.

"The logs were in the way; now they serve for a devil's cross."

He followed the familiar trail across the scorched space and disappeared into a hazel grove.

3

The man sat with his curly head cupped in his broad palms and his elbows resting on the table.

Irenetsa, in a silken summer gown and wearing a velvet head-dress embroidered with beads, was pouring mead into large cups.

"Why are you sad, my fond love? Drink!"

The chief raised his head. His piercing eyes were glazed; weariness was stamped upon his lean features.

"Don't call me your fond love, my good lass. I am a 'saryn'. . . ."

"What a strange word! Can you tell me its meaning, dearest?"

" 'Saryn' is an infidel word; it means 'falcon', but we cossacks translate it by 'vulture'."

"Then I'd better call you 'falcon'. Do not mourn! Drink! There, that's better."

"Ugh, I've drunk heavily enough as it is, and your mead is strong. I'm not sad. My arms and shoulders are itching to be at work again; there is so much yet to be done in Moscow—and in Pskov, too; our men are starting the game. As for me, I am yearning for the Don."

"Maybe a wife is waiting there for your return. Oh, falcon, why were you born such a sweet man?"

"At one moment I'd be thinking how pleasant a caress would be, and immediately my hand would be itching to seize my pistol, to kill. Only a little while ago I was fondling a boyarina."

The woman's eyes lit up with an angry blaze. "What, you'd actually caress a viper? A viper always keeps its sting."

Sipping his mead, lost in thought, the chief said musingly: "I have an instinct like the beasts of the wild, and I know when it is seemly to kill and when it is seemly to forgive. In this case it behoved me to forgive."

"Drink! I've drawn some more. . . . So that's the kind of man you are? Come, let us clink goblets."

She leaned towards him and, as their goblets touched, the pearl droplets of her embroidered sleeve gleamed. She flung her arms round him.

"Don't cling to me thus, wench."

"Do you no longer love me?"

"My heart isn't turned to love just now. I see other things far ahead."

"And I see nothing but love for you, love which is like the lightning. Moscow terrified me as I saw her today—ay, terrifying she was! And what is this thing they cherish and which you bear within yourself so that people follow you remorselessly? The people were ready to smash up everything. They even denied God and the tsar. As for me, had I a will of my own, I'd secure my falcon to my little bed by a golden chain, entwine his curls with pearls, and never let him out of my sight. I'd never give you up to any alien beauty; your blood I'd drink dry; with you I'd die the cruellest death man could devise."

"Leave me in peace; there is no sense in what you say."

"Plenty of sense, my falcon; my mind is in a whirl, my heart is aflame. I feel like going astray and giving myself up. 'Take me, wolves, devour me, I want to die, there is no life left in me—I am in love.' "

"Forget it. Drink, you she-devil of a woman."

A hoarse voice sounded through the suddenly opened door: "Caressing and boozing whilst the boyars are at hand?" The hunchback, his chains clanking, tottered into the room.

The chief sprang to his feet, hand on sword.

"Hi, old man, where is the foe?"

"Nay, good guest, I'm only croaking. There are neither boyars nor catchpolls about. But in the market-place is a placard that describes in detail all your distinctive marks; and it's being read by all kinds of folk."

"There, there, grandfather. A proclamation? So soon?"

"I've read it myself, and so did others, both the sober ones and the tipsy. Each man paused in front of it. Furthermore, good guest, the price on your head is no mean one: three hundred Moscow rubles and a big coat of lynx fur and a warm cap for him who catches you."

"Have they traced me here?"

"Drink, little god!"

"I'm no god and have no wish to be one. I used to go on pilgrimages to the monasteries; I watched the other pilgrims; I wanted to understand what religion was. Am I a believer? I don't know. Only one thing do I know: the people implore God with prayers, tears, and tapers, yet all around them are gallows, the rack, the lash. . . . The rich man grows fat, while the people strain to the uttermost of their capacity to eke out their rent, and try to escape the voivode by taking to the woods. Their last few pence go to bribe the executioner so that he will deal mercifully with them; but those who cannot smear his palm are whipped to the bone. I attempted to seek God, but I am not good at book-learning. My brother, Ivan Razin, was an excellent reader, yet he curses the whole business. This is no time to go in search of God. What we've got to do is to find out how we can break the power of the boyars and their ferocity towards the common people."

"Dearest, it is not merely the catchpolls you have to beware of now, but every man's hand will be against you. Your curls must be shorn off. Leave them

to your unhappy Irenetsa, bequeath them to her, for you'll take away your love. Your curls shall be hid beneath my pillow, they will be watered with my tears, and only in my dreams shall I be able to follow into the wide spaces where my longed-for falcon soars. Listen, here's what I've thought of."

"Speak, lass. I'm drowsy."

"I'll disguise you as a tradesman, pencil your eyebrows red, fit you with a beard and whiskers; I myself shall dress as a merchant's wife and we'll cross Moscow together until we reach the first posting-station, where we shall hire horses. I shall return here while you flee to your own land."

"Time to sleep, wench. Once in bed, I'll think over the matter of whether to disguise myself as a merchant or whether 'twould be best to rely on my sword. Sleep. . . ."

"These are not the thoughts to take to bed with you, my falcon. Thoughts for bed are of a special kind."

"Come, grandad, drink with us."

The old hunchback was sitting in the ikon corner. He had stuck two wax candles on the table and was reading out of an ancient book which had yellowed with age.

"Drink, old man."

"I am not drinking today, good guest. I am imbibing other honey, that of wise sayings. . . ."

"Seeking God? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Heed him not," said the maid. "Take me in your arms, Stenka. Carry me to bed and to sleep."

The candles were put out, making the room almost dark. The old man sat on in his corner, his trembling lips concealed by his scraggy beard, his blackened finger slowly moving across the manuscript pages. Three wax tapers alone continued to burn in the ikon shining before the image of Our Saviour, darkened by age and surrounded by a silver halo.

The young Cossack slept, his powerful arms flung wide; at times he muttered and whistled in his dreams. The woman hovered over him, the pearls and precious gems of her coif glinting in the dim light as it lay discarded on the floor by the bedside.

Irenetsa gazed intently, occasionally passing a hand across her eyes. She crept closer and glued her lips to the sleeper's cheek. Without opening his eyes, he moved restlessly; quickly she buried her rumpled head in the pillows. The shift covering her back shook; a sound of gentle sobbing filled the room.

Turning the heavy page of his book, the hunchback murmured almost inaudibly:

"Irenetsa, do not fret; cease dwelling on his countenance; that which is visible will be lost to the eyes, but the heart will remember."

She whispered back:

"My misery is so great, grandfather, that, however strong the mead, I am proof against it."

Slowly the hunchback turned the page and smoothed it down.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE COSSACK ASSEMBLY

1

KORNEI YAKOVLEVICH, the senior ataman, was standing in the porch, his elaborate overcoat unbuttoned. One dark-skinned hand lay over his wide red sash from beneath which the silver butt of a Turkish pistol glinted. The man's face was deeply scarred, the thick moustache pointed downward, a sheepskin cap concealed the eyes. Whenever the ataman moved his head, a silver ear-ring with an emerald pendant gleamed in his right ear.

"Cossacks! Whoever wins will get a cup of vodka and another of mead."

"Ay, ay, father!"

Two Cossacks, gripping each other's sashes, were wrestling near the porch of the ataman's house. Dust, looking like smoke in the moonlight, rose from under the feet of the sturdy young fellows. Swords had been cast aside and lay trampled in the sand, only their copper hilts glimmered faintly when the wrestlers trod on them. The men's faces were swollen from the strain, their bones cracked audibly, and a pungent smell of sweat pervaded the air.

A number of Cossacks had clustered round the wrestlers. Their faces were pale in the moonlight; bearded men and young fellows smacked their lips, whooped, and gave highwaymen's whistles.

"Ugh, may the sow gobble you up!"

"Hold on to him tightly, Panko!"

"Luke, bring him to book."

A light grey cloud, nestling within the darker hues of another, lay upon the indigo blue sky; the moon peered from behind the cloud like a metal plate resting on a princely mantle. Beyond the whitewashed buildings of the ataman's homestead there rose a tall wattle wall standing murky white in the moonlight. Black shadows of human figures sprawled and flickered on the ground, but the wrestlers, each having been thrown by a hipe, still stood their ground firmly.

A grey-haired old man with his two sons shaped their course across the yard towards the ataman's porch. The Cossacks, who had gathered round the wrestlers, called out to the old one:

"Good health to ye, grandfather Timoshei!"

"Keeping well, old one?"

"Still managing to creep about, youngsters. Oh, ay, quite fit."

"May you live to be a hundred!"

"Tell me, is this a wrestling match?"

"Ay, Panko and Luke are at it tooth and nail."

"Stenka, my lad, just go and knock 'em out," said the old man to his elder son.

"We know your Stepan. We're not wrestling with him!"

"Afraid, are ye, my fine fellows?"

The ataman greeted his guests: "The best of health to you, kinsmen Cossacks. So my godson is here, too? You went on a pilgrimage without a permit from the Assembly. Surely that's not right, Cossack?"

"We'll settle matters later, godfather. I've a gift for you."

The ataman kissed his godson on the cheek and patted his back.

"You set forth to pray, Cossack, but crawled into a pot-house to get drunk?"

"I admit, godfather. I'm partial to strong liquor."

"You drank so freely that the news of the aftermath reached us from Moscow."

"Moscow promised roubles for my head—but couldn't get hold of me. They're on their way hither."

"So they have discovered the way here, godson? Well, the road between this place and Moscow is an old one."

Cossacks with dark, bearded faces, dotted with scars, were assembling in the yard. They were clad in coarse oxhide overcoats.

"Well, father, let's set about our business—if we have any."

"Yes, let's get down to business seriously."

Benches, blocks of wood, and planks were brought out. The men seated themselves while the youths stood at a distance. The wrestlers picked up their caps and swords and strolled away.

The ataman opened the proceedings:

"I declare the Assembly open. Brother veterans, you, senior Cossacks, I desire to apprise you of certain facts, some of which you yourselves are already acquainted with; but these now require to be thoroughly discussed."

Pipes were lit.

"You are the one to tell us, Kornei Yakovlevich."

"Speak!"

"And make it a straight talk!"

"That I will. Now hear what I have to say. I have summoned you, brother atamans, captains, and senior Cossacks to this small Assembly to hear the news from Moscow, and to plan how to safeguard our ancient Cossack liberties. Nothing shall be writ down, but we shall discuss things simply among ourselves."

The ataman took his seat on the top step of the porch. Father Razin and his elder son also sat down, whilst the younger, a mere stripling, stood leaning against the banister.

With a sidelong glance, which made his ear-ring glitter, the ataman addressed Razin's younger son: "Get you away among the boys. It would not be seemly for you to sit among us; this might offend the elders, and if needs must, you may come back for your father."

The youth left the porch, and the old ataman began to speak:

"My kinsmen, you know that for a long, long time Timofei Razin has harboured no love for Moscow, and has taught his children to hate likewise. Moscow has long prepared to deprive the Cossacks of their freedom. Throughout the length and breadth of Russia, Moscow has sent her voivodes, but no voivode has stayed long on the free Don. The free Don Cossack does not escape to the woods to avoid the boyars' extortions; he takes to the woods of his own free will as a Rover. There he hunts or fishes; or he goes across the seas in search of prisoners, doing an honest trade with his spoils,"

"True enough, grandad," came as response from below.

It seemed to the ataman that a door behind him, leading into the vestibule, was ever so slightly opened. He looked round and adjusted his cap. Then he said:

"Words such as you utter, grandfather Timofei, should not be voiced at a time when Moscow's envoys are visiting our lands; they are shameful and a reproach to free Cossackdom. Moscow harkens to our every word, and she has long ears."

"Oh, father ataman, you speak thus—so my heart tells me—because your feelings incline towards the tsar and the boyars, alas, greatly."

The hitherto invisible eyes of the ataman suddenly blazed from under his sheepskin cap, but he nonchalantly emptied the dottle from his pipe against the porch, filled it again, and lit it with his tinder. This done, he resumed calmly:

"Where, old Cossack, did you discover that Kornei was partial to Moscow customs? You, senior Cossacks, search your own consciences and ask yourselves whether I am a serf or a Cossack."

"A Cossack, father Kornilo!"

"A veteran Cossack, seasoned by many a battle!"

"Brothers, Timofei has diverted me from what I had in mind to say. I wished to report to our Assembly that the envoy, the Moscow boyar, did not come here without purpose. He came to request that we pass judgment on Stepan Razin. What he is guilty of it is for him to disclose to the Assembly himself."

The young Cossack rose to his feet.

"Tell me, godfather, and you, senior Cossacks of the lower Don, is my allegiance to be given to the Cossack Assembly or to the Upper Don?"

Puffing at his pipe, the ataman answered:

"Why have you risen, godson, and sharpened your claws before the time was ripe? Sit you down! We are all intimates here, and the judgments we pass are unrecorded."

"Let the Cossack tell the Assembly what happened in Moscow."

"Speak up, Stenka!"

"Veterans and atamans, Moscow has got the people in her clutches. Whichever way one turns there one sees the whipping-post and the lash; the people lack salt because the boyars have appropriated the salt trade."

"What's that you say?"

"I was in the market when the people waxed noisy. They said: 'Lead us against the boyars, and we'll get the salt!' Now judge me in all conscience. When a Cossack is appealed to by the oppressed, can he refuse to help? So we sallied forth and killed; the tsar himself handed that particular boyar over to us."

"What else did the tsar deliver?"

"A sort of scribe was killed—he was a mercenary thief. Also some of the tsar's intimates were plundered. Seeing that the boyars are so prone to loot, why should not the people follow their example? They were merely taking their revenge. Next morning I had a look round and found a proclamation posted up in the market-place. 'To capture the leader', I read, and a full description of myself with all my special marks and peculiarities. So I fled to the Don, but already Moscow had begun to search the Don region. Besides, many of our Cossacks had been detained by Moscow."

"Ay, lad, that is only too true."

"We do not betray our own folk."

"Roam wherever you please, Stenka. That's what you are a Cossack for."

"You have merely to write to Moscow: 'We have chastened him in accordance with our laws.'"

"Look you, godson, beware of Moscow! For this reason I did not summon scribes to the Assembly."

"I am no coward. Let them chase me!"

"One more thing will I say to you, senior Cossacks," the ataman recommenced. "Many fugitives from Moscow have settled in townships on the Upper Don; most of them are husbandmen, and they are appropriating the land. Is this fair and seemly?"

"True, Kornei. It is not seeming for a Cossack to till the ground."

"Let the Ukrainians do the ploughing——"

"And voivodes invariably follow in the train of ploughmen."

"Alien customs come with the plough to the Don. Moscow's hands are greedy."

"That is so, brothers; we should not admit fugitives here. We have to protect ourselves against Moscow without having to engage in a struggle with her."

"But, father Kornilo, how can we not admit the oppressed?"

"How can we place obstacles in the orphans' path?"

"You do not agree, brothers?"

"We do not agree."

"Yet this excites Moscow's wrath against us."

"There is yet another fact for you to hear, Kornilo. Moscow sends us priests, who are decrepit old men. We have enough of our own infirm. . . ."

"Besides, we have no use for Moscow's God. Moscow is full of crosses and churches. There are many gods, but no justice."

The ataman interrupted Razin: "Now, godson, you leave God alone. There is one God both for Moscow and for us. Moscow is nearer to us; she is not like the Lithuanians or the Tatars."

"The Poles are bitter enemies and so is the Turk, but no less bitter is Moscow."

"Do not forget, brothers, that Moscow pays us for harassing the Turks and the Tatars. My godson, Stenka, is too young to know that since times of old Moscow has provided us with arms and ammunition; and now we shall have to ask for assistance in man-power, for the Turk has barred the estuary of the Don, has secured it with iron chains, has fortified a town above Azov with turrets, so that we Cossacks have no outlet to the sea."

"You are right there, father. Let Moscow provide us with both arms and men."

"The Muscovites are none too good as fighters."

"Well, if her own men are too cowardly, she will have to send us Germans."

"A German is loth to join the cavalry. The German is used to command, and we have our own atamans."

"Ay, that we have."

"Give ear once more, free Cossacks, to what an old Cossack like Razin has to say."

"We are listening, grandfather. Have your say."

"I request that the Assembly grant me and my son Stepan a travel permit, for I wish him to accompany me to Solovki to petition St. Zosima-Savvati to be cured of my wounds."

"A splendid idea, grandad!"

"My wounds are eating me away, and I also wish to offer a candle as intercession for my eldest son, Ivan, who has been summoned by Moscow to fight the Poles. My heart is sore within me when I think of the long years since we were together."

"You shall have a permit. As for Stepan, he does not need one, since he roams abroad already without one."

"My heartfelt thanks to the Assembly."

"Are any of our scribes present?"

"Father Kornei will set his seal to the pass."

"I am deeply obliged to you."

"Is there anything else to discuss?"

"A few words more, gallant ataman. I gather from what you have just said that you do not wish your godson to be seen by the Muscovites?"

"That is so."

"Stenka has a head well fixed on his shoulders. It is not by chance that he of all our youngsters sits in the Assembly."

"Never more true a word was spoken, brothers. One more question: shall we or shall we not close the orphans' road from Moscow to the Don?"

"Keep it open."

"Let the people escape from the voivodes!"

"The Patriarch, too, is a fearsome man. Let his ill-gotten serfs escape from his lands."

"We have to bear in mind that there is no bread on the Don, and the newcomers with their families will need food."

"The Patriarch's grain barges ply on the waters of the Volga."

"For ages past we have had to depend upon the Volga for our bread, not to mention the fish we get from its waters."

"And from the Ukraine, from Zaporozhye. . . ."

"The ataman has spoken nothing but the truth. We'll have to think the whole matter over, and specially about the bread."

"That can be settled when our Rovers return with prisoners from overseas. Then we must summon the Grand Assembly."

"Now's the time to think."

The Assembly waxed noisy and quarrelsome. The ataman knew that by introducing the subject of bread he had set alight a spark which would be long smouldering. He continued to draw at his pipe while staring silently at the heads and caps of his brethren. Skirting the rowdy Assembly, a young girl with a buxom figure and a childlike face made her way across the yard to the ataman's porch. She wore a small scarlet cap embroidered with pearl arabesques; her fair plaits were piled on top of her head beneath it. Stepan Razin rose to his feet and sprang down from the porch. He caught the girl's large hands in his and, pulling her aside, asked hastily in a low voice:

"Oliona, what are you here for?"

"I've come to see the ataman."

The Cossack, still holding the girl's sunburnt hands, gazed into her eyes, but was unable to read anything in them save caprice.

"Oh, Stenka, don't squeeze my hands so. . . ."

"Have you forgotten my bidding?"

"Did you expect me to wait for your convenience? You roam over the

whole world, pawing other girls, I shouldn't wonder. And am I to sit here and never dance?"

She kicked out her foot, which was encased in a yellow morocco boot, and her action made the little rounded bells which formed its setting tinkle.

"Did godfather give you those boots?"

"I didn't get them from you, Stenka, anyhow!"

"You just wait awhile. I have gifts for you."

"But I do not wish to wait."

"It isn't fair, Oliona, to sneak up to an old man. When we are married I shall beat you."

"I am not yours yet, so you can save up your beatings."

The ataman, closing his fist over the bowl of his pipe, rose to his full stature and shouted: "Hi, girl, and you, Cossack, you are impeding the work of the Assembly!

"I crave your forgiveness, father, but I wanted to have word with you."

"I am busy with my visitors for the moment. I shall send for you soon, Oliona. Now we are dealing with an agreement. When that's settled we shall have a feast. I shall send for you then, and right glad shall I be to see you."

"You may count on my coming, Kornilo Yakovlevich."

"And very welcome you will be. So wait till I send for you."

The girl quickly withdrew. Stepan returned to the porch. Speaking so low as to be heard by Razin alone, the ataman said: "Godson, do not stand in a father's way; I am a heavyweight and might easily crush you." The jocular words held ill-concealed anger in them. Raising his voice, Kornilo called loudly:

"I invite everyone of you to come inside and sample our modest fare."

"With all our hearts, father ataman!"

The wooden porch creaked. The members of the Assembly entered the house.

## 2

Along oaken shelves a row of silver candlesticks with their lights blazing lent light and colour to the ataman's banqueting hall. On the table, which was laid for a hundred guests and covered with white linen cloths, on which was a printed border in blue, other candles shed their subdued light. There were jugs of vodka and loving-cups containing French wines, beer, and mead. Roast goose, haunches of wild boar, fish such as fried bream and herrings presented good cheer. Large silver trays were heaped with gingerbread, honey cakes, thickly sugared poppy sweetmeats. The walls beneath the shelves were whitewashed and hung with Persian and Tiurk rugs. On these were displayed daggers with hilts, fashioned of fishes' teeth, swords, and firearms of every description, as flintlocks, pistols of silver, and heavy rusted pieces with which at one time ataman Kornei used to go on foraging expeditions along the coasts of Anatolia, or when on stormy nights he would go hunting through the firths of the sea of Azov and out to sea for prisoners and booty. Arquebuses stood in the corners with their gilt wheel-like triggers from which charred wicks dangled. A special corner had been reserved for the ataman's insignia of office, his stamp with a long ornate handle and his mace.

The guests gathered round the table, but remained standing. The host's earring glinted; he said:

"I pray you, we are not boyars, but free atamans, who together have sprawled on our bellies in the mud and squatted round camp fires. I pray you be seated wherever you please; each man's place is his own for the choosing."

He himself retired into another part of the house, which was screened off by a rug. Soon, however, he returned, clad in a scarlet satin coat with ball-shaped buttons, loops and tassels in silver. His grey moustache drooped, though it had been well brushed and presented a fluffy appearance. The ataman approached the table bareheaded. Following the Zaporozhian fashion, this head of his was clean-shaven with the exception of a long grizzled plait. He took his place at the head of the board, raised his hairy hand, which flaunted a gold signet ring on the thumb, and in a ringing young voice announced the first toast:

"Atamans, we drink to the White Tsar!"

"To the White Tsar, father!"

Some of the benches were overturned as the guests sprang up to hold out their cups and touch those of their fellows. As was the custom, Kornei Yakovlevich held a bowl of mead in his left hand and proffered it to each one as he passed by to clink with him. Many of them kissed the ataman on his scarred cheek.

As the guests drank, they tore the viands asunder with their fingers. The host himself did not lag behind, but, rolling up his long sleeves, set to upon a piece of wild boar, gulping down his mouthfuls and pouring out any liquor that came handy to the guests nearest him. Meanwhile, two small Cossack boys ran round the table replenishing the cups and frequently, through sheer fatigue, spilling the wine.

"Carry on, little lads; Kornei, the ataman, is rich."

"Ay, that he is father!"

"More than one predatory eye is cocked on his Cherkass domain!"

"You there, farther down the board, help yourself to drink."

"We need no pressing, father!"

There was a hearty smacking of lips; the air was filled with the mingled odours of meat, sweat, and tobacco smoke. Smoke and steam rose to the ceiling, which had no vent-hole.

"Once more let us drink to the White Tsar!"

"Right willingly, father."

Each time the host proposed a toast to the White Tsar, old Timofei Razin failed to raise his cup, and his son Stepan followed suit. When this second toast was proposed the old man uttered a cry. But his feeble voice was drowned in the din of ringing metal, of pipes being knocked out against heavy boots, and the general clamour. Only those who heard the cry grew of a sudden quiet and whispered the fact to their neighbour. The old man began to speak:

"Cossacks and atamans, hear my words!"

"Have your say, grandad!"

"We are listening. . . ."

"Well?"

"I intend to speak of our Cossack sorrows. It happened in Azov, my children. On the Feast of Our Lady's Intercession, half dead from the siege, we had to listen to the proclamation of the tsar—may he be savaged by a horse! We had to swear allegiance to him and to bid farewell to one another

in preparation for death. On the morrow—which happened to be a wet day—though so exhausted, we crept along the ditch, slithered about on the bulwarks, and when we reached the Turkish camp—it was empty! Making all the speed we could, we caught up with the Turks on the shores where their ships lay at anchor, and in hand-to-hand fighting killed a great number, captured the sultan's banner and many small ones besides. . . ."

"This poor old dotard is babbling. These are things of the long past."

"Do not interrupt me, father Kornei!"

"You are right. Speak on, old Cossack."

"Well, my lads, it was at that time we became 'the great army of the Don'. An illustrious delegation went to Moscow from the Don—four and twenty Cossacks, led by a captain. But Moscow soon forgot the blood we had shed, the heads we laid low, and the hardships we bore during the siege of Azov. Moscow commanded us to cede the town to the Turks, while we were told: 'Return to your homes or wherever you choose to go!' Of such a kind is the White Tsar, and Timofei Razin refuses to drink to him."

"This ancient Cossack will not toast the tsar, and neither shall we."

The older men now became voluble while Razin continued to cry out in his weak voice:

"Let us surrender nothing of that which we have gained by the sword."

"We, too, shall never give up what we have won."

"Father! Where is the guest from Moscow?"

"The way here is long, and the aged envoy is resting."

Over the door leading into the back premises of the ataman's house hung a large tapestry. This was a gift from Moscow and represented the Last Judgment.

Against a black background, green devils were busied over a cauldron filled with sinners. The cauldron was yellow, the flames were red, and the sinners' faces were dark blue. On the right hand side stood the Righteous depicted in azure blue. Farther away, and to the left, a group of sinners, clad in grey, were crouching. The picture moved, and the tapestry was drawn aside. Slowly and sedately, his grizzling head held high, a sallow-faced, lean boyar emerged from the back of the hall and advanced towards the revellers. He wore a long coat of cloth-of-gold, richly embroidered and trimmed round the bottom with sable. Stepping softly in his morocco boots, he drew near the table and said in a low voice:

"To the atamans and the whole army of the Don, the great sovereign of all Russia, Alexei Mihailovich, sends his most gracious greetings."

The old boyar's countenance went dead as a mask save for the wolfish eyes whose piercing glance belied the wrinkles.

The host made way for him on the rug-covered seat. The guest crossed himself devoutly before the ikons and with great dignity took his place.

Someone exclaimed:

"Listen, boyar. It is rumoured that Morozov has the tsar in the palm of his hand."

"The wine must have gone to your head, Cossack. It is a lie!" replied the boyar, glancing towards the door, which was concealed by the tapestry. From here a Tatar boy stepped forth, clad in the loose, striped coat of his countrymen, and bearing an embossed enamel tray on which stood a narrow-necked silver Caucasian wine stoop. The little Tatar deftly placed this in front of the boyar and disappeared. Without raising his eyes, the boyar turned to the banqueters:

"To those who uphold the truth I offer Rhenish wine."

"Why not to all?"

"Only to those after my own heart, gallant atamans."

The guests grew vociferous, shouting for the bandor-players. One of them banged a heavy fist on the board and sang a dance song:

"Ho, my gossip, ho, my dear,
Will you stew for me a bream
For to make some fish-soup of?"

Others, leaning ponderously on the table, were smoking. The host hustled his orderlies, crying:

"Bring more home-brew, vodka, and mead, my lads!"

"Oh, father, sure it is we shall never come out of this alive."

The guest from Moscow turned gently and cordially to Timofei Razin:

"You spoke but the truth about Moscow, old Cossack. There lurks many a grievance against Moscow in an old Cossack's heart. The Cossacks had shed much blood while fighting the Turk in days of old, and nothing came of their sacrifices. Why, indeed, should Azov have been delivered up to the Turks after the Cossacks had captured the town and established their glory in that place for ever?"

"True enough, boyar."

"You take the words out of my mouth; and in any case, the peace whereby Azov was returned to the Turks has been violated. Once again we have to harass the infidel; yet there are instructions for us to hold our hands for a while."

"We are not tardy in harassing them, but still we have no outlet to the sea."

"The White Tsar needs the town of Azov. Let us, therefore, drink a cup of wine together in memory of old wounds and hardships. I hold you in great esteem and plead with you to make your peace with the tsar."

"Never, as long as I live, shall I make peace with the tsar. But I will drink with you, boyar, on account of your wise speech."

"Drink for good health and ease of heart. . . ."

The boyar filled a goblet to the brim with aromatic wine. The old Cossack swallowed it at one gulp and exclaimed:

"Your very good health, boyar and guest! Eh, but the wine is coursing through my veins and tastes sweet to the palate. Give me more."

"An honest Cossack deserves to be given more."

The boyar's parchment-like hand reached for the flagon, but a pair of keen eyes watched him closely; a gleam of silver shot through the air, wine splashed the nearer Cossacks; the flagon hit the wall and rolled to the floor; springing as it were from nowhere, the Tatar boy seized the flagon and disappeared; the Cossacks chaffed one another as they wiped the wine from their streaming faces—"Go on, pour out the wine! wine and blood—that's the life for a Cossack!"

Stepan gripped his father by the shoulder:

"Father, beware of Moscow! Do not accept her drinks!"

"Stenka, have you gone off your head? Eh, decidedly, the wine was good, no doubt of it."

The boyar slowly shifted his wolfish eyes to the young man and bared his scanty and yellowed teeth in a grin.

"You're too late, young fellow; while you were nosing about in Moscow we bound ourselves to drink a cup of peace with your father."

"Father! What's the matter with you?"

"Now . . . Stenka, I am sleepy . . . sleepy . . . sure, 'twas excellent wine . . . now for a sleep. . . ."

The son assisted his father to extricate himself from the table. He leaned heavily on the young man's shoulder as he tottered from the ataman's house. On the porch he was picked up by his youngest son, while Stepan rejoined the revellers. The talk was noisy. Stepan Razin made his way to the back of the hall, and his massive figure disappeared behind the tapestry. Only then did the boyar raise his downcast eyes to address the ataman in a low-pitched voice:

"Have you put your hand on the Cossack who roused Moscow to riot, Kornilo?"

The ataman's face was pale from the quantity of liquor he had consumed, but the blood had all rushed to his ears, making the ring he wore all the more conspicuous against its crimson backing. A short pause ensued while the ataman glanced round the Assembly. Then he said:

"I know of none such as you describe, but I shall have a search made, boyar."

"I, too, am on my guard and have a feeling that he is here, our sovereign's foe. The descriptions given me seem correct: face slightly pitted with smallpox; height; voice . . . For centuries, my dear friend, Moscow has been renowned for her skill in recognizing anyone upon whom she has set eyes and who had revealed his character. Ay, such a man's countenance remained graven in her heart. Were he to fall through the earth, there is no escape for him. Such a one Moscow will invariably track down in the end."

Gradually the crimson hue spread from the ataman's ears to flood his whole face. His battle-scarred and stubborn features assumed a menacing expression. Gripping the heavy drinking-cup in his hairy hand, he bashed it on the table and answered:

"Boyar, to track a man to the Don is not enough; he has still to be caught; and if inadvertently he is caught, as likely as not 'twill be his captor who will be ducked in the water."

"I know all that, Kornilo. However, if a boyar's rank appeals to you and the tsar's fur coat about your shoulder, then you will assist Moscow in the capture of the man, who may do much wrong to the boyars and bring no small misfortune to the free Don itself."

"I shall think the proposal over, boyar; and I make no secret of the fact that the tsar's fur coat as well as a boyar's rank appeal to me."

"That being so, Kornilo, consider carefully how best we can act in cooperation."

The ataman suddenly stood up and cried in a sonorous if rather tipsy voice:

"Gallant atamans and captains!"

"Speak, father, we are listening."

"Atamans! My orders are that you keep a firm hand over the rabble, that you keep your eyes open and see to it that our rabble both in the upper and the lower reaches of the Don does not plot with the musketeers, peasants and serfs who come to us by the fugitives' road. In this year the tsar has bound more securely than ever the peasants and menials to their overlord, so we may expect many of them will flee to our lands. Look to the bread, I say again."

"Befuddled heads should not have orders showered upon them, Kornilo."

" 'Twould be better to give us more wine, father."

Assuming a more genial tone, the ataman waved an arm, flung his cup on the floor, and shouted:

"Hi, come along, girls!"

Apparently familiar with the ataman's habits and waiting for his summons, a bevy of fleet-footed maids ran into the hall, which was ere long filled with young Cossacks and brightly attired girls. A musician, bearing in his hand a lute, and an old Zaporozhian Cossack bandore-player appeared upon the scene. The ataman together with the boyar left the table. Kornei Yakovlevich, though very deep in his cups, walked steadily, but his tread was rather heavier than usual. The drunken veterans never stirred from their places nor so much as looked round. The Assembly continued to gorge itself as if nobody but themselves were present.

"Come here, dancing girls!"

So saying, the ataman ripped down Moscow's gift of tapestry, flung it into a corner and thus opened the way into the back portion of the house. The newcomers trooped in. The minstrel, in faded Zaporozhian attire of wide red trousers and dark blue jacket, squatted Turkish-fashion on the floor and forthwith began to twang out a dance tune. The lute-player, wearing a rusty coat of Muscovite cut, remained standing and accompanied the bandore by singing and stamping out the rhythm.

"Ah, my lute, my little lute!
But Domka, who's my wife to boot,
She buttered pancakes and some pies,
'Not for me,' her old man cries,
But for Vasili who's never blind
To the charms of womankind,
A robber captain he's for sure,
The man-killer and paramour."

"That's a Moscow game! 'Stew me a bream!' And let the devil have it for supper!"

The musician continued:

"Vasili, could I catch you,
A whipping is long overdue,
I'd trample you and make you rue!
See, I fear I'll soon be dead,
With no chance to lie with my wife abed."

The young folk danced. Oliona, the little bells on her boots ajingle, floated like a swan in her white shift. Unlike the other maidens, her cheeks had become paler rather than rosier with the dancing; her dark eyes were half closed in the enjoyment of the dance while her thick, dark brows made her white face all the more striking.

"Oliona, my girl, there's nobody can match you at dancing," cried the ataman as he stamped out the measure with his heavy boot.

The girl's golden plaits flung loose from her cap and twirled through the air with the scarlet bows gleaming at their ends.

"Stop, you devil of a girl!"

The little bells gave a final tinkle as she stamped her foot and came to a standstill.

"Here is something for you"; the ataman clasped a heavy necklace of golden coins round the maid's neck.

Amid the stamping of many feet, the singers' voices were lost, and the throb of strings and the ring of silver-shod heels were barely to be heard.

A taciturn, lean-faced Cossack propped his tall frame against the white-washed wall. His eyes followed Oliona. The ataman stepped forward a pace or two and laid a heavy hand on the young Cossack's shoulder.

"Aha, godson! No more dancers left; Oliona has outdanced them all."

Razin tossed his curly pate, but remained silent as he ensconced himself yet closer against the wall.

"Feeling subdued, fledgling? You left the nest too soon. You are not like the others, who train themselves to stab and slash, whereas you cut down an infidel at one stroke, cleaving him in twain," said the ataman, breathing alcoholic vapour into Razin's face. Then he whispered: "You bandit! But I love you, Stenka!"

"I've ceased to believe that, godfather."

"You don't say so!" The ataman opened his mouth and recoiled. Razin whistled and stepped away from the wall.

"Make way, you devils!"

The dancers withdrew and clustered round the windows. Stenka whipped out his sword and twirled it round his curly head while the silver heels of his boots sparkled. On the ataman's bed, spread with snow-leopard skins, sat the guest from Moscow. His wolfish eyes were fixed on the dancer, of whose countenance he could discern nothing; all he saw were the raven locks, the shimmering heels, and the circle traced by the whirling sword. The piercing whistle of the bandit sent cold shivers down the boyar's back; the dancer was all movement, waving his sword, his eyes glowing like a wild beast's in the dimly scintillating light shed by the candles, which were placed, as were those in the front part of the room, on oaken shelves. The Muscovite closed his eyes, then opened them again, sighing deeply; with a faint click the sword was driven into the wall high above his head. The Cossack went back to his place panting audibly; as was usual with him, his expression was both calm and sullen. There came a tinkle of tiny bells as Oliona rushed up to him and pressed her body close to his, breathing to him: "Stenka, I love you!"

"Then throw back my godfather's gift!"

The girl tore off the golden necklace and flung it on the floor.

"Let us seek out my own father, Oliona, and ask his blessing. Hey, godfather, send me a sword; yours is the best."

Oliona and the Cossack left the room together. Silently the ataman kicked at the discarded necklace and bawled to the revellers:

"Now then, guests, off with you! And do not filch anything from the table!"

"What a stingy old man you've become of a sudden, father!"

The ataman's house gradually emptied itself; the atmosphere cleared and became fresher. In a little while everyone had taken his departure except the guest from Moscow, who was still sitting with his legs up on the bedstead, crossing himself and mumbling incoherently. Without a word the ataman took his seat on the edge of the couch.

"Did you notice that fellow, Kornilo? A young man such as he has no right to exist. . . . Mother Earth never tolerates the likes of him for long."

"I know that, boyar."

"Maybe you do, but you do not know everything, Kornilo. Have you ever had forebodings of approaching trouble? I have. The serfs are fleeing to the Don, where they are given a hearty welcome. They have been doing this since bygone times; but not every riot is successful. Only when such an arm and madcap issue from a mother's womb do riots achieve their purpose. So it is now, and I know that if we fail to uproot old Razin . . . However, he will be no more tomorrow."

"So that's the way the wind blows. I thought yours was no ordinary wine, boyar Pafnuti."

"The burial service for the old man will be sung this very night."

The ataman rose and paced the room. Yet, obviously, his mind wasn't preoccupied with the old Cossack's fate, rather more with his own private grievance. Finally, he gave utterance to his thoughts:

"That Oliona is a little devil!"

"Once you are a boyar, Kornilo, we will find you a highly born and more comely bride."

Going to the aperture leading into the banqueting hall, the ataman called out:

"Hey, Cossacks!"

The boyar shuddered.

Two Cossack orderlies entered the room.

"Escort the boyar to the distant hut where the clerks are housed. A room has been prepared for him there."

The visitor from Moscow rose and, without bowing, held out a cold and wizened hand to the ataman.

"Good night, ataman! Make good use of your hours of repose to think over my proposals, and how best to deal with the issue. I know human nature; it goes against the grain to impose any kind of bondage upon the free Don. Well, make us responsible for it. Moscow is a sovereign realm; she possesses wide spaces and many people. Moscow knows what to lop off and the most propitious time to do it."

"Farewell, boyar!"

The guest departed. The ataman walked up and down the room until the candles had guttered out.

## 3

Laboriously, Timofei Razin was slowly moving homeward. Frol, his youngest son, strove to keep a firm hold on him. But the old man hung limply on his son's arm, and he seemed to be pulled down by his own weight towards the earth. His head was thrust forward, and the bristles of his shorn scalp gleamed silvery in the moonlight.

"Oh, dad, you are like a heavy stone weighing me down."

The old man drew himself up and came to a halt and cast his eyes on his son. . . .

"Frolko, you, too, must beware of Kornei. He is very cunning, and even

more——" The old man stopped short, for he couldn't call to mind the word he wanted; his memory was failing him; his thoughts wandered and were lost in the past; he hummed a Zaporozhian ditty to himself:

"And what may this hut be,
On yonder bank I see?
The Poles, they sat down there
And beat the poor dogs bare;
They broke their keenest knives,
With teeth they took their lives."

"Father Bogdan! You, too, got entangled with a Polish king. . . . Oh, Frolko, if we could only bring up one of our old assault towers and use the battering-ram on the tsar's palace and send a few young falcons and rounds from our arquebuses into the tsar's serene eyes! I, so old a Cossack, would gladly give my life for that and die content."

"Dad, do hasten your steps."

"Oh, Frolko, stop. Let me have a look at the moon, at the sky. . . . I was born and bred in the plain, on horseback, at sea. . . . Ah, you Cossack town! The root of Zaporozhye lying on a silver salver . . . moonlight, water . . . good for one. . . ."

They had reached the hut and entered it. Frol found it a hard task to put the old man to bed. He removed the board with which the window had been blocked, and a fresh wind blew in from the steppes, vivifying the stagnant air. A patch of moonlight fell on the floor through the aperture. The young Cossack found a flint in the pan, struck a spark, lit an oak chip and then another, and stuck them into the iron holder.

"Frolko, my son!"

"What is it, dad?"

"Fill the ladle with sour milk and water. I am thirsty. But not too much water, mind!"

The dark-haired stripling flung his ox-hide overcoat on to the seat, tugged at the ring fixed to the trap-door leading to the cellar, climbed down, and returned with a ladleful of sour milk and water.

"Ah, that's good, son. My innards seem all on fire, and I feel wet with sweat. . . . Give me your hand; feel how cold I am and as rough as an ice-floe in spring; but inside me it's as if the devils were casting bullets wherewith to fight the Poles.

"And what may this hut be,
On yonder bank . . .

My voice, too, is going, yet I sang quite passably even today; now my tongue seems as if made of stone. Son, give me some more sour milk."

"There's none left, dad. Maybe Stenka's got some, but his hut is locked. Wait a moment; I'll have a look under the locker."

"Aha, locked, is it? Do not trouble to look for the key. Stay here by me. 'They broke their keenest knives, with teeth they took their lives.' A good song, that, Frol. We sang it to the Poles at Zbarazh. Ha, ha . . . at Zbarazh, the devil take them! The Poles dealt the death-blow to Burliai. . . . He was a

mighty fine warrior was Burliai. Six of 'em burned Sinop. . . . He'd stuff his pipe with a pound of tobacco, snatch up an arquebus, or a sword, and slay the Mohammedans like so many locusts. At night he looked as if he were on fire, his whiskers and his forelock would crackle from the heat of his pipe. Single-handed, he'd launch a fully laden canoe into the sea. He'd roll into a tavern, and, as likely as not, bring down the ceiling. He'd seize a horse by the belly and swing the beast on to his shoulders. . . . Oh dear, my insides are burning! Frol, come here, listen. I tell you it's burning. . . ."

"I'm here, dad."

"What's that scratching and squealing? D'you hear?"

"Probably the falcon has got entangled in its jesses, swivel and leash."

"Ah yes, the falcon! There will be no need to keep the falcon now, for he knows neither you nor Stenka. As for me . . . I have not long to live. . . . Undress me."

Frol began to undress his father.

"Pull off everything, quick, and take it all away. Bring me a clean shirt. . . . There, that's as it should be. I shall go into the square and declare 'Old Cossack Razin is about to be married!' . . The sword married him, the sword . . . the sword. . . ."

With an effort, the old man stood up. Feverish spots covered his face, while his eyelids swelled out and hung over his eyes.

He tottered barefoot in his long white shirt towards the window where the restless falcon was penned. He but dimly saw the floor, and his scraggy yellowed shins showed beneath his garment. The bird was tearing fiercely at the leash with its beak.

"Stop, falcon! It's long since you enjoyed freedom. Now hush, I shall let you go. Help me, Frol, I cannot see. . . ."

"He pecks, dad."

"A fine sort of Cossack you are! Every good Cossack dies at the stake. And a ne'er-do-well dies in his wife's petticoat. Have no fear, he'll not tear your arms off to the shoulders!"

"I'm not afraid, only he flutters so. . . ."

The falcon set up an angry squeal, tore at his chain and shed dove-coloured tufts of feathers. The old man clasped the bird in his arms, saying softly:

"Falcon! Just wait a moment."

The falcon twisted his head about wrathfully, but ceased pecking and waited. Frol continued to unravel the rusted chain.

"Unfasten him, son, and we'll set him free. He's hearing something, it appears, and has got an inkling that there's foul play afoot. It's not for nothing that he's like this."

"He will not fly away so long as it is night."

"Oh yes, he will! Let loose the leash!"

The falcon, sensing his freedom, hopped on to the window-sill outside.

"Has he taken to his wings?"

"Yes, he is soaring into the sky. Look!"

The old man wept though he endeavoured to keep his countenance.

"And I cannot even see the moon . . . it's all dark . . . darkness. . . . Falcon, greet my son Ivan, who's an ataman. Oh, how it burns! Quick, Frol, some more sour milk. Moscow . . . Stenko said . . . ah, hold me! Frol, where are you?"

The Cossack was too heavy a burden for his young son, so Timofei Razin sank to the ground, and his greasy head dangled from his scraggy, deeply sunburnt neck. Straining to the utmost, Frol endeavoured to raise his father, but, realizing the impossibility of such a feat, laid the cold and lifeless body on the floor.

4

For a while the lad stood helplessly regarding the mortal remains of his sire; then he strode to the bed and buried his face among the rabbit-skins which served as pillows; here he burst into tears, for he felt himself responsible for his father's death.

"Had I not allowed him to sit on the floor, he might even now be alive."

His father had taught him, as he had Stenka before him, to wield the sword, to ride, to strike with the lance. How well the old man had known the right moment to admonish and to encourage!

"Father . . . my own dad. . . ."

When Frol raised his head again, the moon was shining brightly through the window. He thought he heard voices; the path the moon made on the floor broadened; strange tremors shook Frol's body. He forgot everything and stood gaping while he listened to a girl's voice.

"Stenka, I'm not suitably dressed for such an occasion. I shall not go to see your father now. Wait till tomorrow. Then I'll put on my best clothes and come in seemly fashion to beg of him to let you be my husband."

"I pray you, do no such thing, Oliona! There are none as smart as you. You must speak to my father without delay, and on the morrow we shall go to the square, bow to the people, and I shall declare: 'I take you to wife!' Devil take priest and——"

"Be it as you wish."

Impatient hands groped for the door while Frol pressed his face into the rabbit-skins.

"Eh, Frol, where is the light?"

"Gone out; the flint is in the pan with the chip."

A heavy hand struck the flint.

"Frol, where is father?"

"Look on the floor!"

The chip Stenka had drawn forth from underneath the pile was damp so that it merely smouldered; its tiny glow deadened soon in Stenka's uneasy hands. Fumbling beneath the bed, he found a box containing tallow candles. He lit two of them.

"Frol, why is father lying on the floor?"

"Because he is dead, Stenka."

"Hasten, Frol, to the square. You'll find a hut to the right of the road where some Greeks and foreigners live. Understand? A German leech, passing through the plain, is staying there. Bring him here. Tell him . . . yes, here's a thaler, and I shall give more. Tell him that if he refuses to come I shall make him do so at the point of the pistol."

"You'll not find me a laggard, Stenka. I shall tell him. . . ."

"Come here, Oliona. If my father's drink was poisoned, those Moscow boyars will rue the day. See his hand . . . it's like lead . . . he did not come

by a natural death. Come nearer, Oliona. The old man's dead, but you have no cause to feel afraid, for he was a golden-hearted man. He used to take me with him to see how the arquebuses were loaded. He taught me how to cross rivers on horseback, and I was always the foremost when there was any fighting to be done. It was the ataman who gave me saddles and bridles. That's why I am such a devil. But why am I telling you all this? You know all about it."

"Ay, that I do."

"Come, then, have no fear. See, I am raising his arm. Were he alive, he'd give his consent. . . . You are mine, Oliona. Oh, the sadness of it! Old Timoshei—father—my dad."

The young Cossack knelt beside the body and tore his locks. The girl gripped him by the shoulders.

"That German is long in coming. I shall go myself."

"Stenka, you are weeping? I love you with all my heart."

"Do not kiss me, Oliona! Do not come so close . . . I do not know myself . . . what is it? What?"

The door opened. Frol entered almost at a run, followed by two Germans clad in black cloaks, high-peaked hats with white feathers; they wore shoes, and were armed with sabres. One of them remained on the threshold, peering about him suspiciously. The other, a spindle-shanked individual, approached with a firm step and stooped over the dead man. Then he felt the glazed eye beneath its swollen lids and raised the cold hand.

"Bring a light!" he ordered.

Stepan directed the candle-flame towards the places indicated by the leech.

"Dead!"

"Poisoned? Or not? Speak the truth, black Satan!"

"Truth—always truthful I am. Old man . . . heart . . . drink wine?"

"Yes, at the feast."

The other black figure now approached, and stooping over, but not touching the old man, looked long and attentively at the corpse.

"Not know," said the leech, "drink wine, dead from heart failure . . . face bloated." He seemed to be enquiring of his companion as though calling upon a witness; yet this one held his peace.

"Are you going away, German?"

"What is the use of my staying?"

"Take the thaler now you have come; take it, I say. Nevertheless, you are lying, you black devil!"

"*Nein* . . . no lying, Cossack."

The Germans quitted the hut.

So bright was the moon that the sand was as white as in broad daylight. The foreigners walked by the closed taverns; the air reeked with the fumes of vodka, garlic, and pickled carp. Every building with its shaggy straw or rush-covered roof cast a long blue or murky green blotch across the roadway, and shadows of the trees were as clear-cut as intricate carving. The Germans passed a chapel with an image of St. Nicholas attached to the cross on the slanting roof. The chapel was a solid oak building, and the slabs of the eaves looked like tombstones. The same artisan must have been responsible for the whole. The foreigners walked slowly by while the leech was saying:

"We had to hurry. Those barbarians seemed in a threatening humour. I am weary. . . ."

All was deserted around them, and silence reigned supreme save for the occasional howling of dogs and the answering yelp of ravenous jackals lurking among the bulrushes.

"Why did you conceal the truth, doctor? The old savage had obviously been poisoned."

"Long have I travelled in these and other countries. When the Muscovites learn the truth about a violent death from the lips of a doctor, they do not slay the perpetrator of the bloody deed, but that man who reveals the cause of death to them, for the criminal has usually made good his escape, and yet the barbarians feel troubled and indignant. Those whom we visited in order to certify the old man's death are even greater savages than the Muscovites and are quite unable to put a curb on their impulses. They resemble the Roman legionaries. They even murder their commanders when out campaigning and elevate others to the dead man's place. Their main pleasure is spilling blood; therefore they have no need to know the truth. My friend, we are not in Europe, but in the very heart of Scythia, We must praise Almighty God for preserving our lives so that we may still serve the country of our birth. Have we not earned fees from these barbarians to that purpose?"

The two men spoke in the Holstein dialect.

"What a beautiful woman the savage had with him! Did you note her, doctor?"

"Oh yes, she is a well-made wench and has an innocent face, but the place, as so often with savages, stank horribly of pelts and fish. . . . That Cossack's glance is quite extraordinary, and his voice penetrates the heart. Knowing what I did, I was hard put to it to restrain myself from telling the truth. Yet had I done so, we should have been constrained to flee these parts, for we know not what would have been the consequences of our sincerity. Besides, I wish to await the arrival of the Indians who look forward to extracting profit from these brigands. . . . I have it in mind to accompany those merchants to India, to the land of the Brahmins, healing herbs, and fantastic miracles."

Conversing thus, the Germans reached a large hut situated in the square. This was the hostel where foreign merchants usually stayed.

## 5

The guest from Moscow, the boyar, and his three clerks occupied a roomy hut standing at the back of the ataman's homestead. Its interior was fitted up as a living-room: rugs on the walls, home-made mats on the floor, a big stove with a white bench and chimney. Despite the chimney, which was unusual in those days, the room was smoky. The stove was stuffed with glowing coal. The windows were covered with well-scraped ox-bladders through which the light filtered dimly; the frames ran in grooves so that they could be pushed aside to let in fresh air. Boyar Pafnuti Kivrin, in his apprehension of eavesdropping by persons all too eager to discover Moscow's state secrets, kept the windows closed, but the door leading into the hall was ajar in order to let the fetid air escape. The boyar awoke early and opened a dark-blue silver-bound coffer of Novgorod workmanship, from which he took a copper-gilt triptych representing many holy festivals enjoined by the Church, adjusted it at one

corner of the table, stuck a wax taper in front, and lit this from a chip light. Before kneeling down or crossing himself, he growled:

"Too few ikons; and yet they call themselves Christians. . . . Often they even decide on a campaign while in church. . . ."

Making the sign of the cross, he pressed his hand on his chest and brow and then began reciting his prayers. The dim light crept across his bald skull. The door leading to the closet occupied by the clerks had purposely not been curtained off, for the boyar preferred to keep a wary eye on his dependants. However many times he crossed himself or bowed to the ground, striking his head against the floor, one thought kept on intruding itself into his devotions, try as he might to drive it away. He could not avoid thinking: "In this land a man has to deal watchfully with menials, or they might go over to the Cossacks and betray our secrets."

In the other half of the hut, across the passage and opposite the boyar's door, the clerks sat at board. The table was covered with a blue cloth, and on it stood a large dish of fried bream, seasoned with paprika, and a red-glazed platter piled with dried fish.

"Damn these shock-headed fools! We ask for mutton and they give us pike, plague on them!" said a young clerk in a stentorian bass. He had long fair hair and wore a nankeen coat.

"Hold your tongue, not so loud! Cannot you see that the boyar is at his devotions? Besides, look, here are bream and pilchards."

"They are always swilling their beastly home-brewed beer and offering it to us. I asked for kvass, but there's none that I can see. This infernal drink they supply makes my belly as taut as a voivode's copper drum."

"Oh, Efim, you'll have to answer to the boyar for this! You had better put a curb on your tongue, lad."

The clerks ate with their fingers, crossed themselves after the meal and wiped their hands on their coats. Two of them were bearded men, but there was only the merest down on Efim's lip.

They prayed before their own ikons, for there were no others in the hut. The part they occupied boasted of only one ornament: a woodcut by some local artist hung on the wall; it clumsily depicted a Cossack in red cap, dark blue shirt, and red breeches tucked into ill-fitting boots. He was engaged in prodding with his long lance a cringing Pole wearing a long green coat and a blue cap flaunting a scarlet feather. An inscription ran beneath: "Father Bogdan makes the Polish devil dance." The youngest clerk belched loudly and said:

"It would not be bad if we stayed with these folk. There's plenty of space, but too much sand about to my liking. It parches the throat."

"I told you the boyar was at his devotions. You might have waited with your belching as we do; there's time enough for that later."

"He'll not mind."

"Be that as it may, once back in Moscow, you'll find yourself encumbered with an invitation to the Criminal Court, and then you'll go and belch in the face of the executioner."

With a toss of the head the young clerk replied:

"At his bidding I have been beaten, but why should I be delivered up to the Criminal Court? I am no robber."

The boyar, having finished his prayers, took up his staff and, with a dignified and severe countenance, entered the clerks' premises. The three men bowed so low that their fingers touched the floor.

"Are you weary, boyar? Pray sample our modest fare. I shall forthwith clear the table, change the cloth and order that the choicest viands be brought."

The youngest clerk bustled about, only too ready to have an excuse for going to the kitchen. The boyar detained him.

"It is not seemly for me to sit at board with you. Besides, I am going to the ataman and don't want to belch there—'twould not be proper. Look, there's a bug behind you crawling on the wall, as the louse does in the covered wagon of the khan's envoy."

The senior clerks stood with bowed heads expecting the boyar to speak in the very low voice which augured wrath. But the boyar continued in loud and level tones:

"I tried to train you, Efim, as a small boy, teaching you the knowledge contained in books and how to use ink. Now I have promoted you beyond your deserts and you have been entrusted to draw up reports for the tsar's own perusal. Yet you do not recognize the immense honour thus bestowed upon you. You insist on bringing bugs in your wake."

"Pray pardon me, boyar. The bug you mention comes of a gentle belch, not of a loud one."

At this comical rejoinder the boyar tapped his staff on the floor and frowned; he seemed about to say something, but at that moment came the sound of many voices crying outside the window.

"Hurrah, brothers!"

The earth shook from a volley of gunfire.

The boyar turned pale.

"What's that? Efim, run out and see what has happened."

The two bearded clerks made all speed to the windows. Their junior remained calmly where he was.

"That's the marauding party returned from overseas, boyar, so their boon companions here are giving them a hearty welcome."

At this the boyar cheered up.

"That's the sort of thing makes me so fond of you, Efim. You always find out what they are up to. It is very smoky in my room, my head is buzzing, and I feel the need of a breath of fresh air. But I fear——"

"What are you afraid of, boyar?"

"We are the tsar's envoys; many will stare at us; the people here are both thievish and vicious. They do not even consider it necessary to obey their own atamans. What if they were to commit some evil against us?"

"You need have no fear, boyar. The Turkish, Persian and other envoys abide in this wretched little town, and we are just like the others. They are accustomed to envoys."

"That being so, I shall slip on a peasant's overcoat, and we shall both go for a stroll. The coat is of leather, and it suits the occasion."

"Allow me to assist you, boyar."

The young clerk slipped into the boyar's apartment while the older ones looked on him with envy in their eyes. When the boyar began sorting out his clothes, one of them remarked:

"Efim will get ahead of us. He holds the boyar on a lead like a dog."

The other answered in an almost inaudible whisper:

"What you say is true, Semion; he's outstripped us already!"

## 6

Boyar Pafnuti, accompanied by his clerks, passed leisurely through the wattle enclosure surrounding the ataman's homestead.

They attained a hillock from which they could see the river gleaming white in the sunshine. Floating upon its silvery waters the four Muscovites, to their consternation, espied the marauders' long and slender canoes, ribbed with plaited reeds, the oars blackened by moisture and the smoke of gunpowder. The men in the boats were clad in velvet, cloth-of-silver and gold, or wrapped in gorgeous rugs; the men in red caps were Zaporozhians, those in sheepskin caps were from the Don.

"Spawn of Satan!"

The boyar, prodding the sand with his staff, moved on, his clerks following him.

Crowds of Cossacks jumped ashore. On the wharf, another crowd, those of the stay-at-homes, met them with a tattoo upon their kettledrums, the blowing of bugles and the sound of pipes. Others along the shore were firing off salutes with blank ammunition from long-muzzled guns mounted on wooden wheels. Clouds of smoke smelling of powder trailed over the silvery surface of the water. Hundred of voices shouted:

"Here are our brothers from across the sea!"

Captives were led forth from the canoes and ranged along the wharf: men with strange, bronzed faces in tattered garments and bound together; half-naked women in wide, gaily coloured trousers. Instead of fettering these women, the Cossacks led them by their plaits. One huge Zaporozhian Cossack, with drooping moustache reaching down his brawny chest, was lugging two young Turkish women by the hair. He was dressed in a torn jacket of dark blue, and a dove-grey satin mantle, clasped under the chin by a gold chain, was flung about him. On meeting with any other man, he bawled to his captives:

"Now, lasses, cross yourselves!"

The Turkish women tried to make the sign of the cross.

"Buy these captives, brothers; those who can cross themselves will make good wives."

The faces and hands of the returned reivers were streaked with dried blood and untended scars. The motley crowd surged from the wharf towards the church in the square.

"Let's have a thanksgiving service to the patron of our seámen! A thanksgiving service to St. Nicholas!"

"Who's the bookworm here? Let him make the priest!"

"Come now, cross yourselves!"

"Is this really you, Gundosy?"

"And you, Taranuha? Are you well, Cossack? Let me touch you! Ay, you're alive, to be sure!"

These men, who had escaped from the jaws of death and the cold abysses of the sea, were delirious with joy; they laughed and shouted and sang. Without awaiting the end of the common prayer, they flooded the streets, crowded the taverns, ate and drank uproariously.

"Hi, you huckstresses, bring out beer, carp and pilchards!"

The market women with their reed baskets clustered round the taverns,

doing a brisk trade in fish, bread and roast mutton. As the four Muscovites strolled about they came upon a sort of shanty, roughly thatched with rushes and turf, three sides of which were built of oaken logs, whilst the fourth remained open. A swarthy Zaporozhian Cossack was sitting on a stump in the glaring sunlight. His dubious clothing consisted of a dilapidated pair of trousers, bast shoes and a faded dark blue padded jacket. The local barber was scraping the dirt from the man's round scalp with a rusty dagger, sluicing it with muddy water taken from an earthenware jar, and rubbing it with a piece of dirty soap. He wetted his long scimitar-shaped razor on a grindstone, placed on the ground, moistening the stone with water from the same jar and sharpening his dagger against his top-boot.

Each time the barber's dagger scraped noisily on the man's scalp, as though he were scaling a big fish, the Cossack screwed up his eyes against the blinding sunlight and emitted an ecstatic howl.

"That's fine, my lad. Shave it off smoothly, but be careful not to clip off my forelock. The Zaporozhians never get dandruff, whereas the Don Cossacks, who let their hair grow, do. In Zaporozhye we grow moustaches, but no beards; we leave that fad to the Muscovites. Besides, we cannot wear beards because the Yaik Cossacks wear them, and they are subject to Moscow."

Now and again the barber cut away a slice of skin from the scalp. Whensoever this happened, the barber, whose face was distinguished by prominent cheekbones and numerous cuts from the razor, would groan and cover the abrasion with a thick lather of soap. Then he would pour water over the Cossack's face to cleanse it of blood. The Cossack in his turn would console the barber:

"It matters not a whit, my lad. Sprinkle some mould upon it. Call this blood? That's no blood! Zaporozhian caps are red, and thus no one can see whether there be blood inside or not."

Said the boyar:

"See here, clerks, we must take note of all that goes on."

With these words, he left the barber's booth and took up his stand elsewhere.

"Flay him for good and all, the devil," muttered the youngest clerk as he contemplated the barber's craftsmanship. Then, seeing that his master and the two other clerks had gone ahead, he hastened to rejoin them.

They came upon four Cossacks, who, having discarded their long coats, had donned Persian and Tiurk rugs. They were vaunting their exploits before all and sundry.

"Well, brothers, we sent some logs, chained together, to the infidels. A gale was making white horses of the waves, and the chains clanked against the logs while we sat perdu among the reeds."

"Stop, Lavrey! You are wrong there. Let me tell the story. It was pitch dark, and a wind fit to tear your head off. The Turks were blazing away with their cannon at the logs. The logs were tearing at the chains, tossing up and down with their chains rattling—hell broken loose! The Turks were howling, "Allah! Allah!" Aha, you infidels! So you, too, are freezing ashore? Thus we weathered it out among the reeds. Then, when they were numb with cold and had ceased fire, we hurled ourselves into the sea. And it was all up with the Mohammedans."

The ataman's whiskered clerk strolled on to the scene in his smart blue kaftan, a sword swinging from his belt.

"And have all of you slipped past Azov?"

"Nay, Cossack. Some brought their canoes by portage from the Donets to the Mius, then they went downstream to join us in the sea."

The crowd was increasing, and one man jostled the other while questions and narratives were being repeated. To rid themselves of the inquisitive, the reivers turned to the clerk:

"Now, then, scribe, tell us your news."

"What can he know who only sits beside Kornei when the Assembly meets?"

"Brother Cossacks, I shall read you something which will interest you. It is about how the Zaporozhian ataman Serko dealt with the Sultan."

"That's a fine idea."

"We shall certainly enjoy hearing that. Someone bring a cask! Now, you, climb on to it."

A barrel having been rolled up, and a plank laid across the caved-in bottom, the scribe was hoisted up.

"Now read!"

The man adjusted his cap, straightened his sword, drew from an inner pocket a package of papers, moistened a finger, turned over the sheets and, with a glance over his audience, called out:

"One thing I beseech of you is not to interrupt."

Slowly he unfolded the document and read:

"From Chief Ataman Serko to Murad the Crimean Khan."

"Here, what are you reading? We want the letter to the Sultan of Turkey!"

"Brother Cossacks, I mislaid the note to the Turkish Sultan. It was at the head office, but I could not lay my hand on it."

Numerous arms were lifted into the air casting blue and purple shadows, which waved across the white sand.

"The devil must have swallowed it!"

"Go on, read the one to the Crimean creature."

"Well, Cossacks, this is what it says: *Our Zaporozhian brothers, headed by their leader, set out in their war canoes on the Black Sea. Valiantly they made their way to the very walls of Constantinople, which became shrouded in the smoke of their firearms. They struck terror into the hearts of the dwellers in Constantinople and brought them great tribulation. They then set fire to many surrounding villages and returned home with much booty.*"

"These must have been Nechai and Burliai, the Zaporozhian leaders. A gallant piece of work they made of it against the Turk."

"We keep their memory green to this day."

The boyar said to his clerks:

"Note well what has been divulged. These marauders heed not our sovereign's commands not to irritate the Turks."

The sweating, tipsy mob edged nearer to the clerk in the hope of hearing the note to the Sultan. The sun's withering rays beat mercilessly down on heads and shoulders. A bird of prey, scarcely visible to the naked eye, hung above the crowd like a fly against a high blue ceiling.

"Look! There's a soaring vulture."

"Where? I cannot see him. Aha, now I spy him, he's climbed high."

"That he has, the devil's scourge!"

The clerk clambered down from the barrel. The seafaring Cossacks yelled at him:

"Why are you serving the Don Cossacks? Why don't you serve the Zaporozhians, scribbler?"

"The Zaporozhian men have not bartered their freedom, but those of the lower reaches have sold themselves to the Moscow tsar."

"God grant that tsarist Muscovy may perish together with the tsar himself and all his brood."

One of the clerks asked:

"Didn't the tsar and grand prince recommend 'Raise no trouble with the Turks, await orders', boyar?"

The boyar, angrily prodding the sand with his staff, replied almost in a whisper:

"These bandits dishonour the tsar's name with their foul language. It is not fitting for us to be present."

The Muscovites withdrew.

In the middle of a damp street, his satin cloak spread on the mud, sprawled the Zaporozhian Cossack with his two captive women. He had placed one of them at the back of him, and his great shorn head with its trailing forelock was on her lap; the other sat on the sand beside him. The Cossack had released his hold on their plaits and, with half-closed eyes, was basking in the sunshine. Within reach of his right hand lay a Cherkess scimitar and a rusty flintlock pistol.

In mute and tearless despair, the captives sat with closed eyes, and their heads drooped on their dark, naked breasts. The boyar stepped up to the Cossack. The clerks halted at some distance away, but the master beckoned the youngest towards him, saying:

"Wake the man up."

Efim advanced sideways and gave the sleeper a gentle kick with the toe of his yellow boot.

"What the devil!" bawled the Cossack, while his sunburnt fist unclenched, and his knotted fingers gripped the hilt of his sword.

The boyar spoke loudly:

"Hello, Cossack, what is your price for these two wenches?"

"Twenty thalers per head."

The Cossack opened his eyes very slightly and withdrew his hand from the hilt of his scimitar, thrusting it into his red trousers pocket, whence he drew forth an immense pipe, a pouch and a tinder-box.

"You knave, why so high a price?"

Ignoring the boyar's question, the Cossack filled his pipe, struck a spark, puffed away for a while and then fell into a doze again.

"I shall give you twenty-five Moscow rubles—the rate of exchange is one ruble a thaler."

"My blood is still young and virile, and were I not in need of some ready money I'd marry them both myself. But I won't have my wares sold for a paltry sum."

The boyar waited silently.

The Cossack gave him a predatory look and slapped his trousered leg.

"I am still potent, but you, huckster, are already a dead man."

The boyar glowered down at the Cossack, spluttering and shaking his head with wrath. Thin grey wisps of hair shook at the temples from beneath his pink velvet cap.

"Only a fool talks like that; you can't take me in," observed the boyar.

"The devil take you, merchant. I shall not sell you my captives any cheaper than I told you, because I know you're impotent. I want the lasses to have a swarm of brats. You've no brains. Just look at their nipples, their bellies . . . you carrion, ugh!"

"I do not want them for milking. Let's strike a bargain at twenty-six thalers. I'll find the money."

Deliberately, the drowsy Cossack refilled his pipe and puffed away.

The group was approached by a tall dignified Turk or a native of Bokhara, wearing a white turban and long, bright robes. Very softly he murmured something in Turkish, whereupon the captives raised their heads. The dark face of the one who had the Cossack's head in her lap flushed with animation, while the eyes of the other smiled up at the Turk. But they were swiftly withdrawn, and the maid glanced timidly down at her slumbering captor.

The man in the turban stooped over the Cossack, saying loudly: "*Salem aleikum!*"

"Oho," replied the Cossack, opening his eyes while returning the greeting: "*Salem aleikum*, friend!"

"How much the two?"

"For you, Mohammedan, thirty thalers for the two."

"Hand over the captives, take the money."

The Cossack sat up with greater alacrity than would have been expected from so bulky a fellow, and making an armload of the two women, as though they were the smallest of girls, he rose to his feet.

"Here are the captives. Give me the money."

The turbaned man quickly counted out thirty thalers and proffered them to the Cossack. The captives stood in the background. The Cossack took each by the hand and passed them over to the purchaser, first the one he held by his right hand and then the one he held by his left.

The purchaser bowed low to the Cossack, put his hand on his heart as a sign of greeting to the seller of the captives and retraced his steps towards the town with the two maids in tow.

"That's none of your common hucksters; he's a real merchant, he is," growled the Zaporozhian Cossack. Stooping, he flung his cloak over his shoulders and collected his arms and cap in his enormous paw. By now his drowsiness had completely disappeared, and he marched off briskly to the nearest tavern.

Efim could not resist making the comment:

"Eh, boyar, I could have bought both wenches off that rake for a couple of jugs of vodka."

"I'll close your mouth with lead, menial," spluttered the boyar.

A small, almost naked urchin, black-haired and dark of skin, ran nimbly past the Muscovites brandishing a bright red earthenware jug and crying out: "Cossacks, beer!"

Passing Cossacks hailed the urchin:

"Hello, pickled navel!"

Noticing how greedily the Cossacks gulped down the beverage, the youngest clerk grumbled:

"Oh, these devils with their forelocks! They're always swilling and none the worse for it! As for me, no sooner have I drunk the stuff than I must break wind —but the old man is as fierce as a wolf."

Efim feared to walk too close to the irate boyar, so he waited to be summoned.

7

In the square, not far from the chapel of St. Nicholas, stood a wooden church dedicated to St. John the Warrior, the porch of which had a massive overhanging roof of oak. Under the eaves of this porch, above the folding doors, faced with wrought iron of a circular design, hung the image of the patron saint. St. John the Warrior was represented in half-profile, clad in dingy yellow armour, and girt about the middle with a narrow belt, from which dangled a short sword in a dark sheath. From below the armour peeped red breeches and yellow boots like stockings. The palm of the left hand was pressed against the saint's heart, while the right hand held a slender cross. The saint looked as though he were listening intently to something. Among drifts of cloud in a corner, faces could be faintly discerned.

Cossacks moved continuously in and out of the church, and before leaving the porch they would turn about and cross themselves. Candles were lighted before those images which, to their way of thinking, would prove of greater use during a campaign, or to which they had promised an ex-voto if they returned home safely. Both the priests who served the church hailed from Moscow, and each had brought with him an ikon painted by the tsar's own painters. The Cossacks would have nothing to do with these new-fangled ikons and said grumpily:

"Such ikons are not to our taste. Christ shouldn't look like a voivode—red-cheeked and plump."

Other sallies were bandied about concerning the priests.

"They are venerable antiques! One of them leads the other and questions him on the way: 'What's your name, Ivan?' And to this day they don't know which is Ivan and which Piotr."

"Their eyes are so dim with age that they are no longer able to read. So they babble the service from memory and will often say 'Amen' when they should say 'Allelujah'."

It was not often that a Cossack wedded in a church. Mostly they adhered to the ancient custom of proclaiming the names of groom and bride in the public square, a special platform being erected for the purpose. The groom was expected to bring with him witnesses for both himself and his bride.

The boyar, accompanied by his clerks, picked his way through the crowd and made for the church. Near the entrance to the square there was a row of booths and sheds, fitted up as drinking-places. As the Muscovites neared these booths they examined the wares and came to a halt. A bearded Persian in a red-brick camel's-hair kaftan and knee-breeches of the same hue paced up and down in front of his booth, crying:

"Brocade! Cloth!"

On turning he varied his cry:

"Cloth-of-gold! Cloth-of-gold!"

"Hi, pickles!"

"He's not a Greek, he's a Persian."

"Nay, how do you make that out? Those have a yellow streak painted on the nose and wear a white turban, whereas this one's turban is blue. Still, that's neither here not there. Hi, tick, how much do you want for the stuff?"

A second Persian sat at the back of the booth. He was evidently the owner, for he was dressed in a robe of gold cloth picked out with crimson arabesques,

while his head was swathed in a turban of gold-embroidered blue cloth. He munched sticky sweetmeats which he took out of a bag with his fingers. His glossy beard was strewn with a powdery substance from the sweets.

Whenever someone stopped to speak to his companion, he would smile and wave his arms, calling out louder than the other:

"Gold cloth! Come and buy; none in Moscow has the likes of it!"

The boyar walked over to the booth, threw a piece of bright cloth over his arm and said: "What fine brocade! I must buy some. Stuff like this is not to be found in Moscow."

He walked on, not so much as looking at the booths displaying damask, and stopped at one selling velvets of Lithuanian and Venetian manufacture.

"Truly, these bandits sell finer velvets than ever I set eyes on. This amber-coloured one has a golden sheen on it."

Another booth adjoined a shed to the rear. Scores of eager eyes twinkled through the chinks in the wooden walls of the ramshackle structure. The booth was attached to the shed and connected with it by a plank door which was half draped with a Persian carpet. The sides of the booth were hung with rugs of the most marvellous designs. The boyar gaped and almost dropped his gold-knobbed staff.

"Wondrous! Most wondrous! Never since the day I was born have my eyes beheld such rugs—and yet I have lived a long time."

A couple of tall aquiline-featured men occupied the booth; one of them wore a black cap with a fur crown to it, the other a shaggy sheepskin one from beneath which peered a pair of sharp eyes with bluish whites. Both had on sheepskin coats with the fleece turned outside.

"Persian infidels," murmured Efim.

The boyar cut him short:

"Churl, do not pass hasty judgments. Persians trade in cloth-of-gold; these traders, I think, are Armenians."

One of the salesmen, taking the mouthpiece of a hookah from between his teeth, shouted out something in a foreign tongue.

Then with a quick, feline gesture he resumed his hubble-bubble.

"Beelzebub alone knows what he is saying. Sucking at that gut as though he were sucking blood from a vein! Look, boyar! He's a devil escaped from the Last Judgment, yapping like a hell-hound," cried Efim.

"Hold your peace! If we wait we shall soon know what he means," replied the boyar, standing his ground obstinately.

The second man called out in Russian:

"Is it your wish to buy a little boy or a girl, my lord? We also sell rugs from Khorosan and Persia."

His companion shouted once more in broken Russian:

"Our wares cheapest!"

His voice was raucous and guttural; it seemed as if he were immensely delighted at being able to pronounce these alien words. He was a slightly built and yellow-visaged man, and as his sheepskin coat flapped open a long dagger in an embossed sheath gleamed from his belt.

The boyar approached and fingered one of the rugs.

"Fine rug. Made in Faraghana," said the one who had a few words of Russian.

Bargaining began. The clerks stood by, silently, yet expectantly, except for Efim, who hovered about stroking some of the rugs, laying his face against them

and sniffing. The boyar struck a bargain over one rug; the dark man rolled it up smartly, received the cash and started to talk while he slapped the rug with his brown hand.

"Buy little girl, my lord, little girl from Terek, very lithe and—tsa . . ." he clicked his tongue . . . "will dance, beat tambourine, play . . . more like bird than girl; she fly, not dance!"

Without uttering a word, the boyar beckoned one of the bearded clerks and handed the rug over to his custody.

"Take it to my quarters, Semion."

The dark man continued insinuatingly:

"There is one, breasts burnt out, Persian cups on breasts attached by fine chains. You may love her or give as present to someone; not be mother—no breasts, no fruit. Grow up be fierce like hyena. My lord can set her to guard harem, no one she let in; will torture wives, herself no fruit, and not let strange man visit others. Cheap, sir, little maid."

The boyar, making a semblance of not listening to the dark man's tirade, scrutinized the carpets.

"Our wares cheapest!" yelled the second salesman.

Realizing that this one understood little Russian, Efim remarked:

"You, Satan, are you a Persian or a Greek?"

"Me not Greek," replied the man, shaking his ruffled head, "me Armenian."

"Clerks, let us proceed."

The clerks bowed and followed the boyar. Efim drew nearer to his master and spoke rapidly:

"Did you note the one who does not speak our tongue, boyar?"

"Well, what of him?"

"I saw, boyar, that beneath his sheepskin he carries a huge dagger nearly two feet in length. I'll warrant you he sells his wares, overtakes the buyer, slits his throat—and resells his goods to someone else."

"Come now, not so fast! They sell at a reasonable price. Such rugs and at such a price could never be found in Moscow."

"What matters that to them? They are like the Cossacks—all they have is stolen. Did you see the numbers of little maids and lads in the shed? Eyes like sparrows cocked at every chink."

"Doubtless these folk are robbers to a man," agreed the boyar; "still, they charge reasonable prices."

Dogs came dashing between their legs; a stench of putrid meat filled the air. Flies buzzed and blundered into their faces. They had entered the part where comestibles were on sale.

In the glaring sunlight brown boars showing their fearsome tusks were swinging; they had been hoisted up by ropes and fixed on to the oaken rafters. Flies and maggots swarmed about the lifeless eye-sockets of these forest carcases. Legs of steppe horses with broad clumsy hoofs had been cleft in twain and were stood up against the wall. The butcher, a bearded Don Cossack, waving his blood-stained hands above his rough apron, never ceased from bawling:

"Who wants a steppe colt? Withers, head, all the hindquarters. Tasty when roasted with pepper and garlic, first rate!"

"Have you ever eaten horseflesh, friend?"

"I'll lay I have," replied the butcher briskly, "nor shall I deny you the pleasure

of eating it, Cossack; steppe colt's meat tastes sweeter than veal. Buy a sheep or a boar, I've got some of that, too."

"Well, show me a ram, and be sure it's not a cur."

"No time to go running after curs. A dog has no horns. Here's a ram."

"A fat one? No, that I'll swear."

"Pagans," said the boyar, spitting his disgust and lowering his voice, "gorging like Tatars on horse, reptile or any other vermin; foul beasts all of them!"

The clerks, fearing his wrath, lagged behind, while the old man, making a sharp clatter on the stones with his heels and raising dust with his staff, strode hurriedly away from the market with its sights and smells.

"He should not walk in that undignified way. But he seems to be angry, so we'd better let him be," said the young clerk to his seniors.

"Angry he certainly is. There's no approaching him in such a mood. We'd better be on our guard."

The boyar bent his way to the taverns, where he found the oaken sheds open; a stench of vodka, salt fish and dung greeted his nostrils. The taverns backed on to a wattle fence, against which red and black caps and sallow knees could be seen . . . men relieving nature. An acrid smell of urine and excrement was in the air.

The old boyar sneezed, wiped his beard with the tail of his coat and covered the lower portion of his face. He recoiled, staggered backwards and turned to his clerks. Compelling the boyar's gaze, Efim said:

"A brisk trade of the same sort goes on in the backwaters of Moscow, boyar, yet I reckon they go on better hereabouts."

"Where have you brought us to, you limb of Satan? We were on our way to church, and where do we find ourselves? You are sharp enough at times, you scoundrel, but you seem to be blind here."

"The church is a very old one, boyar, and is crumbling to pieces. Our people are building them a new one, but it would seem they prefer their own, so the men squatting yonder are making pillars to prop it up with."

"Blasphemer!" hissed the boyar! "Had you ventured to speak thus of a church in Moscow you'd have got lead poured down your throat. Blaspheme no more, or I'll have my will of you."

Efim expected a blow, but the boyar lowered his staff. Doffing his cap, the clerk said piteously:

"I pray you forgive me, boyar. I have the belly-ache from drinking their beer; my head is so befuddled that my tongue runs away with me, and I utter unseemly words."

"Well, well, I believe you. But it is not the drink which has puffed out your belly, it's the food. These brigands over-season their victuals. Besides, what is even worse, one does not know what manner of food they give us. Is it untainted? Observe them closer, clerk."

"I understand your meaning, boyar. Permit me to lead you along this path, which will bring us to the church."

The old man, afraid to outstrip the clerk, glanced gingerly at the taverns, where tousled locks and powerful arms, bronzed by exposure to the elements, lolled upon or drooped from the tables. The men were drinking hard, tobacco smoke filtered through the gaping doors, uproarious voices billowed forth.

"Stuff money into the publican's purse!"

"Drink freely, there's mountains of gold on the Volga and at sea."

"Moscow's ships will bring clothes and bread."

"What a nest of marauders!" wheezed the boyar.

## 8

The square was so jammed with Cossack men and women, together with peasants in bast shoes and wide trousers, over which hung their white homespun shirts, that it was almost impossible to elbow one's way through to the church. A platform had been erected near to this edifice. Two elderly Cossack women were deftly draping it with a dark blue material and spreading gaily coloured homespuns over the steps. The boyar gave an order in a low voice:

"Efim, go and find out for whom the scaffold is destined."

The clerk, grinning cheerfully over his master's grim joke, mixed with the throng and returned with a report:

"It is a wedding, boyar. These reivers refuse to recognize the priests from Moscow, so they turn their faces to the bench and get a whack on the buttocks with a stick."

"You wag! But what is their custom?"

"They stand, beat their foreheads on the boards and then beat the bride."

"Come, now, tell me what really happens."

"Here they are! Let us draw nearer so as to hear and see better, for are we not the ears and eyes of our sovereign lord?"

"Be not so glib in saying who we are. They take us for hucksters. Did not the bandit tell us so?"

"Draw nearer still, boyar. Here is the young couple."

Frol Razin, dressed in a new dark blue coat and bearing in his hands an ikon covered with a clean napkin, mounted the platform. He was followed by two witnesses, one leading the groom, while the other had the bride by the hand. The party, having climbed on to the platform, made their bows to the whole gathering. Frol, still holding the ikon, withdrew to the background without bowing. The witnesses stepped aside, each to his assigned place at the front angles of the platform. The groom then took his bride by the hand, and they again bowed to the people.

Stepan Razin wore a white satin coat taken in at the waist by a blue silk sash, into which he had tucked a short curved poignard in a silver sheath. The hilt of his weapon was ornamented with fishes' teeth. His unruly locks thrust out from beneath a scarlet cap bordered with fur.

The bride was clad in a brown dress and had a transparent veil of a dark blue material on her head; this trailed down her back and was interwoven with her golden plaits.

"He's wearing a stolen coat, boyar. It's the standard Moscow cut and is picked out with pearls," Efim whispered.

"Cease your chatter! Do you think I am unaware of the cut of that coat?"

One of the other clerks murmured:

"They suspect us—beware. . . ."

"You are as big a fool as the youngster," said the old man; "we are not speaking to anyone." Nevertheless, he glanced round him apprehensively and, seeing that none was observing them, added: "Oh for an executioner! A

suitable block has been set up. Then our stay in these parts would come to an end."

The groom, putting forward his right foot in its yellow boot and holding his cap in his left hand, crossed himself. The bride, keeping her eyes glued to the church, did likewise. Then they both bowed once more to the encircling crowd. The groom, his voice carrying easily across the square, declared:

"Gallant atamans and worthy Cossacks and all of you, my wife is present among you. To those who do not know her name I herewith announce it. She is Oliona Mikitishna, the daughter of Cossack Shishensko's widow."

"And are you aware, Cossack, that your father, Timoshei, died this very night?"

"No man can raise the dead, Cossack. What's done cannot be undone. I am fully aware of his death, and I mourn my father, but a rover's life is a short one, and he has but little time for enjoying his home. When the wedding is over we shall bear away the deceased. Luckily he died in his own home. Then we'll place a cross of honour on his grave."

"Marry her, Cossack. There is no time for a hunter to stay at home and shed tears."

"Your father was old; must have been nigh on a hundred years."

The groom turned to the bride.

"Oliona Mikitishna, be my wife! I shall love you and, as far as in me lies, shall care for you and bring you gifts."

Razin bowed low to his bride.

"And you, Stepan Timofeivich, be my beloved husband! My heart already cleaves to you alone, and now I shall surrender to you my body likewise."

The bride prostrated herself to the ground before her groom. The couple stood side by side facing the multitude.

The witness for the groom adjusted his Cherkess scimitar, which was strapped across his shoulder. He squared himself and stuck out his chest beneath the dark blue coat, but kept silent, while he twirled his small black moustache and smoothed his thick dark hair, which was like that of a Kalmuk, beneath his Zaporozhian cap. After a while he addressed the throng in softly spoken words:

"Atamans, captains, and all you who are gathered here! I, Vasili Lavreiev, commonly known as Vaska Uss, a Cossack, well known to you as acting ataman of our huntsmen, now pledge my word of honour in the name of Stepan Razin, the groom, known to me as a comrade-in-arms, that I shall keep him in the ways of truth so that he will not ill-treat his wife Oliona Mikitishna, and I shall inform you should he ever be unfaithful to his wife."

Without bowing, the witness withdrew to the back of the platform. A voice shouted from the crowd:

"We know these witnesses! A year or less hence someone else will be looking after the bride."

"That remains to be seen," cried another.

The bride's witness, a wiry man of middle height with a gold ring in his right ear, adjusted a short knife, stuck in his belt, and continued the ritual. His metallic voice rang out harshly and unpleasantly across the square:

"I am Sergei Taranuha, who on account of my wall eye am known familiarly as One-Eyed Serezhka. I have been out with the volunteers since boyhood; my sword has tasted the blood of Persians, Turks and Tatars. I know Oliona

Mikitishna to be an honest maid, and I will report to you without deceit, atamans, all you people, and to her husband Stepan Timofeivich, anything I may note, any transgression of which she may be guilty. Nothing shall I conceal."

This witness, too, stepped back.

"Should they separate, who is to judge which is the guilty party?"

"If they fall out, it's no business of ours."

"Now, then, newly-weds, kiss each other and offer the people vodka."

The young couple stepped back. An old Cossack woman in a woollen homespun skirt and a white blouse stepped briskly on to the platform. Her shrivelled hands held a horn-shaped rose-coloured coif embroidered with yellow glass sequins and white beads. The dame bowed to the bridegroom, kissed the bride on the lips and straightway with quick and deft hands removed the maidenly bandeau from her daughter's head, twisted her plaits into a knot and, baring the bride's neck and ears, placed the matron's cap over her hair. While doing these things the old woman kept up a running commentary:

"It was I who unsealed your ears so that you should listen to and obey your husband. I twist up your hair so that the plaits may not wave about and thus hinder you in your domestic work. Love your husband, little Oliona."

She prostrated herself before the bridegroom, saying:

"And you, dear Stepan, love my daughter, keep her well in hand and do not sin. If folk speak ill of her——"

"I will love her, Anna Andreievna."

The ataman of the Don troops, magnificently apparelled in a red velvet Muscovite coat with a stiff high collar, embroidered with pearls and gold thread, now mounted the platform with slow dignity. Frol presented him with the ikon. The young couple bowed from the waist to the ataman and kissed the ikon. Then the ataman spoke:

"Stepan and Oliona, I shall stand proxy to you in place of your father, Timofei Razin. And now I invite you to celebrate the wedding feast in the house of your godfather, who has given the bride away, since she has no father of her own."

Handing back the ikon to Frol, the ataman turned to the people and called out in a loud voice:

"Feast upon feast! To the living and to the dead, eternal remembrance! Yesterday we caroused, gallant atamans, and transacted business. Today I beg you to share in the joy of my godson and goddaughter and in mine, their father."

A tumultuous uproar rose from the square.

"That's all there is to it, boyar," said Efim.

The thin-toned old bell in the church of Ivan the Warrior began to ring. Thereupon the boyar doffed his cap, and the clerks theirs. As he crossed himself, the junior clerk thought:

"What if the old man insists on going to church? I'm hungry as a wolf."

The square was now empty, and the boyar made his way to the church.

## 9

As night fell it seemed as though a curtain of glass had been drawn across the torrid day and the river whose waters had shimmered white in the intense heat.

The shadows of houses and trees lay crystal clear and tinged with green on the white sand. The brightly coloured clothes of the merrymakers took on a dingy hue. For hours a large moon had been hanging in the watery green sky. Numerous were the lights which shone from the ataman's house, and the windows had been pushed open so as to let out the smoke and steam. Tipsy Cossacks, both men and women, and peasants in bast shoes and rough coats, tottering and jostling one another, came out on to the porch, from whence some crawled, whilst others, though doubled up, walked into the yard. Meanwhile the women and girls, also slightly drunk, formed a wide circle beneath the windows and started to tease the bride.

"You begin, friend."

"I will in a while."

One of them began the solo:

"We had at our wedding
Hops and a pipe,
Duh, duh, duh. . . .
Hops say: 'I'll drive 'em all crazy!'
An oak barrel, barrel, barrel. . . .
A hole, a hole is bored in it.
Who bored it? He sweated and sweated.
Stenka didn't sweat, but mistook his own. . . .
Duh, duh, duh. . . ."

"Stenka, wouldn't your bride submit? Stenka, chase her down here; we'll harness her, the sly-boots!"

"Now strike up, friend."

"You daughters of the devil, wherefore do you sing in the Muscovite lingo?"

"Ah, but the Muscovite fashions please the groom."

"By the Don a reed is broken,
By an old gaffer a maid is kissed,
Duh, duh, duh, duh, . . .
An oak barrel, barrel, barrel,
A hole, a hole is bored in it. . . ."

The ataman's porch shook to its foundations. There stood the bridegroom, his tousled locks concealing half his face, his white satin coat splashed with potent mead, but shimmering in the moonlight. Razin held a pistol in his hand. He stamped his foot.

"Hold, you wenches, and any other who dares cast shame on my young wife!"

The crowd of women fled helter-skelter from the ataman's yard, but even from a distance that terrible voice could be heard:

"Whoever among you dares utter a lie, him shall I bring to account."

He raised his head with a jerk. His face was pale, and the shock of black locks stood on end above the lofty brow.

"Where have you all got to, pack of scandalmongers?"

But now it was only the tipsy who wandered about the yard. No reply was vouchsafed. An old woman in a tattered skirt danced near the porch. Her thin

grey hair hung in wisps from under her kerchief and covered her face. She sang:

"Fear not, little woman, fear not. . . .
Slip on red boots
So that your heels may clatter,
So that your foes be silenced. . . ."

After a short interval, Razin said:

"You'll be given no chance, wenches, to trail Oliona's marriage shift about the town. Whosoever ventures to come for it will be tied up in a sack and drowned in the river like a cur. We've done away with some of the things the old folk were so fond of."

He cast a glowering look round the yard and went indoors.

"That you have, indeed! In days of old, brides and their grooms were wont to fast before their wedding. Now they eat and drink," someone shouted.

It was past midnight. They walked down the street with a storm lantern, preceded by six pipers. Ataman Kornei, bareheaded and heavy with drink, escorted the young couple to their home. Stepan, his arm encircling his bride, who wore a short blue coatee and a gilt circlet round her brow and hair, stepped firmly with his gaze fixed in front of him; he never uttered a word. The bride leaned her head with its wide, childlike eyes on his broad shoulder and whispered softly from time to time:

"Do you love me, Stenka?"

Razin was silent.

"Do not you hear, Stenka?"

"I hear, Oliona; but I say nothing, I love you too well."

Arrived at the porch of his godson's hut, the ataman kissed both the young people on the lips, saying:

"Make love, children. It is a fine night, the very kind to . . ." and with these words he left them and went home, where he sat at his liquor the night through.

## 10

From the hut placed at the disposal of the Moscow envoy the boyar sent his senior clerks on errands. Even the Tatar boy, who waited on him, had been loaned for the occasion to the ataman's banquet.

The windows of the boyar's chamber were closely shut. There were only two of the company at home: the boyar and his young clerk Efim. A long scroll of paper, consisting of sheets pasted together, lay on the table before him, and he held a quill in his hand. Discarding his habitual hauteur, the boyar sat with the clerk by his side, thus sharing a seat covered with the skin of a black bear. Candles were alight on the bare table. While the boyar was plunged in thought, the clerk remained silent. The old man was looking at the windows of the hut.

"It is well that the windows are covered in with stretched bladder; in this matter these marauders are wiser than we are in Moscow, for what with mica and the newest fancy of having glass put into frames of thin wood and making holes a yard wide in the walls—well, it all seems to me out of keeping."

"You are right, boyar. It is most unwise to make large windows," agreed the clerk in a low voice.

"I know now what it is I should write. Take up your quill and write to my dictation.

" 'To our Sovereign Lord, Tsar and Grand Prince Alexei Mihailovich, Autocrat of All Great and Little and White Russia, Your servant Pafnuti, son of Vasili Kivrin, sends greetings. In accordance with Your orders, Sire, I arrived here on the fifth day of August in the present year and took my place at the assembly of the Don Cossack Forces, as the guest of Korneiko Hodnev, Yakovlev, their ataman . . .'

"Have you got that down?"
"To the last letter, boyar."

" 'As I promised and undertook, Sire, to inform You about everything, without keeping anything back, I herewith send You my report without delay. The Don city of Cherkassi, Sire, is a fairly large town, situated on an island and surrounded by a wall overgrown with moss and in places sunken to ground level. The towers are in a dilapidated state, leaning over precariously. The city is divided into quarters, the special type of Cossack huts are built in rows and have vegetable plots and orchards in between them. The square, Sire, is a wide one and in it stands the church of Saint Nicholas the Warrior, but it is sadly neglected in appearance. They are building a new brick church, Sire, at your instructions, but their work is slow. The images in their church are of poor quality, being painted on a plain background instead of on a gilt one. The Cossacks, Sire, are not devout, but walk about their church as though it were a market-place. There are but few cannons on the towers; I think they must have drunk them away, for they are mighty swillers. Still, they are not troubled by the shortage of cannon, for none would imperil his face by thrusting it into such a hornets' nest. Alongside the square there are booths with many wares. They trade in gold cloth and prisoners, captured in Terek and from among the Kalmuks. The tradesmen, Sire, are Persians and Armenians. There are many taverns kept by Jews and Greeks. As You, Serene Highness, will see, I have obeyed Your orders in respect of my quarters, and fulfilled . . .'

"Is that a suitable expression, clerk?"
"Which are you referring to, boyar?"
" 'Fulfilled' . . ."
"To my way of thinking, 'carried out' would be better, boyar."
"Yes, that would be more suitable. Write it in . . .

" 'have carried out the instructions received from You, Great Sovereign, and from the State Criminal Investigation Council regarding the search for the instigator of the salt riots, whom I have found during my sojourn here. I have tracked down the robber family to the root from which it sprang, and the root, Sire, was a mean disreputable old man by the name of Timoshei Razin, who is renowned among the people for many marauding exploits. This old robber, Timoshei, Sire, I have put out of the way and silenced

his predatory tongue for ever. All this, as soon as I behold Your serene countenance, I shall report in greater detail, hiding nothing.'

"Have you got that down?"
"All is in order, boyar."

" 'Moreover, I report herewith that it would be desirable, I think, to lay hands on this our host, Hodnev, Yakovlev, and keep him under duress, but I lack the forces wherewith to put such a proposal into execution. . . .'

"Have you written all that?"
"I have written every word, boyar."

" 'The voivode lives too far away for me to communicate with him, and as for men of the regular Forces, apart from runaway menials and serfs seeking shelter in this sordid town, they are not to be found in these parts, and the few that may be found are not to be trusted; it would be dangerous. My severe judgment on the ataman Korneiko, Sire, is due to the fact that he receives merchants from Voronezh, and these merchants, Sire, commit thefts, which are to Your detriment, for they arrive in Cherkassi with provender and gunpowder, which is handed over to the volunteers for purposes of brigandage on the Volga and at sea. Moreover, the old Cossacks conspire with the ataman himself, sharing the wares and the profits thereof with these same robbers. Furthermore, Sire, the boyarina Morozova, sister to the Tsaritsa and Grand Princess, sent the gift of an embroidered carpet, depicting the Last Judgment, to the said Korneiko, and this carpet is hanging in his house in an unseemly place where all kinds of rabble forgather to play games and to carouse. Sire, we are surrounded by nobody but these Don Cossack marauders, and although in our presence Your name is uttered with reverence, nevertheless there is much improper talk, and they boast that they owe obedience to none.'

"Well, clerk?"
"A few more comments and it will suffice, boyar."

" '. . . Concerning the instigator, Sire, I have run him to earth. He is Stenka, the son of the old Razin; he is at home here, the wildest desperado of them all. He is also a kinsman of Korneiko the ataman and was wedded today—if such a ceremony, solemnized here, could be decently called a wedding. In the presence of a concourse of people in the public square he declared that he and his wench would be living in sin. According to our laws, this is a punishable crime, without torture; in Moscow such folk would be led through the market-place naked and scourged. . . .' "

A long silence ensued. Then the clerk said:
"I have written it all down, boyar."
"Do not hurry, clerk. Write fairly and properly. Be careful about your spelling, for I have many a time been scoffed at on account of such mistakes. If you fall into error, I shall belay you with my staff, and when the time is ripe I shall hand you over to the executioner."

"I have made mistakes in the past, boyar, but now I am expert in writing."
"No boasting!

"'. . . Sire, to capture the said leader by force is out of the question, but I think I could get at this Stenka by the way of the ataman Korneiko. I, Your humble servant, am cajoling the said ataman with such promises as "we shall shower honours upon you", and it is in my mind that he will come over to our side and will send the said robber Stenka Razin to Moscow with the Cossack troops. If this should come to pass, Your judgment, Great Sovereign, will be given upon him in Moscow. Your humble servant, Sire, begs your forgiveness in offering a few words of advice. The manner in which the brigands were apprehended at Pskov, when they offended Her Majesty the Queen of Sweden, is not suitable to these parts. It would be unsafe and would jeopardize many lives; whereas my suggestion will give less trouble and will prove more effective. I pray You, Sire, not to accuse me of being a braggart. I merely mentioned Pskov as an example. Further, Sire, I have to report that these Cossacks plough scarcely any land, and should one of the marauders seem zealous about husbandry, he is expelled from the community. The cause of such a state of things is, so I have been informed, that the voivodes and landowners are only feared in the Ukraine, where many peasants have settled.'

"We shall add more presently, clerk. Have you written everything in consecutive order?"

"Every word, boyar."

"I did not look you over before we started writing. What trousers have you on?"

"I am aware, boyar, that I am not fittingly clad, but I sweat so profusely when I write that I spread bits of old velvet over my knees."

"You have done well. Otherwise the entire document would have been smeared on your dyed homespun. Though I am able to say what I want and to state my case clearly, I find it difficult even to sign my name. In a little while, clerk, you and I will be able to write to the tsar as eloquently as Afonka Nastchokin. We must dispatch Senka, one of the other clerks, this very day. He has a long beard and is a good walker. He can beg his way to Moscow, for he looks like a vagabond, and with his staff he will reach his destination safely. He must be dressed in a rough coat and sent on his way; the river he must cross secretly. He needs no guide; he knows the way. And there is another piece of work I want from you, Efim. You must write a short letter to the voivodes that they are not to detain a clerk wearing a disguise."

"Indeed, boyar, this is the surest means for delivering your report to the tsar."

Children's voices sounded suddenly from without the window. The boyar said:

"Clerk, what is that howling?"

Efim ran to the window and, drawing aside the frame, peeped out. . . . "Only some Cossack boys, boyar. See, they are coming home from the steppe with their faces scratched. They play at war every day of their lives."

The clamour drew nearer, and the boys were singing lustily:

"Dunai, Dunai, Dunai,
Ivanovich Dunai's son;
Roam, Cossack, roam . . .
Heed not the cruel voivode . . .
Hi, Dunai, Dunai, Dunai!"

The boyar stretched his wizened hand across the table and clenched his fist.

"Got that song from your fathers, have you? Wait and see what we shall do to you! We shall plough your lands and backs and place the cruellest voivodes to govern you! And now, clerk, read me the report. I shall then sign it and set my seal upon it."

## 11

Stenka Razin sat in a tavern and faced the open door. His locks tumbled over his face. Two other young Cossacks shared his table, whose board was black from frequently spilled drinks. Razin's companions were Vaska Uss and the pale, lean, bony, scarfaced Serezhka Krivoi. The latter's left eye was blind and screwed up, but his right one was sharp and penetrating. The gold ring in his ear glittered. They were drinking strong mead from a tarred barrel standing behind the bar. The tavern-keeper, a black-haired Greek, kept an accurate count of the Cossacks' money while he waited for fresh orders.

"More!"

The rampart of the city wall, now sunk to ground level, faced the door; a haze of dust rose up from the white ribbon of the Don bank; the waters of the river glistened like silver brocade. War canoes were tethered alongside, and their black and motionless forms stood out clearly against the silvery backdrop.

"Voronezh merchants will provide gunpowder and lead," remarked Uss.

"Are they in the town?"

"Not yet, but their kinsmen, in Skorodumova, have stocks of everything."

"And I, brothers, have boyar ornaments."

Razin raised his tankard and brought it down on the table with a bang; the board groaned, and the walls quivered at the sound of his voice:

"Now, then, pickles and more mead!"

The Greek sprang from behind the counter and placed an iron pitcher on the table, making a bow as he did so.

"Money, Cossacks, money!"

"The devil take you, cannot you give us drink free of charge?"

Razin flung him a thaler.

"If there are jewels, there's no more to be said. We'll get a goodly cargo of lead shot on board the canoes, and then we can be off."

"We've got our hands, and they are capable enough."

"Another drink, brothers. Silver is plentiful on the Don; what we want is space."

"We are brothers, Stepan. Give us your hand!" And a long sinewy hand with gnarled fingers reached across the table. Razin took it in a firm grip. The

heavy, hard, stumpy-fingered paw of Vaska Uss sprawled on top of the other two.

"I, too, am your brother, Cossacks."

"Drink, drink your fill."

"That we shall, Stepanushko!"

"Beware of Kornei, Stepan. Your father Timoshei had his very good reasons for disliking him."

"I know, Serezhko, I know all there is to be known."

"Will you be our ataman this time, Stepan?"

"Most surely I will."

The crier marched past all the tavern doors beating a kettledrum suspended by a sash on his chest.

"Hi, Cossacks, the ataman has issued a summons for all to make for his headquarters."

"Time enough has been wasted already. We must take drastic action at once, or the ataman will wriggle out of our plans again."

"He'll not be given time to back out, for we shall be off and away, Seriozha."

The three stalwarts rose and tramped away.

## 12

Oliona, her head tied up in a dark blue damask cloth, and her golden plaits carefully hidden away, her broad hips swathed in a new homespun woollen gown, followed her husband about, pestered him, tried to catch his eye.

"Oh, Stenka, my heart is sore within me. What are you up to? Please tell me."

There was a sullen and far-away look in Razin's eyes as he stalked along in a loose black velvet overcoat, open and showing a narrow silken coat, which reached down to his knees; a red cap was perched on his head.

Glancing at Razin's cap, some old Cossacks muttered grumpily:

"Bred in the lower reaches, and yet he's wearing a Zaporozhian cap. Most unbefitting!"

Many tipsy men filled the square; voices were loud and quarrelsome.

"Stenka, have you eaten so many sweetmeats with your young bride that you want a taste of the briny waters of the sea?"

"My wife's a fine lass, but a Cossack is not meant to lead a comfortable life at home. My Oliona is . . ."—gently he patted her shoulder . . . yet unawares he frowned when for a brief moment he clearly saw before his mind's eye another face; just so had he patted that other's back in Moscow, she who had been dug out of the earth. . . .

"Now then, cap," and a strong arm flung a Zaporozhian cap high aloft into the blue air.

"Are you listening, Cossacks?"

"We are."

"Who among you is going to follow me to the Volga? To fish . . ."

"Big fish, Cossack?"

"Thousands of pounds!"

Caps went flying heavenward: Serezhka's sheepskin one was first, the next was Vaska Uss' Zaporozhian covering.

"Eh! Up goes mine!"

"Mine's as good as any, so up it goes!"

"And here's mine!"

"Listen here, you Cossacks and atamans; as many caps as volunteers."

Sounding his kettledrum, the crier crossed the square and entered the hut which served as headquarters.

"Look out there, Cossacks, here comes the ataman."

From the squat hut which served as headquarters, its porch almost trampled into the ground, Cossacks brought out the ataman's mace with its staff topped by a golden ball and a horse's tail. This emblem was carried by an old captain, Kussei by name, who was followed by other captains and a clerk. The whole company was attired for the campaign in dark leather coats, except the ataman Kornei, who wore a scarlet kaftan. The crown of his sheepskin cap was adorned with a cross of gold braid. In his hands he held the insignia of his authority—a sort of long-hafted hammer. The haft was encased in a black material bound with silver thread. Everyone gathered to form a circle round the front of the church; they doffed their caps and crossed themselves. On entering this circle and coming to its centre, the ataman, too, pulled off his cap and crossed himself. As he did so his ear-ring glittered and hid an iron-grey lock, which had slipped on to his right shoulder.

Casting their headgear on the ground, the captains came forward and, bowing low several times, laid the mace at the ataman's feet. Then they and the ataman resumed their caps. Kornei Yakovlev tossed his head and spoke in loud tones:

"Gallant atamans, please summon those Cossacks who, without permission from the Assembly, are planning an expedition of their own."

A passage was made for those Cossacks who had so recently tossed their caps in the air; now they stood before the ataman, who, lowering his hammer to the ground, surveyed the crowd. His ear-ring glinted. Loudly he addressed the assembled men:

"Is it not known to you, Cossack youths, that in this office we possess stocks, chains, a block and a stout lash?"

"Ay, father, we know."

"Whom have you chosen to lead your expedition?"

"Stenka Razin, your godson."

"And were you not aware of the Assembly's secret decision?"

"No, father."

"Then let me tell you. At a secret session of the Assembly Stepan Razin was selected by the elders to act as captain of the unit which is to be stationed in Moscow during the coming winter. This is no mean distinction for him. My godson will make the journey betimes, and when he returns he will bring back from the tsar gratuities for all and instructions concerning the matter on which the Astrakhan voivodes wrote to us as to what direction the Crimean Tsar would advance with his troops. About the campaign itself we have been instructed by our spies. Furthermore, we wish to find out in Moscow whether it would be timely for us to create impediments in the path of the Turk or, contrariwise, to give that particular piece of business the go-by. We ourselves are in complete ignorance as to the course the tsar will decide for us to take. Therefore I, the chief ataman, order you youngsters to forget about my godson. But since, on account of your youth, you could not attend our deliberations, I absolve you

from your guilt, sparing you imprisonment and not forbidding you to depart, for from bygone days the Cossacks have ever been rovers. In addition, I know how futile any prohibition would be, for you would have your desire in any case. Therefore you must choose another leader with whom to roam over mountains or seas or wherever the fancy guides you."

"Your words ring sweetly upon our ears, father, and we give you thanks."

"We choose Serezhka!"

"As you will; anyone but my godson. As for you, Stepan, fail not to obey the Assembly; it did not forgather under the mace for nothing. Go home, and, little by little, make arrangements about food, sledges and horses. As soon as the snow falls, the elder will summon you."

Silently, Razin raised his cap and, leaving the crowd, slipped his arm round his wife.

"Home, Oliona!"

Oliona tore the shawl off her head and waved it aloft as she turned a radiant face towards the ataman. The latter walked slowly towards the hut, where he handed over his hammer of state, and then waved an adieu to the young woman's greeting.

"Come, little wife! I've been sold to Moscow, and yet you have the heart to wave a greeting to the hucksters."

"Oh, Stenka, think of all the days I shall be with you, thanks to the ataman Kornei."

"A woman's heart finds joy even in a noose!"

He spat and began to sing unconcernedly:

"The Cossacks are roaming,
Tempered arrows they are sending
Across to the Yaik."

With hanging head, and grinding his teeth, Razin crumpled his cap between his fingers.

"Razin can't be bought so cheaply."

"Oh, Stenka, I'm afraid. Don't grind your teeth! You grind them even in your sleep."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BOYARS' MOSCOW

### I

THE fair-haired boyarina tore off her coif, which was sumptuously embroidered with gold and pearls, and put it down on a bench.

"Now, then, girls, who is to be the husband?"

"It's your turn to be husband, boyarina."

"A husband beats his wife, but who could beat you? You must be the husband."

A chambermaid entered the room.

"A layman is asking to see you."

"I receive monks only. Keep any other man away from me."

"He says he used to be a monk, and that the boyarina knows him. He wept as he begged of me to allow him into your presence."

"Who can he be? Bring him in."

The maid introduced an emaciated man in a ragged coat and torn felt boots. Arrived at the threshold, the man sank to the floor and began to wail:

"Oh, mother princess, I am rotting away. They've taken from me my human countenance. Intercede for me!"

"Who is treating you so cruelly, Vasili?"

"The patriarch gave orders, and I was delivered into bondage to the boyar so as to redeem the property."

"What property?"

"Oh, be merciful! I am not guilty either in soul or body, and yet . . . Boyar Kvashnin stored a sealed coffer in the treasury annexed to our monastery; the coffer contained money—a thousand rubles, so 'twas said—and a velvet cap with ornaments and a large pearl loop, also a necklace of precious stones and some gold buttons. And all this was stolen from the coffer. I am but a poor peasant without a travel permit, and my only garment is this monkish habit. So how could I present myself before the boyar and plead my cause and let him see for himself that everything was safe under the seals? Neither soul nor body are guilty, but by order of the patriarch my habit was taken from me, and, clothed in rags, I was delivered over to the boyar. But Ivan Petrovich Kvashnin, being greatly incensed by the fact that sentence had been declared against his claims, and that he was not allowed to take action against the monastery for the restitution of his money and property, now declares: 'As long as you live, old devil, I shall make you haul water for me from the Yauza; neither shall I feed you; they have handed you over to me for good and to do with as I please.' Thus, mother, they make me haul not water, but dung, and they make me clean out the privies and cesspools and do all kinds of debasing work. When I show signs of complete exhaustion they scourge me and give me no food or footwear. See how torn are my felt boots! Even these were given me out of pity by the merchant Eremov, whose shop is near the Varvarski Gate. When boyar Kvashnin —a curse upon his soul—is in his cups, a thing which happens almost daily, he summons me, orders me to be dressed up in a jester's garb with horns, makes me sing filthy songs and crawl on all fours and bark like a dog; and when my voice fails me he kicks me in the ribs and belabours my spine with anything he can lay hands on. As to his wife, boyarina Ustinia Vasilievna Ivanova, once or twice a week she lies drunk in the bath-house, which is in the courtyard by the hop garden; here the girls steam her on the top shelf; she also calls on me to come and steam her, and the bath-house is so hot that it's enough to make the walls crack, and I cannot stand heat at all; I get so weak that I am not able to stand on my feet, my head's all of a buzz, and I feel as if I shall go mad. 'More steam, you rascal,' cries she; 'you steamed the abbot, now steam me—I am higher born than he.' And I throw the hot water over her and swish her with the birch bath-broom, and her lying there all the time looking for all the world like a loathsome mass of flesh. And when she has a call of nature she does it right before my face into a bucket and mentions the private parts as coarsely as any peasant. I lug water till I drop, and if I do not give her enough she orders me to be soused with the contents of the aforesaid bucket, and cries out in most lewd terms: 'There is the grace of the Holy Ghost for you, fright.' But she will

not allow me to discard my rags even when steaming her up. Oh no, I've got to keep my clothes on! After that a man has only the strength to creep along all of a tremble, with feet and head numb, and crawl into some stinking and filthy dark corner wishing the end of his days might come. Serene princess, if only you in your mercy would take pity on a poor old man!

"I am no princess, but merely a boyarina, Vasili. How can I intercede on your behalf? You know well that every one of us is powerless against the tsar and the patriarch."

"Oh, dear mother princess, please ask boyar Boris Ivanovich. I beg you to persuade him to have a talk with boyar Kvashnin and to ask him why he tortures my soul in this way. Why does he want to deprive me of my human dignity?"

"You may rest assured, Vasili, that I shall not forget. Go now. I shall tell Boris Ivanovich."

"I implore you, mother, with tears and protestations."

The old man took his leave.

"Now, then, girls, let's begin."

"Here's a bench for you, boyarina. Lie down and fold your hands."

The bench on which the boyarina lay down was covered with a rug. Near her right hand the girls placed a whip. Then, forming a circle round the bench, they began to sing:

"Now my new house
Is standing open wide.
Now my old husband
Is lying dead. . . .
Now my old husband
Rises from his coffin,
Rises from his coffin
To beat his young wife. . . .
I did not submit
To my old husband. . . ."

"Get up, boyarina, and whip your wife."

At this moment Morozova's old nurse entered the room. She had a keen and sly look in her eyes and wore a coif adorned with large beads, and a loose coat of brown cloth, embroidered at the hem with light-coloured silks. Pounding away with her crutch-stick, she fell upon the girls:

"You young jades, may the ague take the lot of you! When the boyar himself deigns to come he'll dispatch you to the police, and there you'll get a proper taste of the lash. As for you, mother, you should be ashamed of yourself for thus teasing boyar Boris Ivanovich. How he cherishes you, conforms to your every whim, cannot take his eyes off you! God forgive me, but he'll soon be placing you in a glass case and praying to you. You mean more to him than the patriarch himself. And who is it makes you gifts of jewels and outlandish birds which talk? Have you no respect for him at all, Ilinishna? What a game to play! You know that the boyar's hair is growing grey from worrying how best to please you. And well you know that he detests any mention of old husbands. What if he were to stroll into these apartments and overhear you? He'd be very angry. Then what? There'd be thunder for you, and lightning for me!"

The hefty old woman brandished her crutch and again fell upon the girls.

"Away with you, giggling hussies!"

"Oh, nanny, we are no longer playing; do let them stay. Now that you are here, pray tell us a story, then we'll keep as quiet as mice."

"A story? Very well. Why not tell a story, mother Ilinishna?"

With help from the girls, nanny climbed on to the stove settle.

"Bring me a bench."

The girls dragged along a bench on which the old nurse firmly planted her feet. Bowing her head, she leaned upon the crutch-stick and began:

"Once upon a time there lived a lazy peasant. Everything slipped through his fingers; no work he did ever went well. He lived a wretched and lonely life, for no woman would consent to marry him. The peasant had a favourite saying: 'When God gives, He hands it through the window.' One day, when the lazy peasant was asleep, he heard a voice saying: 'Rise, Toma, and go to the field and dig under the oak tree on the mound; there you'll find a treasure.' The lazy peasant awoke, scratched himself, turned over on the other side and fell to snoring again. Once more he heard the same voice: 'Get up, Toma, go and dig.' The man sat up in bed. Still, there is nothing like sleep, and he could not keep his eyes open. Dawn had not yet broken outside; the second cock-crow had only just reached his ears, so it could hardly be later than midnight.

"Why so early? So he lay down and fell asleep again. But the voice called for the third time, and it seemed to him that someone had jabbed him in the belly. Lazybones got up after all, put on his felt shoes, tied up the rags which swathed his legs, groped in the closet for a spade and crept out on to the porch. By this porch stood a covetous merchant. He had been up all through the night, for he could not sleep from worrying about his warehouses being broken into by burglars. He asked our lazybones:

" 'Why so early abroad, Toma?'

" 'Well,' said the peasant, 'thrice has a dream wakened me urging me to go and dig for treasure on the mound in the field. But for the life of me I don't see why I should go. I just do not want to. Look you, if it had been some man who had told me this, then 'twould be a different matter altogether.'

" 'Let me go in your place. I am cold, and if I dig a bit I shall soon be warm,' said the merchant, as he glanced towards the east, where the day was now dawning, and thought: 'It'll soon be light; no fear of burglars then.'

"The peasant handed him the spade and went back to the hut to sleep. The merchant found the mound, had a look around the oak and set about digging. He dug and dug until he dug up a dog's carcase; whereupon he grew exceedingly wrathful, and talking to himself he inveighed against the lazybones: 'When you need them most, you have no brains, but when it comes to playing a practical joke on a fellow, you are bright enough. I'll give it you, my lad!' And so, my queen, my mother from over the seas, the merchant dragged the carcase to the village, and as he dragged, he thought:

" 'What a weight you are, may the ague take you!'

"When he found himself level with the peasant's hut he seized the carcase by its tail and flung it through the window, which was not much above ground level. As the window smashed up, he bawled:

" 'There is one for you, you lazy devil!'

"The dead dog fell into the hut with a thud—and the carcase scattered gold all around. The noise made Toma jump.

" 'Must be the overseer summoning me.'

"Then he saw that the whole hut was bestrewn with gold. The peasant scratched himself, rubbed his eyes and said:

" 'Indeed, the saying is a true one—When God gives, He hands it through the window.' "

"Oh, nanny, this is a delusive tale. It is a deceitful one, because God is chary of His gifts. Only a short while back old Vasili came to see me. The patriarch has handed him over unconditionally to boyar Kvashnin, and the boyar so ill-treats him that the poor old man can hardly stand on his feet. Do you fancy that Vasili has not prayed to God and various saints? And yet God sends him no aid."

"Mother Ilinishna, my queen, wherefore do you utter such things in the girls' hearing? What if from sheer stupidity they should blurt your words out and perhaps distort them? Then they'll be seized with remorse and will confess: 'We heard the boyarina say this.' The patriarch and the priests are tenacious; there is more than one man whom they have brought down to the grave for the faith's sake."

"Nothing will happen to me, nanny, but . . . oh, how dull life is! I am bored to tears. . . ."

"Oh, my queen, my mother from over the seas, resist such blaspheming. What has God to do with it? If it be your fate, a covetous merchant will bring wealth into your home and not take it away. As for the old man you speak of, it was his fate to suffer misfortune. The people dislike monks; recently they again complained to the tsar, saying: 'The crowd throws sticks at us when we walk round the monastery in procession bearing the cross and the holy banners.' And those whom the people do not love are not pleasing in God's sight."

"The people do not like the voivodes or the boyars, nanny; do you mean, then, that God does not love them either?"

"Ah, mother Ilinishna, you befuddle my old brain! The voivodes and the boyars serve the tsar; the monks serve God, but how do they act? Outwardly they keep the fasts, and secretly they commit fornication, are covetous, hold persons in bondage to the monasteries, practise usury. Not so long ago the monks made themselves responsible for many a rowdy display on account of their selling vodka at fairs. Vasili may be getting what he deserves."

"Yes, nanny, if the old man had been an abbot. But he is nothing but an illiterate peasant, who, maybe, fled to a monastery in order to escape some voivode's cruelty. To come back to your story. It praises a lazybones, so it stands to reason that a lazy man invented it."

"That is not for me to say, Ilinishna. I just told the first story that came into my head."

"It was not a very cheery one. You'd better tell us what news you have gathered in Moscow."

"Oh, my queen, what is there in Moscow to be cheerful about? Listen, and I will tell you. First there were drinkers, who, returning from the taverns, cursed the boyars, and because of this boyar Kvashnin's secret police were hauling them off to the courts for getting them a taste of the cudgels. Then a profligate wench, Ulka by name, had her head cut off for suffocating her offspring. Moscow is ever like that. What is there that is cheerful about the city? The tsaritsa's court in Kislovka has three gates, and there are watchmen to guard them, yet publicans and drinkers were caught within the precincts, and among them the

widow Dashka, one of the tsaritsa's waiting-women. I expect you know her, Ilinishna? Such a bustling, merry soul, and—dear me—what a chatterbox!"

"Yes, I knew Darya. I am sorry. What's become of her?"

"She cast spells on the tsar's towel, and also, so 'twas rumoured, caused the tsaritsa's footprints to vanish."

"Persons are tortured on the strength of the stupidest slanders. I do not believe in evil spells, nanny."

"What, not believe in evil spells! Oh, you beautiful queen! An evil spell is a dreadful thing. Now I shall tell you more about this merry Moscow. The constables turned everything inside out in the foreign quarter between the Arbatski and the Nikitski Gates. Many bandits were discovered there; they stored their loot in an empty homestead beyond the Nikitski Gate; this place belonged to some German persons, who carted the stolen property; watchmen from the Arbat as well as an usher from the Law Office told the bandits whom to rob. They all received a mighty flogging, and tokens are now flaming on their bleeding backs."

"Alas, nanny, there's too much beating going on. For one man proved guilty, there are ten innocent people murdered."

"But, mother Ilinishna, d'ye mean that thieves should go with impunity? Should they be offered sweet hydromel and patted on the head?"

"I told Boris Ivanovich that flogging was wicked, and he replied: 'We have adopted such methods from overseas; there, people are tortured even more drastically than they are here, they are burned at the stake.' What is the worst thing of all, we here know nothing, neither about the sun nor the firmament nor alien faiths and peoples. The priests see to it that we remain in ignorance. Tell me, have you seen any foreign envoys?"

"No new ones that I know of, mother Ilinishna. The Germans have been among us for a long while now, and some of them have left for Persia. Also some Don Cossacks have been carousing about the town these last few days; they've been delegated to wait upon the tsar and hear what he has to say about gratuities, bread and supplies of all kinds. By the way, mother Ilinishna, I have borne in mind long ago to tell you, but the matter always escaped my memory: folks say that among these Cossacks is the man who was the ringleader in the salt riots and took so much of the Morozov possessions. Should we not do well to verify these rumours and find people who would recognize him? Then you, mother, could whisper a word into boyar Boris Ivanovich's ear. He could trace the man through Kvashnin Ivan Petrovich, who is at the head of the *Zemski Prikaz*. If that man is in his own body here and is tracked down, just think of the honour which will accrue to you being the first to discover him! Our sovereign tsar himself would pay you due respect."

"Nanny, don't you think there are enough informers already in Moscow? Do you wish me to be added to the list? Did I understand you to say that this man was the leader in the salt riots?"

"The very one, my queen, the very one."

"Girls, go back to your room, we'll have no more games today."

The girls obeyed. The boyarina herself locked the door behind them, came back, sat down on the bench at nanny's feet and bowed her head.

"Why are you hanging your head, and why are your eyes so dim? I wonder whether someone has cast the evil eye on you, my Ilinishna. Come now, won't you tell me?"

"That's all nonsense! I do not believe in spells, nanny."

"Spells—nonsense! Therein you are badly mistaken, sweetheart. God shield you from the evil eye!"

"No one loves me, nanny. How dull and stifling it is here! If only I could be free! Even to wander off with the pilgrims."

"Why are you so distraught, my queen? What has happened, mother Ilinishna? Do boyar Boris' love and fondness not suffice you?"

"My heart is on fire, burning like resin, nanny. My young blood is hot within me and my husband is old and withered. . . ."

"Do not tell him so in a moment of passion, my little mother; God forbid that you should do such a thing! He loves you and thinks nothing of himself, so deep is his love. And I love you, too, have loved you since you were a baby. I love the tsaritsa Maria far less than I do you. You were my nursling, I sang you to sleep."

"Long may be your days, nanny! . . . Why should you die for my sake? Listen to what I have to tell you," said the boyarina as she raised her head. "You said I was to witness against that Cossack who took part in the salt riots, whereas I, in truth, long to see him here, quite close by me, and to ask him many things I should like to know."

"Come now, boyarina, let us repeat together, 'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Do you truly wish to see this monster with your own eyes? What if he should kill you? For if he turns out to be the leader of the riots, then he is a Cossack bandit and a slayer of men. . . . 'My heart is on fire!' Why, that's nothing but a frightful disease! Plague upon the fellow!"

"Try to understand. I should have met my death then had it not been for this Cossack. It was he who averted it. Or if they had not killed me they'd have set the house on fire. And me lying there helpless! I still recall his very words: 'Sleep; no one will touch so much as a hair of your head, nor will they set fire to the house.' I was ill and frail at the time, but I clearly saw the gold cloth, the precious stones, the men's faces—clearer now than then. I recall the expression of his eyes, terrifying eyes. . . ."

"What else could he do but spare you, boyarina Ilinishna? Think you what he was up to, the robber. Looting the boyar's chattels. And they might have murdered you!"

"The looter does not pause to think, neither does he fear anything. When a pack of robbers is gathered together, no one is specially guilty. Either all are guilty or none, say what you like."

Once more the boyarina's head drooped upon her breast. It seemed to the old woman that she was weeping.

"Oh, Ilinishna, what is it that ails you? Had I better call in Tatianka the sorceress? Maybe you have fallen under some spell. There is no truer saying than that gold becomes dross, and that pearls die at times."

"I want to have a look at him. May it not be that he will tell me something that will cheer me and calm me? He is not like one of us. He is free, up in the mountains, at sea, in the steppes—in those endless steppes. The mountains soar above the clouds, the sea is an unknown, immense ocean, the steppes are a world to themselves, blue and green; innumerable creatures of all kinds, small and large, are their dwellers; snow-leopards are roaming about on the ground, and in the lofty heights of the clouds mighty eagles, with beaks hard as iron, are spanning their vast wings. . . ."

The boyarina sprang to her feet and started pacing up and down the room restlessly.

"Bring him here, nanny! Find him. I long to see him. I shall give you anything you ask for. I shall then really believe that you do love and pity me. If only you at least could find it in your heart to love me. . . . The girls, no, certainly not, they do not love me, they only flatter and pay me homage out of fear."

"Oh, my queen, you are delirious . . . think only, were the boyar Boris Ivanovich to find out that you have received the bandit in your chamber through my help, what would happen? And find out he will, you may be sure, every word, which passed between this brigand and yourself. If what the people say be true, mother, he certainly was the leader of the salt riots. The boyars will most surely put him to the torture, and while under lash and flames, do you imagine for a moment that he will not disclose where he went, to whom, and what you spoke about? How should we act then? You are sheltered by a strong wall; your boyar husband will defend you to the bitter end. But what about me? It is a fearsome thing to lose one's life on the gallows without the last sacrament. I am a lone woman, like a blade of grass in the wind, and my soul will fly away from sheer fright, for they flog you with three lashes and from head to heel, while the blood oozes out of you."

"You say that I am sheltered by a strong wall. But you are behind me, and I am your wall. I fear no one and nothing. What does fill my mind with alarm is to be cooped up in my apartments, drinking potent mead through utter boredom, to spend my time in useless embroidery, and to go from one church to another listening to priests and beggars. Oh, how weary am I of it all! An you love me, nanny, take my side and bring him here as soon as possible."

"Dear me, dear me! What a peck of misfortune have I not brought upon my stupid old head! You cannot be in your right mind, Ilinishna. Apart from that, where is your Cossack staying? Perhaps he and his men have put up in some far-away suburb, for they are free Cossacks, and we are the servants of our masters. And I doubt whether they'll stay quietly in their quarters, but will go wandering about Moscow. Night imposes no restraint on evildoers; indeed, it leads them on. Stocks and bars are nothing to them. They are not afraid of guards. Besides, a body cannot drag a man, armed with pistol and sword, to the police-station, and, moreover, you have to remember that the watchmen themselves are at one with them. Where there is no thoroughfare, an evil man will scramble across an empty courtyard—at least, so I have been told. How is an old woman like me to find such a fellow quickly? Nay, Ilinishna my queen, you must be patient in awaiting this meeting."

The boyarina stamped her foot in a pet.

"I want to see him soon. I want to!" She picked up her coif from the seat and started to adjust it, but she flung it aside, and it fell to the floor. "Do you understand, nanny?"

"I do, my queen from over the seas; I do, Ilinishna. I shall forthwith dispatch someone with brains in his head to find that viper. Oh, God, forgive me! What a calamity I have brought upon myself and what terror to my soul. Woe is me! Well, I am going now, boyarina."

The old woman, her crutch-stick tapping on the floor, hastily withdrew from the room.

2

Stepping softly, though heavily, in his morocco leather boots devoid of the usual heel-irons, prince Yuri Dolgoruki issued forth from his private apartments. Two menservants, in white Tatar coats, were waiting for him in the embrasures at the sides of a cabinet, filled with silver utensils, which adorned the monotonous dark blue background of the dining-room. The steward, a venerable grey-haired man, stood by the table as though rooted to the spot. The board was illumined by many three-pronged candlesticks, the light of which played upon the blue tablecloth, embroidered at the corners with silver grasses and golden hoofs. Crossing himself, the voivode took his place at the board. His hawklike eyes strayed to the gilt loving-cups and the food displayed on silver platters. Apparently he found everything to his taste save for a guttering candle, which he silently pointed out to his steward, who deftly drew from the pocket of his dolman a pair of snuffers for dealing with the erring candle.

"Tell the vestibule attendant to introduce boyar Kivrin and no one else."

"He has been told, prince."

"To usher in the boyar alone?"

"He knows your orders, prince."

"Why have you placed these pillars here?" said the voivode, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the two young servants standing near the windows.

"It is in accordance with the rank of your visitor, boyar-prince."

"No ceremony today."

"You may go," said the steward, waving the silent attendants away.

"You, too, Yegorka, follow them and wait until I summon you."

The steward touched the floor with his fingers, so deep was his departing bow.

The tap-tap of a staff could now be heard approaching; it stopped within the low doorway, and the visitor revealed his shiny bald pate. A thought flashed through Dolgoruki's mind: "A low door—whoever enters willy-nilly has to pay homage to the host. . . ."

Pafnuti Kivrin, in his wide rustling kaftan of rich brodade, entered the chamber, straightened his back, leaned with his left hand on his staff, crossed himself before the ikon in the corner and said in a resonant voice:

"All honour to you! Are you in good health, prince and voivode?"

"Yes, I thank you. I pay no heed to precedence, so take a seat wherever you will, boyar Pafnuti Vasilich. You are most welcome."

"Such goodly cheer invites one to sit down. I shall take my seat here, prince Yuri."

Kivrin extended his yellow, wizened hand towards the viands.

"Well, if this pleases you, we shall make a start on it. Here is some French wine, boyar."

"Oh, prince Olexiyevich, we shall partake of whatever you please to offer."

"I offer you, boyar, that which your eyes fancy, or your hand reaches out for; at my table you are not so much a guest as a host. There are none to serve us, for I have sent the menials away. No superfluous ears should harken to our talk."

"Wise is prince Yuri. My heart goes out to him. Mother Russia is kept alive by men like you."

"Fill up your glass, boyar Pafnuti. The wine is out of my reach, so I cannot pour it out myself. Pray take what you desire."

"I dare not indulge much nowadays, prince Yuri. The years are growing upon me. It was not thus in olden times, was it? Just one cup of Cretan wine, and then it's 'Amen' for an old man."

"Is that the tsar's kaftan you are wearing, boyar?"

"It is a good brocade, and the sable is untouched by moths—it's from Yugorski. God grant long life and the best of health to our sovereign the tsar; he does not forget his humble servant Pafnuti Kivrin. And your kaftan, prince, I see it is of regulation cut and adorned with gems of large size. It is one of the Dolgoruki heirlooms."

"It is. So you've recognized it, boyar? Well, Pafnuti Vasilich, here's to the tsar's health."

The prince rose with cup in hand, and the old man followed suit, his wolfish eyes looking calmly into the prince's face.

"To the good health of our sovereign tsar and grand prince Alexei Mihailovich!"

After draining their cups, each overturned the empty vessel above his head.

"A toast to the tsaritsa, boyar."

"To the tsaritsa and the grand princess Ilinishna! I fear, prince Yuri, that if I go on like this, my old head will fail to remember what it was I meant to confide to you and to hear from you."

"You will remember. To the tsaritsa, boyar."

"Her health, prince Yuri."

"We should drink to the whole of the tsar's family, but I fear my head will not be equal to it."

"Let us be seated, Pafnuti Vasilich."

"Ay, let us sit down, prince Yuri. I am already feeling slightly the worse for our libations."

"I have a purpose in inviting you to sup with me, boyar; Ivashka Kvashnin is incensed against you, Vasilich, and is trying to incite Morozov against you. Morozov, as you are doubtless aware, is on intimate terms with the sovereign, and as you are further aware, Morozov has been given certain powers. . . ."

"I have already discovered this, prince Yuri. But one thing remains obscure. Why is Ivashka Kvashnin angry with me?"

"Do you not know, boyar? I do."

"I am listening, prince."

"Ivashka alleges, boyar, that you are enticing the best men of his department away from him and enrolling them into your service and interfering with all his cases."

"This is truly slanderous, prince Yuri. In what way do I interfere? My men are not investigators. I have named them 'informers'. That is a word familiar to all, and the function they perform suits their name. They deal mainly with cases of petty thieving, which they report to the voivodes; they take no action in the cases themselves. Kvashnin's men know all the regulations for crimes against the state and wear uniforms denoting their authority. Kvashnin's men are clad in coats dyed the same colour as are those of the musketeers. 'Tis said that those of Yakovlev's department wear scarlet; that others belonging to Piotr Lopuhin's, are blue; their caps are like those of the musketeers, and it is only the weapons which are missing. My men are dressed in black skull-caps; they have rough homespun coats and handwoven linen and suchlike rough peasant clothes."

"I do not intend to go into details, but am merely warning you that Morozov means to malign you in the tsar's ears. The slander will start from the premise: 'Kivrin's report contains much which is false.' This report was supposed to have been written by you when you were away, but what it was about I have not troubled to learn."

"I am profoundly obliged to you, prince Yuri. The report can be none other than the one I wrote while I was still on the Don, and it concerns marauders. Indeed, you are a true friend to me, prince Yuri, like kith and kin."

"You likewise, boyar Pafnuti, are the same to me."

"Once more I thank you, prince Yuri Olexiyevich."

"We both love Russia, Vasilich."

"That goes without saying. We love her, prince Yuri, and desire happiness and prosperity to the tsar's family; and we both serve not for the sake of promotion and such a paltry thing as a salary. I am old and single, what use have I for diamonds and gold? But listen to what an old man has to say, prince."

Kivrin looked cautiously round, drew his seat nearer his host's and spoke with bated breath:

"How long ago did we have salt riots here, prince? Another riot is smouldering in Pskov, and it is spreading to Novgorod. When I am flogging and burning thieves in the Torture Tower I come upon many a would-be rioter—ay, many. Their number is so great because the cost of maintenance for the voivodes and their staffs is high, and the bribes in the law courts pile up mercilessly and all is borne on the backs of the serfs. But the tsar seems unaware of the fact. Do you think Plestcheiev was the only judge to be done to death by the mob in the 'Red Square'? Oh no! The men who are placed by the tsar to keep watch on the voivodes conceal their misdeeds. Again, in boyar Morozov's potash mines the waterers and labourers have detestable sleeping-quarters; cattle are better housed than they. As for food, contaminated meat and bread mixed with sand is their portion. The homespuns on their backs get corroded with the potash; they have to provide their own clothes, but where are they to get them? All their earnings go into the tavern-keepers' pockets. You know how the law runs: 'Consumers should not be turned away from the pot-houses.' The potash is forwarded down the Volga in barges, and the Volga region offers wide spaces for—brigandage! The Cossacks are within a stone's-throw; there are deserters from the musketeers; along the whole length of the Volga, taverns grab the workers' money; there are pot-houses in every village. Is not this fuel enough to set riots aflame, prince?"

Dolgoruki smiled gloomily.

"You may be old, boyar, but you see far ahead."

"Ay, prince, I am far from being young, but, look you, I have not been nicknamed Wolf's Eye for nothing, and no one knows that my nose, too, is like a wolf's: I see and sense things far across Russia, prince."

"Vodka, blood, fear—what need for any other help against treason, boyar? Vodka takes the strength out of a man's arm and legs. Torture, fire, the lash—and liquor!"

"Prince, I consider a drunkard is no helper. What sort of a job can he be put to?"

"I think otherwise, Vasilich, and will continue to think as I do, for vodka loosens the tongue and reveals hidden deeds."

"Well, let us discuss the matter from a different angle. You, prince, are a

recognized authority on how to quell riots, so it is not for me to teach you. Further, I know that whatever you have it in mind to do does not issue from a befuddled head, but a clear one. If we put my insignificant advice and your lucid thinking together we shall be better able to preserve the tsar from those who thrust themselves upon his notice for their own ends."

"You promised to reveal something of especial value, boyar."

"Prince Yuri, your words are ever to the point. Kvashnin has persuaded Morozov, and Morozov was about to approach the tsar—only he chose an inopportune moment!—in order to tell his Imperial Highness that Kivrin's report on the Don regions was absurd. But you, prince, must believe an old man's word."

"That I do, boyar."

"Did I stay all that time on the Don simply to play about with the Cossacks? Was I ready to risk my life at any moment to be cast into the water with a stone round my neck to no purpose? These pirates don't think twice about such things. . . ."

"I am listening, boyar."

"While I tarried in those parts, prince, I discovered the root of their bandit activities, and, in the tsar's name, I exterminated it. But there remain three shoots belonging to this tap-root: Ivan, Stepan and Frol Razin. I have not met Ivan; Frol is a stripling; but Stepan—I know him well. He is in very truth an instigator of riots, and such as he must be caught and exterminated. Men like this make the earth tremble. You, prince, are aloof from affairs and were probably not informed as to the person who started the salt riots."

"I heard about the ringleader's distinctive marks; but the inquiry was carried on without my knowing anything about the details."

"The salt riot was instigated by Stepan Razin. I was sent by the tsar on a secret mission to the Don with instructions to track down the ringleader. Herein lies the cause of Ivashka Kvashnin's wrath against me, for he has learned through Morozov that I have well succeeded in my mission."

"Speak on, boyar. Then I shall also have something to tell you."

"I have almost done, Yuri Olexiyevich. The only part I have omitted is that I boarded with the ataman Kornei Hodnev, Yakovlev, that I persuaded him to send this Stenka to Moscow. I know for a fact, prince, that the Cossack delegation is in winter quarters here in Moscow, and that the ring-leader we are after is captain of the company. That is all."

"I have to inform you, boyar, of the following: I had in the course of the Lithuanian campaign a man serving under me named Ivan Razin, who was ataman of a Cossack unit. This same Razin incited the Cossacks to mutiny, saying: 'Why should we waste our time; let's do away with the voivodes; there are many roads to the Don.' I learnt of his plans and decisions, had the brigand arrested and disbanded the rank and file, telling them to return whence they came in peace."

"Is the brigand still in your hands, prince?"

"I warrant you he is! I was in no hurry to give him quietus; but no one apart from myself knows what has become of him. At first I had in mind to exercise summary justice upon him, but on thinking matters over I thought it as well to find out whether he had spread any tentacles to Pskov or along the Volga. Now I know. Tomorrow I intend handing over Ivan Razin to the Criminal Office, and you will deal with him, but not without torture, Pafnuti Vasilich."

"What good fortune! The grace of God is evident in your wisdom, prince Yuri. So let us drink long life to you, Yuri Olexiyevich. I am no longer afraid of the liquor going to my head even though I have more work to do. I vow to listen to all you have to say—and not as a tavern roisterer, you may be sure. Heaven itself must have illumined you with its celestial light."

"Here, boyar, are two cups of Cretan wine. Your health!"

"I protest that would not be right; we must first clink glasses in a toast to you. Here's long life to you!"

The old man quaffed deeply from the cup, fell on to the seat, being seized with a choking fit, convulsively snatched at a bit of something on the table, put it into his mouth and, munching it slowly, regained his breath. Then he said:

"Now, prince Yuri, here's what I have worked out in my foolish mind. There's no time like the present! Before Morozov can calumniate me before the tsar, what do you say to seizing and executing both these Razins?"

"I am quite of your opinion, boyar."

"You will cope with Ivan, while my men will track down Stepan and haul him off to the Criminal Office. And now I must be going, Yuri Olexiyevich, however much I may feel inclined to tarry in your company. But there is work awaiting me at the executioner's."

"Do your utmost for Russia, boyar, and take the advice which I give you: Do not be squeamish in regard to Ivan Razin. Finish him off. We shall present our report on his case to the tsar afterwards. For this I assume full responsibility. Seize the other brother as secretly as possible, and before dealing with him you must inform Morozov that the leader of the salt riots has been captured, and we are proceeding with the trial by torture, after which, and when he has made full confession, a report will be presented. The rebel needs careful handling because he was sent here with the Cossack troops. We dare not raise trouble in the Don territory on his account. If anything of the sort were to happen, all the blame would fall on us."

"Truly so, prince Yuri."

Thereupon the boyar left the chamber. After seeing his guest to the door, the prince called out:

"Yegor! Muster the men and escort the boyar's carriage with lights so that he has a suitable bodyguard."

A voice responded from one of the back rooms:

"Pray do not put yourself about, prince."

## 3

"Hi, Orthodox Christians! I've got pies, hot pies, to warm your faces and bellies this bitter cold day."

The hawker in his snow-covered felt boots stamped his feet beside his stall and slapped his mitted hands on his thighs. A bearded crowd in hare-fur jackets and sheepskin coats passed by without taking any notice of him. Some among them wore ordinary cloth or rough homespuns.

"Meat pi-i-es!"

A man disporting a goatee thrust his head forward and said: "I reckon there's nothing but dog's flesh in your pies."

"You beggarly rascal, the plague take you!"

"Who wants fritters? Here's fritters!" boomed a bass voice from a neighbouring stall.

Many felt and leather boots churned the snow. Someone shot a question at the vendor of fritters:

"You've had a drop too much, eh, hawker?"

"I'm not a Mohammedan, but a true Russian, so I certainly do drink when I feel so disposed."

"Sand, Christians, from Mount Tabor, from Jerusalem! 'Twill protect you from the lash and from every misfortune."

"Hi, black-coat! You'd do better to sell moss from Balchug in memory of the first pot-house set up in Moscow."

"Heretic! Don't make a mock of the holy things, or I'll call the musketeers."

The snow drifted steadily down on Moscow's tortuous and narrow streets; snowflakes crept into the boots of the pedestrians, many of whom sat down on adjustments or frozen porches to take off their boots, beat out the snow and put them on again. Others shambled along almost barefoot, their boots and bast shoes being battered and worn out, yet seeming not to care.

Many hawkers with their trays full of wares stood in the recesses of houses; they were selling large honey cakes with raisins, dried blackcurrant jam, which looked like leather, white loaves powdered with coarse flour. In the passages between the black deal-roofed houses with their narrow mica windows were wooden privies with filthy seats. The stench of excrement clung to the street.

Since it was the eve of a feast day, the bells boomed out ceaselessly, the sonorous sound floating over the housetops, while from the height of the Kremlin, where the cathedral stood, came a distinctive note, more melancholy and solemn.

Now and again the noise of the millwheel, or the plaintive wail of beggars at the nearest church, encroached on the general hubbub.

"For the love of God and for the sake of the tsar, give of your charity! Christian passers-by, give for your souls' redemption, and that those of your kin may rest in peace!"

The crowd moved forward as a solid mass, only a few pausing at the stalls to drink hot water and mead, eat the pies, gobble down the fritters.

A closed carriage, poised on high sledge-runners, came into sight. Through the small mica windows a face could be glimpsed; it was a plump one, made up, and over it was a low sable cap adorned with pearls. Five horses formed its equipage; a young man, bearded and tousled, wearing a sheepskin coat and bast shoes over his bare feet, rode bareback on the shaft-horse.

"Make way for the boyarina!"

"To the devil with her!"

The servants ran on foot beside the vehicle.

" 'Twould be a good thing were another like this to pass."

"It makes the way easier for a foot soldier when a trail through the snow is cut."

The throng drew closer together to make way for a hirsute, heavily bearded priest in a clerical cap and a hareskin jacket. A cross dangled from his chest. He had a red face, and seemed to be all legs and arms.

"Have you just christened someone, dad?"

The priest pounced on the questioner.

"You infidel! May your mother have twenty tails! Why don't you ask a blessing of me?"

To avoid the priest's wrath, the man stepped back and merged with the crowd, while the priest was still endeavouring to catch him by the sleeve.

"Stop! May your mother—— You cursed unbeliever!"

The man took shelter behind a tall, stalwart fellow dressed in Cossack uniform with a sword hanging from a strap underneath his loose fur coat. He wore a red cap with a narrow beaver border.

"Now, then, make way, Satan!" exclaimed the Cossack when with his strong hand he pushed the priest aside.

"What are you pushing for? How dare you call a priest 'Satan'! Hi, come hither, you tsar's man!"

The Cossack gave the priest a hefty punch with his fist—the chain, from which the cross was suspended, jingled; the priest fell to his knees in the snow, supporting his headgear and moaning "He-e-elp!"

A pert, undersized artisan, wearing an apron, seized the Cossack by the hand.

"Hold, Cossack, you do not know the rules which govern our actions here."

Catching the cap, which had nearly fallen from the priest's head, the young fellow shoved it on to the tray of the nearest hawker, quickly grabbed the priest by his long hair, thrust his face deep into the snow and started to kick the cleric in the ribs, to the accompaniment of the priest's groans.

"Musketeers! Hi, sentries! Help!" shouted the priest.

Two musketeers sauntered leisurely down from the square, while a business-like voice enquired:

"Somebody being beaten?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A priest."

"For long?"

"Not long enough yet," the priest himself replied ironically.

"Where's his cap?"

"I've got it here," shouted the hawker.

"Well, let be now."

"Soldiers—for Christ's sake!" cried the priest in hoarse, heartrending tones.

"Now, then, my worthy, let go the priest."

The artisan pulled the snow-covered and betrampled priest up by the scruff of the neck, snatched the headgear from the tray and, stooping towards the cleric, clapped it on his head.

"Here's your coif, father, none the worse."

The priest groaned, shook the snow out of his beard and walked meditatively away with a slight limp in his gait.

"Look you, one may throw a priest in the snow, but his headgear must be respected," some wiseacre in the crowd observed.

The sound of frozen trestles being placed in a convenient position now smote the ear. Hawkers of pancakes with the steam rising thick above their heads were adjusting their trays on the tables. A smell of fried oil and burnt bread filled the air.

"Pancakes with sour cream!"

"Pancakes with fish-roe stuffing!"

"What kind are yours?"

"They are made of barley meal."

"Mine are of wheaten flour."

"Give me some barley ones."

"Me too."

"You there, Cossack, are you from the Don, from Cherkassi?"

"We'll talk once we've finished our meal."

"No one in Moscow is allowed to bear arms except us musketeers."

"But I am the captain of the Cossacks, who are wintering in Moscow. We have been sent on a mission to the tsar."

"That is no proper way to speak of our sovereign. You should say, 'to the sovereign, tsar and grand prince'. The carrying of arms is all right for you, lad, but have you a permit for them?"

"Yes."

"Well, pass on. Grisha and I thought that maybe we'd have to take you to the *Zemski Prikaz*."

Elbowing a path through the dense throng, the Cossack went on his way. In an alley beside the square, half the space was taken up by coffins and timber. White crosses, smelling of fresh resin, were planted in the snow, while others leant against the houses and wooden porches.

"Who is in need of a last dwelling-place? Each of us will want one, be he beggar, policeman, prince or boyar; everyone, sooner or later, will parade in such a wooden coat."

The coffin-maker fidgeted on the porch, knocking one felt boot against the other. On either side of him stood a monk in long gown. A peasant woman in sheepskin coat and a shawl, which formed an angle above her head, was choosing a coffin.

"Which do you want, little woman? A painted one, or plain fir?"

'A plain one, uncle."

"Whom is it for?"

"My husband was coming home from the tavern when he fell and died. The almshouse folk dragged him to the *Zemski Prikaz*."

"Do you know his measurements? Choose carefully so that the deceased does not have to writhe, or he'll get angry and visit you by night."

"Ugh, what horrid things you are saying, uncle."

"Take a painted one, little woman; that will placate the dead man."

One of the monks, still shaking from the effects of drink, also made suggestions to the woman.

"I'll read the psalter, then the deceased will not come. It will set his soul to rest, little woman. Make things as easy for him as you are able before he comes into the presence of Almighty God."

"Efrosyn, don't you understand? This woman's husband did not die a good death. The patriarch has forbidden the psalter to be read over any who have met with a violent end."

"Father Panfili, what's the patriarch to me when my belly thirsts for wine? I am coming, little woman. We shall read the psalter."

"Oh, I don't know how I'll——"

"Make way, there!"

"A soul is on its way into the kingdom of heaven."

The crowd backed towards the crosses or into the snow. Bumping in and

out of the holes in the road, a long-swung, one-horse peasant's sledge was dragged along the lane in the direction of the square. Inside there was a bench, resembling a coffer, on which a criminal sat, his feet sunk deep in the litter of straw, his arms gripped in stocks, which lay across his knees; his hands, blue with cold, held a wax candle. By the criminal's side lay a black cap, shaggy as a crow's nest. Passers-by threw small coins into the cap. The criminal hung his head, his long hair falling over his face and thus concealing it.

"Here's a wonder, brothers! It is windy, and yet the candle keeps alight."

"He must be innocent, a righteous man, in that case."

The executioner and two musketeers marched behind the sledge, the former carrying a broad axe with a short haft on his shoulder and wearing a sheepskin coat, girt about the middle with a leather thong. Without faltering in his pace, the executioner at times flung a word or two to the crowd.

"The clerk will read out the sentence in the square."

"To the square, my gallants!"

"The clerk will read——"

"He's the one who was seized in the cathedral."

The platform in the square was covered with frozen blood; around it were stakes, on which the heads of the executed were stuck, their hideous faces, without noses or ears, half smothered in snow. The sledge conveying the criminal crawled slowly towards the platform. The Cossack, wading in the deep snow, crossed the square. The crowd continued to munch bread as it strolled along to witness the execution. The Cossack met a priest emerging from an alleyway. He was wearing dirty chamois-leather mitts and held a silver cross in his hand. Musketeers, bearing pole-axes and pointed stakes, followed the priest. In the silent chilly evening air—for no bells were ringing—the jerky tones of the clerk, who was reading the oft-repeated formula, could be distinctly heard:

"And you, thief . . . an anonymous letter with seals . . . against the sovereign and grand prince Alexei. . . . The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin . . . during the liturgical prayers in the Kremlin . . . looted . . . enticed by a Don Cossack and ataman. . . . By decree of the great sovereign . . . you . . . to be quartered and punished with death. . . ."

The Cossack came to a halt, listening to these fragments of the death sentence. A clock struck high above; he did not count the strokes—but someone in the crowd, which was surging towards the taverns, explained in a tipsy bass:

"This is the time-measure! Self-sounding and self-moving. . . ."

## 4

The tavern was surrounded by a high fence; the wattle sections between the posts, strengthened by long wooden rods, were placed horizontally. The tavern stood not far from the wooden gates. Its sign consisted of a long wooden pole, surmounted by an earthenware jug, minus the bottom, with a besom above that. Over the low front door against a white background one could read the following inscription: "No beverages to be brewed in private houses, nor shall lewd women be attached to the taverns."

The Cossack stepped into the vestibule. Although in the open dusk had barely begun to fall, there was a chip light burning in a holder fixed to the wall;

its ashes were dropping to the black and sticky floor. Instead of a door, there was a hole made in the partition separating the vestibule from the hut, into which a planed step led. The hut itself had no chimney, so that its ceiling was smoke-blackened; here were tables and long wooden benches on either side. A tallow candle lit up the bar, behind which a dresser could be discerned with a coffer on the bottom shelf. On this coffer an inscription in indigo lettering was carved: "He who does not drink at the tavern, but drinks his own brewed liquor at home without stint, is a thief and a cur, for he deprives the exchequer of revenue."

Musketeers from the square strolled into the tavern in the Cossack's wake and sat down next a deacon. This cleric was a habitual drunkard and bemoaned his fate, for he had no more to spend on liquor, by droning out a dirge-like tune in a deep bass voice:

"A little coffin I shall make,
And wood from sleeping-bunks shall take.
Now woman you must get a shawl
To wrap the babe therein for good and all."

"Oh, do stop it, deacon."

"You tsar's men, I shall do so only if you stand me a drink with a good head on it."

"I'll give you one with my pole-axe."

"Then it is my fate to go on singing," said the deacon, thrusting his horny and begrimed fingers through his hair.

"Ding-dong, ding-dong bell,
Saint Saviour's is ringing well.
The clock, yet, at Saint George's
Is striking oft its orgies:
Beat out your strongest notes
Which Moscow's memory promotes!
Pshaw! For a quart of wine
Will Moscow filch a dime of mine."

"What gibberish are you singing, deacon? What's there to whine about when drink is so cheap in Moscow?"

The musketeers paid their reckoning and left the tavern. The deacon very reluctantly followed suit. The Cossack sat down at one of the tables and called for mead. The tavern attendant, who was a spy, scrutinized the Cossack.

"Have you spotted a kinsman in me by any chance?" jeered the Cossack.

"The likes of you have many kinsmen. I must take a good look at your face in case you turn out to be a malefactor. 'Twould be useful to know you. . . ."

"Fine! So these dogs of publicans are keeping still more curs at their beck and call? Wipe the jug."

The attendant did as he was told with his sackcloth apron and threw away the dregs of the iron mug on to the floor. He handed the money for the drink to the publican, who turned the coppers over in the broad rough palm of his hand and shoved the money into the box bearing the inscription. He then raised

a pair of distrustful eyes to another man, who had just approached the bar. The man drawled:

"Here, Artem, read!"

"What is it you want? You never come for any good."

The man in his short, flounced coat, which was of a pea-green hue, had a lean, melancholy face, grey hair and a straggling beard. He laid a sheet of paper on the bar. Moving a candle towards the paper and smoothing it out, the publican slowly read what was written thereon, opening and closing his lips as he did so and keeping his place by drawing his stumpy finger along the lines. The newcomer set two pewter jugs on the bar and said:

"You read too slowly. I've been put to a deal of trouble, but I've got what I want at last because the tsar's eagles are stamped on the measure according to the price fixed by the register. . . ."

"Well, what of it?"

"This is what of it! You charged me at least a third more for a drink I had from this identical measure. Now, on the strength of this note, I shall buy wine from you at the regulation price. Today I shall have one measure, and you are to put the surplus you took on to this counter."

The tsarist tavern-keeper called his attendant.

"Maksimo, fill up the merchant's jugs."

Maksimo took the jugs, while the publican drew a handful of coins from a drawer and counted them out to the merchant. The latter slipped them one by one into his coat pocket, tallying them mentally as he did so, and never interrupting the course of his speech:

"Now, then, Artem, show me the measures you have with the tsar's stamp. If all is in order, we need discuss the topic no further."

With a snort the tavern-keeper thumped a damp measure smelling of vodka on the counter and laid a measuring-rod beside it. The merchant measured the bucket and said:

"Now look here, Artem, I am going to measure the thing correctly. From the upper edge inside and to the bottom the bucket should measure fourteen inches."

"And do you mean to imply that my pot is not up to the tsarist standard? Has it not been stamped with the eagles?"

"Why are you in such a huff? Undoubtedly it is the tsar's standard measure."

The hosts's broad face edged towards the merchant's ear: "Tit Efimich, the little devils in kingdom come are searching for your soul with lanterns. Likely as not you'll die soon. To whom are you bequeathing your wealth?"

"Certainly not to you, vile scum!"

Thereupon he snatched up the jugs and left as he had come without vouchsafing so much as a nod to anyone.

"You miser, you pettifogging wretch, may you dry up from the root," the publican spat out.

A gust of wind eddied across the hut, and the candle on the counter sputtered out.

"What cur has done this?"

The tavern-keeper took the lighted chip out of its holder and lighted the candle. A shaggy, full-grown bear, covered with snow, ambled into the hut. Holding to the chain in a ring drawn through the beast's lip, a peasant with a tambourine barged in. His head was uncovered, and he wore a sheepskin coat with the grey fur outside; his misshapen feet were in frozen bast shoes.

"Devils, indeed," grumbled the publican; "it near took the wind out of me!" He served a customer with a mug of liquor and added: "Have you paid?"

"That I have, Artem Kuzmich. I'll have a little loaf of white bread, too."

Swearing loudly, and reciting in the same breath some prayer or other, a most uncouth figure was trying to push his way into the hut in the wake of the peasant and the bear. He carried a club many feet in length. This mound of flesh, having managed to get in, groaned and bellowed:

"Were your hands palsied that you could not make a proper door instead of this hole, which is fit to break one's neck?"

"Even a door would be too narrow to allow such a bulky fellow as you to pass."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Once within the hut, the absurd figure straightened itself and blurted out an oath. Its belly bulged as it shouted a prayer. Just below the blackened ceiling, a paper mask with protruding eyes made its appearance. The drinkers yelled:

"Ah, daddy Artem, you've nailed the tsar's decree on the door, but you were too lazy to draw a cross on the door, and so the devil's come into the hut!"

"Why do you call me a devil?" bawled the colossus; "my face has been baptized more than once on the feast of the Jordan at Epiphany time, and my navel received the executioner's baptism in Ivan Square."

The uncouth figure paced the hut and stumped its club on the floor. A kind of ample overall, made of several coats stitched together, hung from its shoulders, while a black sheepskin collar dangled half-way down its back. Sticking a pipe through the mask, the figure started to whistle a tune. The front of the overall bulged out, and from where the navel should have been another pipe took up the melody. This strange gigantic creature pranced across the hut, then threw off the painted mask and stepped up to the bar.

"Lord have mercy on your soul, Artemushka, but sprinkle mine with a mug of frothy liquor."

"Cash down," said the tavern-keeper as he set a mug of vodka at his customer's elbow. The figure, bending at a sharp angle, reached downwards while the overall suddenly flapped open. The mug disappeared, its contents vanished into the giant's belly and was returned empty to the counter.

"Ho, ho, ho! Serve him out another, Artem; we'll stand the drink."

The mug was duly refilled. Groaning and writhing, the figure strained to reach the vodka, but the navel drank it up.

"Damn! Such is my fate, Christians. My navel symbolizes the boyars, while my countenance and head signify the people. The face asks for and provides what is necessary, but the navel guzzles the whole lot up. And so, brothers, Christian folk, all my life I go hungry," the figure whimpered.

"Look you, indeed he speaks the truth."

"Fill up, Artem; maybe the people, too, will have a drink."

The tavern-keeper shook his fist at the giant.

"Buffoon that you are, I refuse to serve you any more, but shall, on the contrary, turn you out if you so much as mention the boyars again."

Some of the customers got up and felt round the gigantic figure. Then they shouted:

"Hi, you fellows, there are two devils joined together!"

Starting to twirl round the hut, the monster moaned:

"Oh, can it be that I am about to be delivered of something? What a big infant is crawling into the world!"

The figure sank down on its haunches and fell apart. Two tall young men crawled from beneath the trappings, rolled up the overall, put the club in a corner and joined the company at the table.

"Now Christians, stand vodka to the lying-in woman. See what stalwarts she has been delivered of. Fit to marry straight away!"

"Drink, new-borns! You deserve it!"

"Now it's the bear's turn."

"Amuse us, Bruin."

By cries and by beating his tambourine the bear-leader encouraged the beast to dance. But the animal merely growled and shuffled its feet on the same spot. Thick saliva, stained with blood, dropped from its maw.

"There's nothing else for me to do," said the peasant, holding out the tambourine to the drinkers. "Give a few coppers, Christians, so's I can feed the poor beast."

"Why don't you feed him yourself?"

"You can't put a hungry horse to the plough."

"Ay, that's true enough. You see, there's nowhere I can earn a living. The patriarch has decreed that such animals are not to be taken to the market-place. . . ."

A man at the bar, having finished off his vodka, stood staring at the mummers while he slowly broke off and chewed bits from his piece of white bread. The bear turned to him, waved a paw, grabbed the bread and swallowed it. The peasant signed with his cap to the bear-leader:

"Pay for the roll, the beast is yours."

"What's that you say?"

"Your beast has gobbled up my roll!"

"Be reasonable, good fellow. The poor thing's belly is big and empty."

"All I have to say is that my roll must be paid for."

"Let be, my lad; it's alms for the beast, and it'll make you laugh."

"Pay up, or I'll call in the police."

The Cossack thumped his iron mug on the table.

"Host, bring me a pile of rolls."

"Cash down."

The Cossack tossed him a silver coin. From out the heap of rolls the Cossack selected one and handed it to the peasant.

"Take it and make yourself scarce."

"I'm off!"

The Cossack threw bread to the bear, which caught each morsel in its mouth and gulped it down without chewing it.

"Now, then, Bruin, show us how a peasant salutes a voivode."

The bear-leader tapped the beast on the head with the tambourine, whereupon the bear crouched on its belly, crawled along the floor, whined and grunted and hid its snout between its paws.

"And now, Bruin, show us how honest folk have to pay court bribes, rates and the plough tax, and how these monies are extorted from the peasantry on behalf of the boyar of the manor."

The bear sat on his haunches and drove the claws of one front paw into the floor; then it started bashing and scratching with its right paw until chips from

the deal planking were flying about. Meanwhile, it growled, groaned and showed its teeth.

"Hi, you devils, I'll turn you out and hand you over to the police for all these goings-on. As it is, I might get myself into trouble on your account. It is forbidden to introduce bears into taverns," shouted the publican.

The bear-leader pacified the bear, and the drinkers offered vodka to both man and beast.

After having his fill of mead, the Cossack drank vodka. His head was buzzing, and something wild and rebellious rose up within him. For a reason he could not explain, he felt angry with the tavern-keeper. His hand went to his sword, but he mastered himself, rose from the table, shrugged his shoulders, pushed his cap well back and, as he left, called out:

"Folk of Moscow, the block, the stocks and the lash have broken your spirit. You drag out your days in misery and utter prayers, not needed by God, but forced upon you by the priests. Sadder still, those who make a stand for you are the first whom you yourselves help to put in chains, and none of your kin is so dear to you as are the boyars and officials. It passes comprehension! But take this to heart: I await the day when you will throw off the burden laid upon you by the boyars."

"He speaks nothing but the truth. He's a genuine Cossack," came from one of the drinkers.

The publican made a sign with his broad hand, and instantly the spy-attendant sprang to his side. Casting a sidelong glance at the retreating Cossack, the tavern-keeper whispered:

"Quick, lad, run to the *Zemski Prikaz*. Tell Kvashnin's clerks that an unknown Cossack is inciting the people in the royal tavern. Quick!"

"I see for myself how things are, and 'tis not for the first time either, Artem Kuzmich."

Without staying to put his cap on, the informer slipped out into the vestibule.

Calmly the Cossack went on his way, the metal heels on his boots ringing out clearly as he followed the spy, who was hastening along without looking back, gathering up the skirt of his long coat and pulling at his apron. The Cossack kept the fellow in sight. At a twist into a lonely lane the young man climbed over some logs, slackening his pace, since he had to wade through deep snow. Not a soul was to be seen. A spark flashed . . . the youth cried out and tried to dodge the shot . . . he fell among the logs. The Cossack thrust the smoking pistol into the belt under his fur coat. Stepping across the logs, he trampled the body deeper into the snow with his heavy boot and, emerging into the square by the lane, hissed: "Satan!"

He then walked along the fringe of the square past the *Zemski Prikaz* and reached the river Moskva.

## 5

A bridge had been thrown across the river on ice-bound barges, the railings of which were covered with snow. The booths and warehouses in the vicinity of this bridge were empty, for trading transactions were being plied on the Moskva river itself. The first to open their booths were the butchers and fishmongers; the merchants, whose booths used to be in the Red Square market,

followed them. Within the city the only tradesmen who were carrying on with their sales were the vendors of pies and pancakes, which they held out on trays.

Near the bridge, in front of the booths, was a decrepit wooden structure with a roof of turf. This was the bath-house. A crane for hauling water faced the river; the windows of the bath-house were blocked by frozen bath-brooms.

Through the brooms steam was creeping; it reached the slopes of the roof and, coupled with the general warmth, it thawed the ice and the drips formed long icicles, which hung from the eaves.

Naked men emerged from the slanting but strong doorways, through which the clash of wooden utensils and the hubbub of human voices, mingling with the hiss of hot water poured on bricks, could be heard. The naked men rubbed themselves with snow; others stood absent-mindedly beneath the dripping roof, their bleary eyes staring vacantly at the passers-by, who made derisive remarks:

"Hi, youngster, place a fig-leaf over your sinful parts!"

"The hairy creature yonder would seem to be a priest. Shameless pig. Look what he is doing in the street."

Evening was drawing in, and people were returning from vespers.

A woman came out of the baths completely naked, with her breasts and abdomen hanging, for she was of mature age and weighed some sixteen stone; her double chin was adorned with a row of warts. From the bath-broom between her legs water dripped off her on to the snow, while clouds of steam billowed round her body. She was panting. Passers-by guffawed.

"Have you washed away your sin?"

"What's that to you?"

"Hi, gossip, what do you sell your flesh at?"

"Oh, you fiends! May the catchpolls take you before the Criminal Office!"

A boyar's son, black-haired and wearing a curly beard, his crimson winter coat held by round buttons caught with fanciful loops, went up to the woman and began molesting her.

The Cossack, after listening for a while, stepped forward and drew his sword.

"Hi, Satan, let the wench be!"

The boyar's son tested the snow with his heel and stepped back quickly—a Tatar scimitar gleamed in his hand.

"Want a little swordplay? I'm your man."

Sparks flew in the dusk, steel clashed against steel. After some few parries the boyar's son took his opponent's measure. Adroitly and with mincing steps he retreated behind the booth and called out:

"Suspected murder, did you? It was nothing but a little amusement with a woman."

"You curly pate, if ever you cross my path again you'll swing," said the Cossack, walking away.

"Ho, ho! So you think to hang me? Then you may as well know my name. I'm a boyar's son, Lazunka Zhidovin."

"If ever I catch sight of you again you won't escape."

"Heigh-ho! What a Cossack! He's good at swordplay, but he's not out of Moscow yet. I'll swear that ere long he'll be on the rack, as sure as I'm——"

"The wretch! Was it the drink made me meddle with him?" the Cossack asked himself as he crossed the bridge.

6

The snow which covered the hut was grey in the gloaming and had blended with the building to such good effect as to make the long, low habitation look like a mound. There was a certain eeriness about the trail which led to it. But the hole leading to the underground room loomed black.

The Cossack stamped downwards, his sword clattering, his head bumping against the low vaulting, his feet searching the step. Then he heard a melodious lullaby:

"Tick, tack, woodpecker,
You are motley coloured,
Your beak is sharp.
It strikes the sounding-board,
Not threshing any rye. . . ."

Just as he had done two years ago, he now stumbled over coffers and boxes in the wide dark vestibule. The thought flashed through his mind:

"I feel as if I were blind. In town I followed my memory, but here there's only a voice to guide me."

The door which he pushed with a strong hand flew open, and a whiff of warm air, sour milk and damp cloths assailed his nostrils.

"Mother o' mercy, if it is not my dove! Oh, my bright joy! Quick, grandad, look up, it's our falcon Stepanushka."

Irenetsa, in a yellow summer gown, sprang to her feet and caught at a cradle in which a dark-haired boy stood up.

"Ma-a-ma!"

The old man very deliberately wrenched himself away from his book, blew out the wax candle, got up and, for some obscure reason, pulled open the collar of his greyish blue homespun shirt.

"Why, Irenetsa, 'twas but yesterday we were saying what a long time it was since we had clapped eyes on him. Had you a good journey, honoured guest?"

"How d'ye do, grandad? And you, Irenetsa?"

"Here's a diamond in a silver setting! And though the night is outside, inside it's as if the spring had already come."

Irenetsa, weeping with excitement, clung to the visitor's neck.

"Do not cling so, wench. I'm a married man now. Receive me into your midst, or be angry, it's all the same to me."

"Ah, my falcon, my dove, each must go his own way. I am not at all angry, only very happy."

Stepan Razin flung his coat on the seat, unbuckled his sword and whip and kicked away the pistol under the seat as it dropped to the ground.

"Ah me, 'tis a long time since I had drink of any sort, but I shall drink to-day in honour of my falcon of passage. Away with dull care and weeping!" The woman bustled about, tidying the room, and meanwhile dressed herself becomingly.

"Would you like a wash?"

"Never mind about that, my girl. To go unwashed is just as pleasant. There's time enough. . . ."

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"Well, I'm off to fetch mead and honey. Grandad, you keep an eye on the baby. He's yours, Stepanushka? Why don't you take a look at him? Isn't he a beauty and a joy unspeakable?"

"In this passionate and crazy world every joy and all things beautiful become tarnished." So saying, the fool went towards the cradle. The woman left the room.

Quietly and gently, the old man laid the child down in the cradle and smoothed the pillows.

"Sleep, my little one born of human love, sleep, my spoilt darling, while those who fondle you still live. But a time will come when worms will crawl out of the nostrils of those who now lull you to sleep."

"Why so gruesome, grandad? We are alive and may as well have a merry time."

"You speak truth, good guest. It is meet and just that the living flesh should burn red hot."

The child fell asleep, and the fool turned from the cradle to the seat in his wonted corner. The Cossack paced up and down the room, taking precautions not to make a noise with his heavy boots. Tapping the open book, he asked mockingly: "Oh, man of wisdom, have you found God in these pages, and what have you to say about Satan?"

The old man replied quietly and after reflection:

"I spend much time reading. He who seeks God will not find Him. To believe is not to seek . . . but I do not believe."

"That's strange."

"As you know, I am deemed crazy here in Moscow, yet I could put up a good argument with the patriarch himself. But what's the upshot of that when no one respects me? Nor are we allowed to argue about faith, for the patriarch has ordered that molten lead shall be poured down the throats of those who have mastered the wisdom of books, and he has erected special prisons for them. Here I live, as it were, in a grave, and I should be overgrown with fur in my tattered clothes were it not for Irenetsa. Can you understand?"

"Ay, I understand very well, and wish to learn from you."

"I am exceeding old, and my body has lived for more than a hundred years. My soul alone blossoms with the knowledge of peace. Though my legs be shaky, they still carry my body because the soul commands the body. A consuming fire bursts forth from the bowels of the earth. Many a time have I read that in distant lands this subterranean fire rains down resin and brimstone upon towns and villages, smothering them in smoke and ashes. Thus is it with my soul. It will not allow my body to dissolve, and through the long years it conceals the fire with which it is consumed against Moscow's boyars, those executioners of the woman who, at the scaffold, gave birth to a fool named Grigori."

"There's no sense in what you are telling me."

"Think it over, and what is now unintelligible to you will be full of sense."

"I am pondering your words."

"People innumerable, in Moscow and all over the world, are being tortured and burnt because they are accused of reviling Christ and the Blessed Virgin. They are bound in chains; their life-blood is soaking the ground like so much water. Yet what does it matter if they did revile the deity?"

"I, too, deny the saints, grandad."

"What I say is: why destroy the living for the sake of the dead? The legend

which has been written on parchments and bound up in books is dead. They tell us that a man called Jesus once lived and that he had a mother called Mary. Yet the tale of my pregnant mother, who was beaten on the block and, while bleeding from the lash, gave birth prematurely, is so unintelligible that it goes in at one ear and out by the other. The hand-maiden Efrosynia, my mother, after suffering at the hands of the boyars, was devoured by worms—bones and all. How can one be expected to believe something which happened more than a thousand years ago? It may be that the Christ was crucified. But then it may just as well be that the sacred book was written to deceive. The Bible? The New Testament? I've read a lot of that. And what is the Bible? It contains the ancient Jewish wisdom, written down for the people whose faith our fathers of Orthodoxy are at present persecuting, while at the same time guiding this very faith along a similar path, but preaching falsehood in that they say: 'Their faith is accursed; it is Jewish heresy. Our faith comes from Byzantium!' Yet the Byzantines are Greek, and the ancient Greeks worshipped idols as did the Roman Caesars. Which of these spiritual prelates are we to believe? The Jewish faith is the rich man's faith, because the Jew believes in the coming of Messiah, the King. Then will the kings of all the earth bow down before Him, and all the peoples will work for the Jews. The poor man, on the other hand, who knows bitter want, never thinks of making some other man work for him. Such is the faith of this quality. But our patriarchs and bishops, having recognized Jesus as King and God, say: 'The end of the world will come, and then Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, and the whole world will be transformed and will seek to live a merciful and meek and blameless life.' But how is one like myself to be meek? Man is a creature aflame with passionate desires, which consume the flesh, and he hungers for life, the touch of body against body, the feel of the grass, the savour of food—for it is only these things which bring joy to life on this earth. A man full of vitality has no need of meekness and righteousness. We await the advent of Christ and the Messiah from heaven. But what is heaven? The earthly globe floats in the firmament, as it were, as in the blue waters of the sea. Another thing we are told by the patriarchs and priests is: 'The tsar is God's representative on earth; bow down before him, bearing in mind the God who is in heaven; hear him, for he is lord over your very lives.' Though the tsar may be a lawless and profligate man, yet we have to believe that he is wise. He chooses his advisers and helpers from among the righteous—courtiers, governors, boyars, princes. The latter are appointed to the position of voivodes and live on the fat of the land, for they are the tsar's men. This is what the ancient scriptures lead us to, and this is why tsars, merchants, boyars and sundry seize upon unbelievers and those who venture to speak against the faith."

"Oh, grandfather, if I am vouchsafed the strength, and if the people will follow me, I shall come to Moscow and do away with the tsar and his patriarch," said the Cossack, making a sweeping gesture with his great hand.

"Sh! Sh! Stop, or we may be overheard—someone is coming."

Irenetsa entered.

"Shame on you, grandad! There you sit reviling God and quoting books, with never a thought of putting a clean cloth on the table, Candles, too! Surely we cannot entertain such a guest by the dim light of the ikon lamps?"

Irenetsa again bustled about the room, changing the cloth and lighting candles.

"Have a care, lass. Our guest, I reckon, comes hot from a battle, so he will not expect much in the way of daintiness. Besides, if we quaff our mead heartily we are sure to spill it over the cloth."

"I don't care if the cloth is stained, or the candles burn it. I do so like a comely display. Oh, my falcon, I am itching to hug you and bite you all over from sheer joy! Please go up to the cradle and take a glimpse at your little son. He's that clever—and wild, too, at times! I've seen him sitting there saying nothing, but thinking just like a grown man."

"I am afraid to love my own, Irenetsa. I am starting on a long journey, and I feel that many troubles lie ahead of me. One loves; and, behold, the beloved is snatched away and devoured as if by wolves, leaving the heart bleeding for many a day."

"Well, at least sit down and take off your coat."

Razin threw off his coat. In his white embroidered shirt he took his seat at the board.

"I am so fond of cauldrons of spiced meats and also of a plentiful supply of frothy liquor. I am sure my tongue will become very unruly if I sit long at this table," said the old man.

"You may rest assured that I shall not allow you to tell any lies, old 'un. I'm weary of thinking bedtime thoughts all by myself."

"Irenetsa, let us drink to you and grandfather together; then I should like to toast him alone, for though his body is decrèpit he has a splendid mind."

"So be it, dove! But on one condition: that after each cup and goblet we clink you give me a kiss."

They ate, drank and embraced, the old man sitting sideways so as not to see them.

"Let your flesh burn and kindle into flames," he said as he laid his white head on his emaciated arms, while with closed eyes he sang:

"Ailing is our mother dear,
To Moscow does not wish to go.
Did seven homesteads domineer,
As fancy bid her, this I trow!"

"Have a care, grandad, not to lapse into obscenity."

"I shall not, Irenetsa. Sear your flesh with fire, good guest, and heed not what the tsar's prelates say: 'Hunger for bread does not kill a man; the greatest hunger for man is to live without faith in God!' "

"You old centenarian of a hunchback, better give us a song than to babble such nonsense."

"I might sing you a song, but are you not afraid the words would be foul?"

"Better indecent words than to prate about God. Stepanushka, kiss me on the lips—kiss me all over, my love!"

The old man began to sing:

"The widow Fetinia was baking pies,
When into the hut the cow arrives,
And scatters flour from the dough-trough,
Licks the floor clean and then is off. . . ."

He suddenly jumped to his feet and began to dance.

"Fetinia, she was short of flour,
In the barn was caught that hour,
Was thrown upon the hard deal bed,
And tossed and rolled and overspread,
Was turned about from side to side,
And pummelled well till eventide. . . ."

The fool stretched his hand towards the mead and sat down.

"When you become chief ataman," said he—"and I feel that you will some day—beware of the patriarch's lies no less than of the voivodes! The patriarch will pronounce a public curse on you."

"Words do not frighten me, old man."

"Are you not aware that a terrible word is more terrible than mortal combat? You can foresee no harm from that word? Well, I do. The people believe the priests. When they rise to support you, the people will bring the axe nearer to the boyars' heads. Then the word the people dread will thunder against you from every pulpit in Moscow and, like ripples made by pebbles thrown in the water, its echo will spread throughout the land. The priests in the provinces will take up Moscow's cry. Oh, worthy guest, the people's hearing is very sensitive to the age-old legend!"

"Hold your tongue, you hunchbacked raven. Don't heed him, Stepanushka. I'm dropping with sleep, but I do not want to go to bed without you. Put me to bed and lie down beside me."

"Do not cling to me thus, Irenetsa."

"Let your wrath cool, my dove. I am alone—come to me."

"There is nowhere else to go, so I shall come to you. For tonight I am yours."

"Come, my falcon, my fond love! Don't believe what he says, he's always croaking, the old raven. Come, and I shall whisper something joyful to you."

Irenetsa threw herself on the bed.

"I am thinking of other things, old man," said Stepan.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Of the time when I shall become ataman and go to Persia and become a subject of the shah. From there I shall be better able to decide how best to help my people."

"Do not offer your services to the shah! The sultan of Turkey would be a more useful man to approach."

"Do you want me to be impaled?"

"Hark you: the shah has always been a friend of Moscow. What if the tsar's intimates should go to the shah and come to some sort of agreement? Might not the shah then deliver you up to Moscow?"

"Let's drink, grandfather."

"Right willingly, good guest. Why should they trouble their minds about you, when they show no mercy to their own men? The archpriest of the Archangel Cathedral once copied out the prophetic book of Kyril. This book contains the following exhortation: 'We must not turn away from heretics, neither should we be irate against them, but on the contrary we should pray for their salvation.' For writing these words the patriarch had the copyist flung

into prison, and it may well happen that the archpriest will be burnt alive in a cage as an apostate. No, if Moscow ever sets herself against someone, she never lets go her prey even if she has to go to Persia to seek him out. The sultan is more reliable, for he is not at peace with Moscow."

"Ah, grandfather, it looks as if the crows will feed off the falcon wherever he may be! They may be afraid, but still they will peck."

"Let's have that drink, kind guest."

"Yes, for it's time we were abed."

Razin went to bed. The old man continued to drink, mixing mead with vodka. Then he hung his head and crooned:

"She pushed the monk down from the porch,
And there the little man lies now,
With heels aright in air. . . .
The merchant had bashed in his brow,
The scrivener's head was broken there.
My sweet, you must not take it ill,
If Moscow tortures you for this at will."

The old man rose heavily to his feet, tried to dance, but his feet refused to obey. He crept into his corner behind the stove-shelf and continued far into the night raving and murmuring snatches of song.

## 7

The bell which sounded the tocsin hung in the Frolov Tower in the Kremlin. A passage, about twenty-one feet long, led from here to the torture chamber, which was at a lower level. The two towers were connected by a drawbridge with its chains and pulleys. Three criminals were led from the Frolov Tower across this bridge by six musketeers, on their way to be tortured. Walking in front was a tall Cossack in a grey kaftan without a belt. Though he stooped slightly, he was of powerful build and had sharply protruding shoulderblades. His beard was thick, his black hair profusely streaked with grey. His long arms were thrust into gyves, the strap of which tightly gripped his sunburnt neck; they were so lengthy that they dangled down to his knees.

No sooner had the musketeers jostled the malefactors across the bridge to the torture chamber than the squeaking pulleys set to work getting the two wings separated from each other above the deep moat, which was paved and full of water.

Torches were burning and crackling in the torture chamber. At the top of the tower there were two iron girders, placed crosswise, and above them some small slits, through which the smoke and steam could escape. To the height of three feet and more the walls were bespattered with black, coagulated blood, scraps of flesh and matted wisps of hair. On the brick floor lay a log with a sort of bayonet-like sword thrust into it, and a pair of leather mitts was fastened to the hilt by a leather thong. Nailed into the wall, not far above the log, was a planed rod; shears and thumbscrews and other instruments of torture were fitted in between the wall and the rod; also a blunted sledgehammer, haft upwards, was crammed into the same space, and from it dangled, like a necklace

of beads worn by savages, a string of sharp splinters of bone, which, when necessary, were driven under the nails of the victims. Two narrow, mica-covered windows pierced the outer semicircle of the wall, and within, a table and wooden seat were installed beneath these slits. A bearded nobleman, who acted as assistant to boyar Kivrin, the head of the Criminal Office, was seated at the table. The seat of honour at the same table was occupied by Kivrin himself, wearing an unbuttoned black coat over a short green shirt. A reddish-brown peaked cap adorned the boyar's head; the cap was trimmed with a narrow strip of fox fur. On either side the door two clerks were seated, one in red, the other in blue. Beneath their coats they carried inkwells slung on straps; each had a roll of paper, and a goose quill was stuck behind the ear. Efim was one of the clerks, but he was by now a mature man with long, fair hair and a curly, well-trimmed beard. Kivrin shifted his wolfish eyes towards the rack, from which strong leather straps hung like harness from a cross-beam.

"Clerks, tell the torturer Ortiem to tar the rack-bands, they are becoming very dry and may snap."

The clerks rose and bowed to Kivrin.

The log which the executioner used as a foothold was adjusted into an angle of the wall. On the floor under the rack there was an iron door about three feet square, on which the fires were kindled; it also served as a trap-door, through which the dead bodies could be ejected. One had merely to raise the plates, and the corpses slid down the incline into a stone culvert, and thence dropped outside the Kremlin wall not far from the Frolov Tower. Every morning the men from the almshouse came to collect the corpses, for these torturings took place every day, except at Christmas and on Easter and Trinity Sundays.

Right in the middle of the Frolov Tower, near a doorway, a bloodstained paper was nailed to the low door. It read:

> "Pursuant to the decree issued by the tsar and grand prince Alexei Mihailovich of All Russia, thieves and bandits are to be tortured daily not excepting festivals, for they themselves take no heed of these days in the performance of their vile deeds."

The tower resounded with the booming of the Kremlin bells. Without rising, Kivrin doffed his cap and crossed himself. The nobleman rose, took off his fur cap, turned towards the window and reverently crossed himself likewise. Then the clerks did the same and seated themselves when they had done. Two musketeers stood by the vaulted doorway, which led into the other part of the building. Kivrin said:

"Musketeers, as soon as the timepiece strikes the hour, lower the drawbridge to the Frolov. The executioner will be coming."

"We are aware of that, boyar."

"Vespers are nearly over, and we shall soon start work. Yet I wonder whether it were not better to wait for the second brother before we begin on the elder."

With bowed head the nobleman sat staring down at a paper lying before him. He raised his eyes and nodded assent.

"There's no sign of the second one being dragged in, boyar," remarked Efim.

"Hold your peace, churl. I was not speaking to you. We may have to wait all tomorrow, Ivanich."

"It seems to me, boyar," said the nobleman, "that Kvashnin's men are not very alert. Why not send your own men, Pafnuti Vasilich?"

"My spies are at hand, Ivanich, but, even as things are, Kvashnin bears me malice; he alleges that I interfere in every case where an investigation is needed."

"If that be so, boyar, it is obvious that we shall have to waste much time over this urgent matter."

"No! Kvashnin be damned! Let him lodge a complaint with the tsar if he pleases, but I shall send my own men. Hi, musketeers, summon the spies."

A musketeer took a burning torch from the wall bracket near the door and marched away to another part of the tower.

"Kivrin's men! Summons from the boyar!"

Four men in tanned sheepskin coats entered the torture chamber and went to the table. Three of them wore white felt caps. The fourth, a broad-shouldered fellow with prominent cheekbones and slanting eyes, had a pointed cap edged with black dog's pelt, which came well down over his forehead and slits of eyes. He was definitely of Tatar type, and instead of a belt he wore an executioner's thin leather lash with a loop on its end and wound a couple of times round his waist.

"Now, lads," said Kivrin, scanning one face after the other, "do you know the man you have to seize?"

"We have a description of him, boyar; also we are informed as to his identity. He is captain of the Cossack unit stationed for the winter in Moscow. His name is Stenka Razin."

"That's the man. Well, find him. But have a care to make no commotion and avoid the eyes of the inquisitive. Do not approach him in a mass, but separately, and lay hands on him when he is not carrying a sword, for if he has his sword he will lay about him and start chopping heads off as though they were turnips in a kitchen garden. This freebooter is known to be fearless and never to have missed fire."

The boyar fixed his eyes on the Tatar, saying:

"Warrior Yumashka, I have been told that you capture many horses with a lasso, but have a care not to miss my man when you go after the Cossack. Remember that if he holds a sword in his hand your lasso is useless. Here are my instructions: track him down when he is in a privy—he cannot climb on to the bar while wearing a sword. Or you might instigate some of the spies to start a fight on the river bank; this sham fight will keep the matter secret. As it is, we have lost his trail for a good while. Only yesterday I discovered he had spent the night in the musketeers' settlement, whereas the Cossack unit is billeted near the Kremlin. He is bound to be in the settlement again. So here are my suggestions for carrying out the job: when he comes along the icebound Moskva river you must start a hand-to-hand fight right across his path; maybe he will get excited and join in. Then he is yours. Have a sledge ready, throw a piece of sacking over him and bring him to the Frolov Tower. Here we intend to receive him without ceremony."

"Trust us to get him, boyar."

"We shall get him."

"Be off now, and God speed the work!"

The men withdrew. The clock in the Spaski Tower struck the hour; the pulleys squeaked as the drawbridge fell into place. Kivrin asked:

"Musketeer, are the executioners coming?"

"They are, boyar."

8

Everything was as clear as daylight; it seemed to Razin that he was lying on the deck of a big barge, slowly drifting downstream with an indigo-coloured sail just in front of him. But observing the prospect more attentively, he found that his right hand lay on one side with the fingers beckoning. Some distance away was a body, yet the boots of a man in a blue coat were quite near him. Where the man's face should have been there was a sheet of yellow paper, and underneath the paper he beheld a fair beard. Razin heard the man reading something aloud, and he made an effort to understand: . . . with his diabolical hopes . . . robber . . . perjurer . . . wanted to revile holy things . . . ignorant of the intercession of Our Most Holy Lady . . . of Moscow. . . .

Above the blue coat and the yellow paper there rose crenellated walls; beyond the walls there clustered one above the other women's golden headgears with no faces beneath; they rose higher and higher until above them a golden cross flamed in the sunshine.

"How wonderful!"

Though Razin wished to get up, he became acutely aware of his bodily torpor . . . obstinacy and resentment surged up within him. Taking a deep breath, he shouted: "What's the matter with me, Satan?" And so saying he sprang out of bed. . . .

Facing him across the room, a cradle, curtained in blue damask, was rocking peacefully to and fro near the wall. The hood of the cradle was trimmed to about half-way down with a fringe of bright yellow silk, which swayed with the rocking. Behind the cradle sat Irenetsa in her shift, which had slid off her shoulder and exposed her ample bosom. At a little distance from her on the same seat lay an open book, illuminated by wax candles, and in front of this squatted the fool, his finger moving along the page as he argued with himself.

"There now, didn't I tell you, you hundred-year-old carp, that you would wake our guest? Oh, Stepanushka, the old man must have drunk too much; it looks to me as if he has a burning fever. He is quite delirious and out of his mind."

"Most Holy Lady of Moscow, say you? Nay, that is false!" yelled the ancient, taking no notice of Irenetsa's intervention. "In the book, which the archpriest copied from Kyril, it runs: 'First of all, the devil scatters the seeds of his falsehoods by composing legends about false gods, born of woman.'"

Razin hastily began to dress.

"Where are you off to, falcon? Oh, my dear love, sleep while it is still dusk. I shall prepare some food, and we'll eat, and drink strong liquor."

"And the archpriest is also false, for Kyril's book tells us: 'Satan himself will be incarnated as Antichrist.'"

"Grandad, are you ever going to stop? Let me look into your eyes once again, my bright falcon, let me kiss every one of your little pock-marks. My heart is sore, I cannot sleep, and it seems to me as if this will be our last farewell."

"Oh, we'll meet again. Don't cling like that. I must quit Moscow as soon as possible, for she disturbs my soul."

He went out, followed by Irenetsa's wailing voice:

"You croaking old raven, you've scared away my joy!"

## 9

Avoiding deserted lanes and keeping the towers of the Kremlin well in sight as they rose above the low roofs, Razin made his way across the suburb and headed for the river. Several persons, swinging their arms as they walked, sauntered towards him across the snow; two others, in long-tailed fur coats and with frosted beards, were not far behind. One of them was eagerly enquiring, while the other replied boastfully.

"And did you ever run like a Chaldean?"

"Ay, that I did until the patriarch forbade it. Many's the beard I've set fire to with willow-herb during the Christmas merrymaking, and for thus doing I had more than once to swim among the icicles at Epiphany."

"Weren't you frightened? Did you never catch a cold?"

Their words became indistinguishable; they had either lagged behind or had gone in another direction. Three men were endeavouring to overtake Razin, and churned up the snow, slipping and turning out their toes so as to get a better grip. One shouted as he went:

"The Novgorod strap-makers are first rate, but they'd never give satisfaction to my executioner—never!"

"Why?"

"Well, here's what he says: 'If I don't have the feel of it in my hand, that's no proper whip!' Then he plaited leaden weights into the thongs."

"The devil he did!"

"So now the man who is not in a position to bribe him will never come out alive."

"You don't say so!"

"It's gospel truth. The clerk counts the strokes; no sooner does he open his mouth than the executioner strikes 'one', and the victim falls to the ground with his tongue lolling out."

"The cur!"

"Women are finished off with a mere half-stroke. But they know what to do. They need but whisper, "We shall meet later near the bath-house,' and nothing is done to them. He just touches them lightly, and though blood may spurt, their flesh remains sound."

For a long time Razin could hear them exclaiming:

"Oh!" . . . "Well!" . . . "There's a devil for you!"

At one of the cross-roads, knee-deep in snow, stood the beggars from the almshouse in patched and tattered array. They were intoning:

"From the invasion of alien people, Lord God deliver us!"

"From capture of wise and powerful princes, boyars, governors and merchants by the heathen, Lord God deliver us!"

An opulent-looking merchant in a dark, single-breasted coat, fur cap and embroidered felt boots, plunged his chamois-gloved hand into a bread-basket held by an urchin and distributed loaves among the beggars. They bowed so low that they touched the snow with their foreheads while still continuing to drone their mournful incantation:

"Grant, O merciful Lord, a long life to our great sovereign the most pious grand prince Alexei Mihailovich, and to the voivodes, boyars and to all living people."

Razin descended the steps cut in the snow down the river bank, and as he did so he thought:

"Shall I ever live to see the day when those who are now being prayed for will be cursed?"

"Cossack—gallant Cossack! Help, for God's sake! We're being beaten!" a man shouted to him as he passed.

The fellow, who looked like a petty tradesman, was dressed in a short shabby coat and a dirty print shirt, open at the collar. A little copper cross dangled from his sinewy neck; his bare feet had been slipped into felt shoes; his face was streaked with blood.

"Who is beating you?"

"Not me alone, but all of us tradesmen are being ill-treated by boyars' menials. They've chased us away from our sledge-loads in the market-place."

Razin stepped on to the ice and glanced along the river. In the butchers' row there were carcases of beef, with their legs cut off at the knee. Beside the fishmongers' booths, immense catfish, tails in air and muzzles down, leaned against the walls, looking like the carved pillars supporting a boyar's porch. A crowd was milling to and fro in the frost-laden air; and round the stalls, piled with silks and prints, the press of people was greater than elsewhere. A deep-toned and unending roar rolled along the river.

"Is this true? Who's doing the beating?"

Razin caught sight of a throng of poorly clad persons retreating from the fishmongers' row. They were being hard-pressed by another pack in yellow sheepskin coats, top-boots and felt caps with ear-flaps; these were armed with staves.

"Strike at them, lads!" The ear-pieces on the caps of the staff-armed men flapped as they bustled along.

Throwing off his coat, Razin rolled up his sleeves.

"Hi, you ruffians, halt!"

The retreating crowd paused.

"Here's a leader! Stop!"

The men with staves raised a shout:

"This is not a fight, it's murder!"

"The Cossack has a sword."

"And a pistol."

"He has no right to fight."

"And what about your staves?"

"If you throw down your staves, I'll discard my sword."

"If you win, the sledge-loads are yours."

"Come on, you ruffians!"

The staves were thrown on the ice.

"Hi, Cossack, we've rid ourselves of our staves."

"Good!"

Razin stepped up to where his overcoat lay, unstrapped the sword and flung his pistol on to the sheepskin. The crowd rallied to his side. He put them in formation, placed himself at their head and commanded:

"Now, then, forward!"

The two crowds closed in on one another. Razin struck his adversaries in the chest with his fist, and those unable to dodge his thrusts reeled and fell. His advance was marked by prostrate men.

"Aha! You devils, the sledge-loads are ours, and so are the sheepskin coats, as was agreed."

"That's not fair. Why did you take up with an extra fighter?" shouted back the men in sheepskins.

"Had your behinds tickled, eh?"

Razin fought his way through the crowd of adversaries; some lay on the snow, while others ran away; but he noticed that these antagonists seemed to be making signals to one another. He immediately sensed a trap, and retraced his steps to where he had left his coat and arms, but as he turned and tripped up a man who was barring his way he heard someone whistling through closed fingers, and at the same instant a lasso whizzed in the air and tightened round his neck.

"The dev——"

About ten paces away Razin caught sight of a row of grinning teeth under a Tatar cap. Gloved hands were rapidly winding up the leather twine. He felt suffocated and half dazed, but not in the least frightened. He hurled himself towards the gleaming teeth, closed his large hands round the Tatar's sinewy neck and, with a punch in the chest, sent him sprawling on the snow. The face beneath Razin grew purple, the slanting eyes bulged.

"Satan . . . Satan . . ." gasped the underdog.

Although the noose round his neck impeded Razin's breathing, he made a movement with his shoulders and wrung the foe's neck.

"The brigand! He's finished off Yumashka!"

Razin's boots slithered on the ice, and he had no time to protect himself against a sharp blow from a bludgeon. His whole body trembled with the impact.

The river with its booths and its motley crowds, the red wall of the Kremlin, the golden cupolas on the churches—everything spun round and round as it turned to green; far away in the dim distance little sparks, which might have come from the crosses glistening in the sunshine or from lighted candles, danced before his eyes. A great buzzing filled his ears.

## 10

Whiffs of feathery snow drifted through the top windows of the torture tower. The torches flickered, showing up the form of a man stretched on the rack. His shirt had been torn from his shoulders, his grey coat lay on the floor in front of the table. He ground his teeth and moaned. Then the executioner thrust a log between the victim's legs, pressing it hard with his knee and looking up to assure himself that though the arms of the tortured man had been dislocated from their sockets, they were not severed. With a gust of wind, the sound of church bells entered the tower.

Kivrin, seated at the table, crossed himself and said:

"Vespers was over some time ago. This must be a mass for the dead. The bell on Ivan's belfry isn't good today, it has a thin sound."

As usual, the two clerks, one in red, the other in blue, were sitting on either side the door. The one in red replied:

"That is the bell of the Archangel Cathedral, boyar."

"That accounts for its being so poor in sound. Now then, Ivanich, let us make a start with God's blessing."

"You do well, boyar," answered the nobleman.

"Executioner, strike! And you, clerks, write everything down."

Down came the lash with a rushing sound . . . once, twice . . . five times. A trickle of blood oozed from the dark blue weals on the yellowish skin of the victim's back.

"Enough! That makes five strokes," said the clerk.

Kivrin's dull voice came from the other side of the table:

"Robber and thief, Ivan Razin, did you conspire against the voivode Yuri Olexiyevich Dolgoruki? And if you plotted against the commander, dispatched by our sovereign tsar, did you not, in so acting, likewise conspire against our sovereign himself?"

"Ay, against all the oppressors who try to infringe our Cossack liberties, against the voivodes, boyars, mayors and officials. Yes, I plotted against all these," the bearded, curly-haired Cossack replied from the rack in resolute manner, though in low voice.

"Write his statement down, clerks. Were you in communication with Tsevka Koza, a musketeer in the Pskov army, and with other bandits, who defamed the name of our sovereign and grand prince of All Russia? And did you use foul language in connection with Her Majesty, the Swedish queen?"

"I deeply regret that I knew not of this at the time, for in very sooth I would have communicated with them. . . ."

"What else have you to say?"

"I should like to be in touch with all those who have withstood the evil-doers, who oppress the starving people and deal worse with them than ever the cruel Tatars did. I should take my stand with those who are maltreated by such persecutors as are the boyars and the voivodes. . . ."

"Executioner, add a few more strokes so that he tell all he knows."

Down came the lash again. . . . The skin grew more and more purple, and the man's trousers were so sodden and heavy with blood that they slipped down.

"Enough! In all, he has received twenty-five strokes," said the clerk.

The dull voice from behind the table spoke again:

"Whom else will you name as an associate and ringleader in the revolt, robber? Were you in touch with the marauders who arrived from Pskov, and who, near Ivangorod, on the river Luga, assaulted the English envoy's ship? Also I wish to learn from you the names of those who concoct devilish plots against our great sovereign."

The tortured man made no reply.

Within the niche of the tower, where before the torture lay the executioner's footrest, could be seen a pair of shining silver tabs on the heels of a pair of large boots protruding from beneath the matting. The boots moved, the heels stamped, and a dark head with a blood-stained face thrust itself from under the matting. There came a voice, which drowned the soughing of the wind and the chime of church bells:

"Brother Ivan! If I live, your blood will be avenged threefold."

"Stenka! It is even more cruel than torture to learn that you, too, have been captured."

"So he has come round!" said Kivrin, his yellow teeth showing in a sneer.

The wolfish eyes cast a glance at the matting. "It is a pity that the time is not yet ripe for us to stretch two bandits on the rack at once."

"Why should we not, boyar?"

"We cannot, Ivanich, because I have not seen Morozov. He must first be informed that the ringleader of the salt riot has been caught."

"Can it so fall out that he will be dealt with by Kvashnin instead of by us?"

"Morozov must be informed, Ivanich. Now then, executioner, see if you can instil a little truth into him who is under trial at present."

The flogging was resumed. The first whip had been discarded, and the executioner's assistant handed him a new one. The head executioner squared his massive elbows, which were steeped in blood, he straightened his broad back in its yellow jacket, pressed the full weight of his body on to the log between the victim's legs, and—crack went the bones.

"Your spine is breaking, and yet you remain obdurate? Speak, bandit, name your associates, the ringleaders and other enemies of the tsar."

The victim mustered every ounce of strength he still possessed to cry out:

"You devil, I've told you everything."

"Executioner, your whip seems to be a bit lenient. Add a trifle of fire, it's more reliable."

The assistant threw some wood on the iron plate beneath the rack. The executioner withdrew the log which pressed against the tortured Cossack's spine, and thick smoke hid him from the boyar's and the clerk's view. The flames leapt higher and higher and began to lick the Cossack's legs. A smell of roast flesh rose upon the air. The victim groaned and ground his teeth, then his teeth began to chatter faster and faster as from the ague.

Thumping the table with his gloved hand, Kivrin watched the torture and made joking comments:

"The peasant is sweating because he finds the tsar's mantle overwarm. Executioner, throw the pincers into the fire, and when they are white-hot nip off his private parts and break his ribs."

Spurts of blood sizzled in the flames. The executioner observed: "He is bleeding from his insides, boyar."

"Loosen the rack, let him rest awhile, executioner. If he is worn out too soon he will not disclose everything. You must have pressed too hard on the log and ruptured his guts. Still, he was not invited here to enjoy a feast. By the way, clerk, did he see a priest on his way hither?"

The clerk in the blue coat rose.

"Boyar, as the prisoner was being led into the Frolov Tower a priest approached him, but he turned on him so violently that the priest went away."

"Well, if he refuses to have a priest, he need not have one."

Ivan Razin was taken off the rack. His face was black. Tottering on his burnt feet, scarcely able to open his eyes, moving and bending his head like a blind man in the opposite direction from the matting under which Stepan lay, he said in a broken voice:

"Stenka, brother! I am nearing the grave; remember me. . . ."

"I shall never forget, Ivan. Forgive me."

Throwing down his red-brown cap and baring his teeth in a sardonic grin, Kivrin shouted:

"We shall honour Stepan no less effectively than we have done you, never

fear. Hi, musketeers, take the other brother into the next room and pass his arms through the rings."

Four musketeers, lighted by a torch, led Stepan Razin into an empty part of the tower next the torture chamber and knocked the manacles off his hands. Razin glared at the musketeers and said:

"All the boyar's curs will be handsomely paid."

The musketeers stretched Razin's arms along the wall, passed them through iron rings and fastened round his neck a leather collar, studded with nails and fixed into the wall.

" 'Tis said a hen-harrier is bold, but it is not for such to peck a free bird."

Stenka Razin's head was still bleeding from the bludgeoning he had received; the blood was smeared over his face and stuck up his eyes.

"Shouldn't we place a rag on his head? After all, he is a human being," said one of the musketeers with a coloured patch on his sheepskin cap.

Another answered authoritatively:

"He'll last out till the torture begins. Then everything depends on the boyar's humour."

"These Cherkassi folk are like cats, they seem to have nine lives," remarked a third.

The musketeer who held the torch said nothing.

Water trickled down the walls, and the victim shivered with cold. Stretched on the wall with his feet planted on the stone floor, and his neck still sore from the lassoing, Razin tossed from side to side in an endeavour to extricate himself. He might have succeeded in his efforts had his neck not been again held by a strong, though not very tight, noose, the nails of which pricked him whenever he made the slightest movement of his head. The thick stone pillars of the entrance without doors obstructed his view of the proceedings within the other chamber.

All Stepan could hear was a hissing noise, caused by the application of the white-hot pincers, and the cracking of bones, whereby he knew that his brother's ribs were being broken; he sniffed the smell of burnt flesh. Groans from his tortured brother came to him, and the questions, asked by the same dull voice:

"Name your associates, brigand."

"I shall say . . . I am dying. . . ."

"Very well, then. Executioner, heat up the pale and plunge it through his innards. Write this down, clerks:

> " 'The robber, Ivan Razin, cursed the voivodes, boyars and princes; he threatened to raise a fresh rebellion, he remained obdurate under torture, refusing to name the ringleaders, and, when subjected to intense torture, he was unable to withstand it.'

"Now finish this one off, executioner. Burn him."

Came a prolonged groan. Stepan Razin, chained to the wall as he was, heard the clang of the iron plate and the sound of something heavy slithering underground.

"Musketeers," said the boyar, "lower the drawbridge; let us now give thanks and work no more; I am weary, and besides, it is past midnight."

And the same dull voice droned on:

"Executioner, take the coat—it is the custom for the executioner to get the dead man's clothes."

"These tattered remnants are not worth picking up, boyar."

"Have you grown so wealthy? Your assistant will not despise them. Snuff out the lights."

## 11

Irenetsa sat rocking the cradle and singing, while her thoughts ran on the guest who had left his night's shelter so early.

"You were parted, little son,
From your own loved mother.
Lullaby, my little one!
Big and black the forests are,
Where they drove your father,
Lullaby, my little son!

"When to manhood you have grown,
Strong and lonely stripling,
Lullaby, my little one!
New-built house will be your own,
Looking splendidly and strongly.
Lullaby, my little son!"

The shuffling sound of frozen footwear and the clank of chains could be heard outside the door, as the old hunchback descended toilsomely into the room.

"You've made a strange choice of a song, Irenetsa."

"I'm in no mood for singing, grandad. My heart is sore within me." She started on another lilt:

"Oh, you pussy, pussy cat,
Curly is your pretty head!
Naughty pussy went and sat
Cosily in the boyar's bed.
They will catch you by the jaws
And will break your tabby paws. . . .

"Well, you lump of misery, is this one merrier?"

The humpback divested himself of his tattered furs and threw them on the stove-bunk. He also took off his ice-cold iron chains while muttering to himself:

"We're in a bad way, that we are, if what folks say be true. And I shall die before misfortune overtakes the boyars and oppressors. Ah, woe is me!"

"What's all this about woe, you croaking old raven?"

"I'm afraid our tom-cat has already been caught by the boyars."

"Whining again?"

"I heard about it in the market-place and by the Kremlin walls."

Irenetsa pounced on the old man and, seizing him by the shoulders, whispered:

"What—what was it you heard? Tell me, quick."

"Now you are all of a pother! What a firebrand you are! You'll do yourself no good by meddling, only get yourself buried again like you did over your husband Maxim. Don't squeeze my shoulders so tight."

"I shall strangle you, old fool. Don't keep me on tenterhooks. Maxim was an evil man. What have you found out?"

"Folks say that Stepan, our guest, was taken to the Frolov Tower on a sledge with a cracked skull. The musketeers pushed the people away and dragged him inside."

"Is this really true? Was it he, grandad?"

"I'm afraid it was. He was seized on the Moskva river during a fight, and 'tis said that he was a Cossack who had been the ringleader in the salt riots."

"Was he taken to the Criminal Office, to boyar Kivrin?"

"Where else could they have taken him? Ay, to that devil incarnate."

Irenetsa hastily began to dress with trembling hands. She felt dizzy, and unsteadily picked up her things, threw them down again, and picked them up once more. However, in the end she managed to dress herself in her best clothes: a blue silk sarafan with wide shoulder-straps of beads, a white silk blouse with sleeves puffed to the elbow, a net of pearls on her head, a silk scarf over it, and a coat lined with fox. From a coffer she produced a marten-fur cap with pearl tassels.

"Would that my throat were palsied," cried the old man; "where are you off to in all this finery?"

"To the Criminal Office."

"Straight into the wolf's maw! He'll give you such a roasting as will set your teeth achattering."

"Life's naught to me!"

"You pity that other; have you none to spare for this little one?"

Irenetsa dropped on to a seat and wept as she said:

"Grandad, please do not sear me with words. Of course I pity my baby son. He is asleep, and I must not wake him, but oh, how my mind reels!"

"If they let you off alive—well, such is your destiny. But what if it's the block, as it was for my own dead one? Remember that, you empty-pated woman with the long tresses."

"Grandfather, take care of my son. Use the money from under the bolster. Feed him, wash him often, do not neglect my Vasiutka."

"There is money enough without having to take from your savings. Oh, woman, you will burn at the stake, and we too."

## 12

Irenetsa mounted the stone stairway with rapid steps; the place smelt of mint, and the air was stuffy from steam. On the landing, with low folding-doors and inside a semicircular arch, she was met by a handsome, fair-bearded clerk in a red coat. He held a lighted candle in a copper candlestick.

"What is your business here, young woman?"

"Oh, my dear, I should like to see the boyar."

"What do you want of the boyar?"

The clerk opened the door, and Irenetsa followed him into the boyar's anteroom, which had a vaulted ceiling supported on pillars adorned with arabesques.

Along the walls ran long seats with red quilted mattresses and an occasional brightly coloured cushion. Ikons occupied two corners. Irenetsa, her net and pearls shimmering, bowed to the clerk from the waist.

"It's about the Criminal Office, my dear. I've been told that a young Cossack has been arrested. He is tall, curly-haired and slightly pock-marked."

"What have you to do with a malefactor?"

"Oh, my dear, they say his skull has been cracked. But he is innocent, so why has he been arrested?"

"You must know what the boyar is like, wench. Where blood is concerned, there's no means of moving him. Your petition is ill-advised. Better go home, while the barriers are still open in the town. I'm telling you this because I'm sorry for you. You are so comely that I'm quite taken with you."

Irenetsa threw herself weeping at the clerk's feet. The young man placed the candle on the floor, raised her to her feet, and she fell on his neck.

"My dear, you may ask me what you will if only you can soften the boyar's heart."

"Keep your hands off," said the clerk, unloosening her arms; "were any to see us there'd be trouble. Yet I should like to make love with you! Tell me where you live."

"Beyond the musketeers' settlement, my sweet, in the burnt glade, where there is a snowbound hut behind the fence."

"I shall come. But you must go now; you must not show yourself to the boyar. He won't let you off unscathed, so take care," whispered the clerk, stroking Irenetsa's shoulders and looking into her eyes. "Where could a girl like you have been born? Many's the beauty I have seen, but none to compare with you."

"My dear, tell me the truth. Is the Cossack under arrest?"

"I am forbidden to tell, but I shall tell you. Yes, if he's Stepan Razin."

"That's his name, darling. Let me go to the boyar, my heart is all aflame."

"Don't go. Wait for him. He's in the bath-house."

"I cannot wait, my pet. Let me go, tell me where it is."

The clerk shook his head and picked the candle up from the floor. "Seems to me you've gone crazy. Well, be it as you wish. The bath-house is here, under the stairs. Turn left and walk to the first door. Push it open, and there you are in the ante-room. But you're a very silly girl!"

Irenetsa threw off her coat and cap and ran downstairs to find the door. In the ante-room candles on shelves were burning in copper chandeliers. A green velvet jacket and a rose-embroidered skull-cap lay on a wide, polished wooden seat. A dull voice called from the bath-room: "Tishka, where are the girls, eh?"

Irenetsa set the door ajar and peeped in. She saw a wizened yellow angular something with thin, distorted toes lying on the top bunk. The bald head of this object gleamed in the light of a lantern hanging from the wall. The thought crossed Irenetsa's mind: "It's as if one were washing a dead man!" Humbly she announced herself:

"Whatever the boyar wishes, I shall do."

"Eh, who is there? The devil take it, I do not want any girls! Very well, then, wench, climb up and wash an old man and dry him."

Picking up her shift, Irenetsa withdrew from the close, steaming mint-laden

air into the ante-room, where she dressed herself and waited for the boyar to join her. The boyar climbed down from the bunk. She helped him into the ante-room, carefully wiped him down and deftly dressed him. He coughed, and his breath was laboured. He walked with his arm round her waist and spoke in a low voice as he gasped for breath:

"I feel faint. I reckon I'll soon be tossing pancakes for the devil."

She led him upstairs to the front room and towards a bench, where she placed a cushion under his head, lifted his legs on to the mattress and covered them with her coat. The boyar dozed, while she sat at his feet. When he awoke he asked for a drink of kvass. The clerk in the red coat still stood with bent head leaning against the door-frame. At a nod from the boyar he went out and returned with a silver dipper filled with kvass. The boyar quaffed a good half of it, belched, and handing back the dipper to the clerk, said:

"Give her some; she toiled very hard. Oh, Efim, were I but a few years younger I should never let her go. She's a diamond, not a woman."

The clerk bowed silently. The boyar asked him:

"Why so glum? Are you sleepy?"

"I am feeling rather ill, boyar."

Irenetsa sipped some of the kvass and handed back the dipper.

"Then you'd better be off to bed. I shall discuss market prices with this young woman."

The clerk went out.

"Now, then, river pearl, tell me what you came for. Surely it was not to wash a corpse? It appears to me that we've got hold of someone whom you are fond of, and so you came to fetch him."

Irenetsa fell on her knees.

"With tears I bow low to you, boyar, on behalf of the Cossack who was brought to the Criminal Office today. He is called Stepan——"

"Ah!" the boyar interrupted, as he sat up and, quicker than might have been expected, put his feet to the floor. Irenetsa noted how the wolfish eyes suddenly blazed into life. "Razin? Stepan?"

"Yes, boyar."

"Who told you we had him? The clerk?"

"Folk are saying so."

"Did you and Razin live together in love?"

"Only for a short time, boyar."

"Is that so? And are you aware, wench, that this same bandit Cossack and his brother rebelled against God?"

"Of that I am not aware, boyar."

"Sit down and speak the truth. Do you not know that Stepan Razin was the leader of the salt riots?"

Bowing her head, Irenetsa remained silent for a time, then she felt her face growing hot.

"Now I know that you are informed about the whole affair."

"But that is so long ago, boyar."

"Come nearer," said the boyar, as he reclined again on the seat, looking straight into Irenetsa's eyes. "There was Lucifer, little woman, and this same Lucifer disputed with God. So God cast him into Gehenna and doomed him to everlasting fire. He who opposes God's anointed, the tsar, opposes God Himself. These Razins and their entire kin are all bandits and rose against our

great sovereign, and for this they must be cast into the flames as God cast Lucifer. How can you, whose body has cleaved to Satan, expect to find salvation? And, moreover, you have had the temerity to come and intercede on Satan's behalf! Yet how sweet you were, as sweet as an onion head in a frying-pan. Well, there's no more to say about the matter just now. Go to your bed, and I shall think over during the night what price there'll be to pay. . . . Hi, Efimo, clerk!"

At the boyar's summons the fair-haired clerk emerged from another part of the room.

"Take this wench into the little closet in the passage. We shall arrange a bride fair tomorrow. She's been to the baths, but was not properly steamed."

"I would go home, boyar. I would come back here ever so early."

"Do you wish to be assaulted on the road by malefactors, thrown under a bridge, or lose your head? At least we shall be able to leave your head where it belongs. Take her away, clerk."

The clerk said grimly: "Come along, woman."

The clerk in red dress walked before her with great strides, holding the taper in front of him. Irenetsa thought:

"Just like an executioner."

A bed stood in the single-windowed closet; an ikon hung in one corner with a thin candle burning in front of it.

"You are to sleep here."

The man placed the candle on the table and, on reaching the door, looked round. There was a gleam of golden hair on her shoulders. He could not see her eyes. He said very softly:

"I am enchanted by you. Whether you are going to come out of this alive I know not. The boyar said——"

"Oh, my dear, I can stand anything."

The clerk left her. For some unknown reason Irenetsa seized the candle and went to the window. It was narrow, covered in with mica, fixed into a stone niche and barred with wrought-iron grilles; closed shutters concealed it from without. The convex mica mirrored her face in distorted manner so that it looked broad and hideous.

"Oh, woe is me! Vasenka, forgive me! And how is my other dear one, my Stepanushka? Is he alive? What misfortunes have come upon me!"

She blew out the candle and began to say her prayers. Lying on the floor, she fell asleep towards morning.

Irenetsa dreamed that someone was singing an old familiar song:

"Her sleep was short,
Her dreams were bad.
Her dear one's mood was of the sort
Of being restless, grieved and sad."

Simultaneously she heard the clanking of iron bars, padlocks being removed from doors, keys scraping, while worms crawled over her body; she tried to push them off, but her hands stuck, and she could not remove the worms, which went on wriggling until they reached her eyes. Waking, she found herself lying on her back. Before her stood the boyar in an unbuttoned black coat and high-peaked reddish-brown cap. In his hand was a mica lantern. His wolfish eyes were fixed on her.

"Now then," he said, "come to the bride fair, young woman."

Irenetsa sprang to her feet and bowed deeply to the boyar; then she shook her clothing to rights and followed the boyar. They passed along corridors within the building and emerged into the Frolov Tower. The place was dank with moisture, and within its round walls the musketeers were doing sentry duty, wrapped up in fur overcoats, armed with poleaxes and bearing lanterns. They were obviously awaiting the boyar's and the girl's arrival.

"How about the drawbridge?"

"It has been lowered, boyar."

Kivrin passed his lantern over to one of the musketeers. The party entered the torture chamber. Inside, one clerk in red sat by the door. Irenetsa bowed to him. The clerk rose as the boyar came in and sat down again as soon as the boyar had taken his seat at the table. Two musketeers took up their posts at the vaulted entrance.

"Musketeers," said Kivrin, "admit no one into the tower except the executioner Kirinka."

"Your orders will be obeyed, boyar."

"Clerk, take a light and accompany the wench to where the man lies."

The clerk detached a torch from the wall and led Irenetsa away. Turning to the musketeers, the boyar commanded:

"Draw the rack-straps aside, lads, and kindle a fire beneath."

He then flung his peaked cap on the table and walked towards the stand where the instruments of torture were ranged, chose a large pair of pincers and plunged them into the flames.

More fuel was brought and chopped up while the fire was taking a grip on the iron plating. In the empty part of the tower next door Irenetsa set up a loud wail.

"My falcon, my beloved, what have the devils done to exhaust and wound you thus? They've tied you up with a collar and chains as if you were a wild beast."

At the sound of Irenetsa's voice the boyar moved forward and stood in the archway with his arms akimbo. From beneath his black coat there was a gleam of his green boots as they were caught in the flare of the leaping flames.

Irenetsa was wiping Razin's blood-smeared face with her silk shawl.

Razin murmured in a dreamy voice:

"Why have you thus revealed yourself? For the devil's delight?"

"Stepanushka, my falcon, I cannot bear it. My heart aches for you—oh, how it aches! I shall go to boyar Morozov and plead with him against the torturers."

"To Morozov? The one who fled from the people during the salt riot? No good will come of such a move."

"Then I shall go to the patriarch, to our sovereign tsar himself. I shall implore and weep and pray."

"Forget me! . . . My brother Ivan has been killed, and my own end is nigh . . . There's that Satan!"

Razin raised his eyes to Kivrin. The boyar stood in the same place, his green under-jacket protruding from beneath the black kaftan, his bald skull reflecting the red glow of the fires.

With an uncontrollable sob Irenetsa threw her arms round Razin's neck, disregarding the spikes on the collar; blood flowed down her hands and breast.

"Go away! Do not trouble my heart. I am so numbed by this cold that I cannot feel you."

"Now, then, wench, the requiem being sung, come and cook the memorial feast! Lead her back, clerk."

Efim drew Irenetsa away from Razin and pushed her into the torture chamber.

"Put down your torch. Hold her hands; never again shall she give suck to young vipers who plot against the sovereign tsar's life."

The clerk replaced the torch in its sconce, took off his coat and turned in such a manner that he was back to back to Irenetsa; then he gripped her hands firmly in his own and dragged her towards the fire. She was almost hanging from his broad, hot back.

The torture chamber was filled with screams.

"You'll be drowned in blood, devil," thundered a voice from the cell next door.

Leaning against the jamb of the vaulted archway stood a broad-shouldered youth with reddish down on his stupid face. He smiled, showing strong white teeth; his oxlike eyes twinkled merrily as he watched the boyar's handiwork. He wore a leather apron. His brawny, blue-veined arms were bared to the shoulders and partly hidden under the apron. His hands twitched impatiently and his huge head in its low, black cap jerked from side to side.

"Boyar, may you live to be a hundred! You are still strong in hand and keen of eye."

Kivrin pulled off the executioner's mitts and replaced them on their hook.

Irenetsa lay in a dead faint on the floor in front of the table. Great gaping wounds, from which blood was still streaming, marked the places where her breasts had been.

"To gnaw them out is bad, to burn them out is a mere nothing. Sprinkle her with water, Efimko."

The clerk in his green spotted shirt brought a bucket of water and poured it over Irenetsa's head. She sat on the floor and wailed softly to herself, writhing with pain.

"Now, Kirinka, it's your turn: scatter the fire and fix up the rack."

The executioner made one stride towards the fire, raised the iron trapdoor and pushed the smouldering wood underground.

When the boyar got back to his seat, the clerk rushed to the table, placed his trembling hands upon it and exclaimed with tears in his eyes, inflamed with anger:

"Listen, boyar! If you touch that woman again I'll kill myself! By Our Holy Mother, I will!" And he crossed himself.

"Have your wits forsaken you, my lad? Do you not know the law? She's a bandit's jade—see? She harboured him, and such as she are tortured even more than the robbers themselves. If we let her go we ourselves may have to suffer the rack."

"I care little what she has done. But I shall do exactly as I said I would."

"My lad, you do not seem to realize what a lucky young fellow you are. I have trained you and adopted you; now I have another honour in store for you; I am preparing you for the post of tsar's clerk. I am a bachelor, and when I die, all my wealth will be yours."

"Leave the young woman alone; I care neither for wealth nor honours."

Kivrin turned to the executioner,

"Too bad, Kirinka! You'll not be able to inherit the woman's gown. Go to the Frolov Tower and wait there till I summon you. I thought to have been a gravedigger, but maybe I shall find myself in the place of a father at a wedding."

The executioner went out.

"Efimko, since you feel so kindly towards the wench, go with all speed to my bedroom; there you'll find a sheet of paper on the table. Senka, your colleague, wrote it out last night. Tear that paper to shreds and burn them. I had intended when I had dealt with her to transfer her to Ivashka Kvashnin and have her place searched. Well, I shall not do this now. Buy some little Persian cups with chains to put over her breasts and make love to her. Wipe her hair and cover her head. Thus shall it be. Musketeers, as soon as this woman is dressed, escort her over the Moskva river. Once that side, she'll make her way home by herself."

## 13

The ringlets of a silvery beard swept down upon the chest; shining ends of hair fell softly over the blue coat; proud eyes were leisurely scanning page after page of an illustrated German folio wherein were depicted animals and birds —snow-leopards, elephants, parrots, peacocks—all were passing by in a slow procession on the gaily coloured paper.

A slender, fair-haired servant in a tightly fitting coat of silver tissue entered the room, bowed low, placed a letter before the boyar, and with quick, light steps drew away. The boyar raised his eyes and turned about.

"Are you celebrating a feast day, menial?"

"No, boyar."

"Then why are you rigged up like a fighting-cock?"

The serving-man looked down at himself.

"The steward gave us orders, boyar."

"Go, call him hither."

With a spring in his gait, the young man withdrew noiselessly. The boyar picked up the note and read:

"Boyar and master Boris Ivanovich, the price of the mirror in a silver frame is twenty rubles, and that of its case in plain red velvet is five rubles. Two rubies of right good colour and quality are set in the top and bottom of the frame and cost a hundred and fifty rubles each. These rubies have been set according to your wish in silver thistles. The mirror itself is none too clear, the glass is slightly askew, but Venetian glass cannot be obtained at the moment, and Novgorod workmanship is inferior. . . ."

Entered the steward, who, bending his aged back, bowed low to his master.

"Why, Sevastian, have you ordered the boys to dress in silver tissue? Tell them to exchange this finery for their plain nankeen clothes."

"Yes, boyar."

"It is you who should be well dressed, for you are old, and fine clothes will adorn your body; but the lads have no need of such trappings; their hair is curly and bright, their faces and eyes full of fire, and their bodies well proportioned and healthy."

"Your orders will be obeyed, boyar."

"One thing more," said the boyar, as he gently tapped the note before him

with his fist, "the silversmith has sent his bill; he was apprenticed to a German, and yet his work is bad. Is this silversmith here?"

"Yes, boyar, he is waiting in the servants' quarters."

"Go, then, and send him hither."

The steward departed. The boyar, while examining the pictures, mused: "How well these Germans paint animals and birds! But as to portrait-painting, they are no match for the Italians."

The silversmith entered the room diffidently. His long beard gave him a dignified air; he wore top-boots and a long coat of black broadcloth; his well-oiled hair was cut circular-wise and kept in place by a narrow snood; the eyes betrayed ill-concealed fear.

While the man prayed before the ikons, the boyar kept silent. The prayer finished, the silversmith pressed his back against the door and bowed. Still examining the pictures, the boyar asked:

"Who wrote that note, churl?"

"My son, boyar; my son was taught by the sexton of the church of St. Nicholas."

"Did you yourself work on the frame for the mirror?"

"I did, boyar."

"A fine piece of work. Then why did you use such a poor piece of glass?"

"I know, boyar, the mirror glass does squint a bit. I was run off my feet in search of a better one, but there is none to be had. Later, perhaps, the Venetians or the Germans . . ."

The boyar looked up, and the expression in his eyes awed the silversmith, who bowed again.

"Take back your wares. I need not give you my reasons, for they are obvious. The glass distorts the face, and I intend it to be a gift. Or do you fancy that I shall use your work so as to offend the person for whom it is intended? It reflects not a face but a monstrous caricature, like that of some outlandish dwarf or fool, who plays pranks and cracks jokes. Keep this glass for yourself and admire yourself therein on holidays when you are in your cups. Go!"

The silversmith bowed and retreated towards the door backwards, opening the latter with his buttocks. As a parting shot, the boyar added:

"Send me the lad who wrote the note; he needs to be taught. If he proves worthy I shall give him a post as scrivener when he is older."

"For this you have my heartfelt thanks, boyar."

"As to the glass, when you find a good piece, fit it into the frame and deliver it to me."

The steward entered.

"Boyar, the head of the Criminal Office is coming into your courtyard in a closed carriage."

"Meet him and escort him hither. When the wolf comes into the yard, the dogs lie in wait for him under the gate."

The boyar pushed away the folio and shifted his position so as to face the door. Tapping with his staff, his bald head glistening, Kivrin stopped a while before the ikons to say a prayer. Then he turned and bowed.

"All honour be yours! Is the tsar's councillor boyar Boris Ivanovich in good health?"

"Thank you, I am very well. All honour to you also, boyar; pray be seated."

Kivrin sat down and examined the walls, the decorated ceiling and the rugs on the wide seats. Then he said ingratiatingly:

"My host has innumerable possessions and much wealth; and as to honours and favours from our great sovereign tsar, who can fathom their magnitude?"

"Steward, bring in refreshments for my guest; I should think you must be tired, boyar, for you are no longer young."

"So long as I live I shall manage to do my duty. We have to work without complaint. We are all the servants of our great sovereign; that I am weary is due more to age than to the arduousness of my work."

"True, true, boyar."

The steward re-entered with a stoop of wine, goblets and refreshments on a large gilt tray.

"Sample this French vintage, boyar. I have also received a cask of wine from the Swedish merchants who are organizing their trade at Novgorod. Should our talk prove to be congenial, and we felt so disposed, we might broach that gift, too."

"Oh, boyar Boris Ivanovich, as if I were greedy for drink! Nowadays a cup or two is enough, then 'Amen'. A trifle makes me queer; I get palpitations, and my tongue begins to blab unseemly. So here's to your health, Boris Ivanovich."

"The same to you, Pafnuti Vasilievich! May there still be many years of work before you as chief of the Criminal Office."

"Then let us have one more drink together, and the toast this time must be to our sovereign's councillor and intimate boyar. But I should have started with business first, for if I drink I am apt to forget."

"What has prompted you to come today? You so seldom visit me."

"Business keeps me from visiting you, boyar. Otherwise I should be a frequent visitor at your table, old reveller that I am! I wish to consult you upon a most important case, Boris Ivanovich. I don't know where to begin and where to end. When you dive from a bridge you aim to plunge into deep water, nevertheless, you may hit your head against a stump. Here is how the matter stands, boyar. I have arrested and brought to the Criminal Office the ringleader of the salt riot, Stenka Razin; so, Boris Ivanovich, as befits your rank, and since we cannot legally finish off the job without your sanction, I have come to inform you that I should like to proceed with the torture and intend to report verbatim on the case to the tsar himself after the torture."

Kivrin's eyes were ablaze as he fixed them intently on his companion's face. He continued:

"Why so glum, boyar? Have you detected some offence in what I have just told you? I can assure you that no offence was intended."

"Go on, boyar. Only I have different ideas on this matter."

"May I ask what they are, boyar?"

"This Cossack was sent here from the Don as a mark of distinction; and not as an ordinary rank-and-file Cossack, but as a captain. The unit was provided with all the necessaries, it was received in audience by our sovereign; but until this visit of yours, boyar, I did not know why the delegates still tarried here instead of returning home; now I see that they are waiting for their man and are searching the whole of Moscow for him."

"The Cossacks are small fry, boyar. It is not possible to let the bandit off; he must not be allowed a chance of ravaging Moscow a second time and to maltreat notables."

"That is your idea of justice, boyar; the Cossacks have theirs. This unit was sent by the great army of the Don Cossacks."

"If you are unaware of certain information, let me tell you this, boyar. During my stay in Cherkassi I persuaded the ataman Kornei Yakovlev——"

"Kornilo . . . boyar."

"He is called by one name or the other. . . . We agreed to include this ringleader in the unit. He knew and desired the inclusion of this ringleader, for Razin and his entire family are a disgrace to his kind. I am surprised that you, Boris Ivanovich, should take the part of a bandit who caused you such great damage in the salt riot."

"That is a thing of the past, boyar. They killed the old major-domo, too, and that is a pity."

"It is not a thing of the past, boyar. The bandit has remained exactly as he was then. The beaver moulted in the spring, but his teeth have been left intact."

"Let us drink, Pafnuti Vasilievich! It may soften your heart."

"Ah no, boyar! Let us come to terms and then . . ."

"What terms? So, hear what I have to say."

Morozov's face reddened, the proud eyes flashed round the walls, he drew himself forward on the seat, and his tone was icy cold as he spoke:

"The ringleader Stenka Razin has been arrested by your men?"

"The truth is ever the truth, boyar. The robber did away with one of my best men; nor was he the only one. The Tatar was a champion in the matter of strength, solid and sinewy; yet this accursed Razin crushed him to death in a fight on the Moskva river. How he did it is a marvel."

"He did right to crush him!"

"You surprise me, boyar. Robbers will begin killing off service men, and the boyars will applaud them and shout 'Ho, ho, ho!'?"

"Service men should not infringe the law! Ivan Petrovich Kvashnin and I myself were informed about this ataman and his connection with the salt riot as well, and together we discussed what should be done. Kvashnin—I believe—does know the law, though he is fond of drink. . . . This is how we posed the question: 'Would we be acting correctly if we had him arrested when he came as a delegate in the unit? And, if we arrested him, would this not lead to far worse troubles on the Don?' Kvashnin said: 'Churls who commit misdeeds in Moscow and flee to join the Cossacks may not be tried for past misdeeds if they return to Moscow as Cossacks.' The same applies to this man. We failed to capture him then, now it is illegal to do so. Forgive my bluntness of speech, boyar, but you have acted too hastily and against the law."

"But, boyar, while you were thinking over the matter the man could have got away. The law has not been infringed in this case, for I sent a full report of it to our great sovereign while I was staying on the Don."

"Your report has still to be debated in the Council, boyar."

"I know that, Boris Ivanovich. You are merely encroaching on my preserves. . . ."

"Nevertheless, do not be in too great haste, Pafnuti Vasilievich."

"It seems to me, boyar, that things have come to a bad pass. You are an intimate of our sovereign lord, you drape yourself in his favours as in a sable mantle, and yet you decline to safeguard Russia from rebellion!" The wolfish eyes blazed, and Kivrin rose tremulously to his feet.

Morozov slid still further forward on the seat and threw back his head.

"You are too old, boyar, to be called to account for what you have said, or I should have to talk to you in a different tone after all you have put forward."

"I see in all this your friend Kvashnin's machinations; he aims high, and you, boyar, are paving the way for his advancement. But take heed, Boris Ivanovich, a cow will never fly like a falcon!"

Kivrin had turned pale, his hands shook, while his staff beat a rapid tattoo on the floor.

"Steward, escort the boyar to his carriage and show him the way out in case he forgets which road to take."

Kivrin departed.

Morozov resumed his contemplation of the pictures. . . .

## 14

Numerous lamps, burning in front of the ikon-case, cast an amber glow over the room. The irate boyarina paced up and down in the half-light with her golden hair rippling down her back. Her coif still lay neglected on the seat.

"All that my soul craves for passes me by! What a cruel fate is mine!"

The old nurse entered tapping her crutch-stick.

"Nanny, I sent you to find out about the Cossack, and where have you been all the time?"

"Be not angry, little mother. I've discovered much, but none of it is worth a penny."

"Why not?"

"The Cossack has been seized and delivered over to the Criminal Office and is to be tortured, as I have long since expected. This very day old Wolf—the one in charge of robbers' cases, Kivrin—called on our boyar. So I, sinner that I am, listened at the door from a little neighbouring closet, mother mine. Had Boris Ivanovich caught me eavesdropping it would have cost me my life. But my wish to serve you, my queen from over the seas, is greater than my fear of death. And yet you stamp your little foot at me."

"It is very naughty of you to eavesdrop, nanny, but never mind now. What did you find out?"

"I found out that everything folks say hereabouts is true. The Wolf himself barked at the boyar, saying: 'I have seized the Don marauder, Razin, and before settling with him I have come to inform you of my action, Boris Ivanovich.'"

"And what did the boyar say?"

"The boyar ordered him not to proceed with the torture until——"

"And what next?"

"Well, Ilinishna, I dared not stay any longer lest the boyar peeped into the closet and found me there. So I hobbled away. The Wolf, little mother, has a clerk named Efim, the bastard of a serf now dead. Kivrin loved that girl, so he took charge of the little orphan; yet he tells everyone Efim is a foundling."

"Oh, nanny, how fond you are of listening to gossip and slander!"

"Ah, my queen, this was told me by trustworthy folk and not by malicious gossips."

"Hurry, nanny, I hear footsteps, perhaps the boyar is coming."

Without stamping her stick, the old nurse vanished from the room.

The boyarina stood in the dark room facing the window when the boyar approached her.

"Your room, Ilinishna, smells of olive oil like a pilgrim's cell, and how dark it is, dimly lighted by the ikon lamps only! Hi, maids!"

Two fair-haired girls in blue sarafans answered the summons.

"Light the candles, take some fragrant herbs from the chest under the seat, burn them and perfume the room. I cannot abide this kind of convent smell."

The girls lit the candles, perfumed the room and went out; the tapers stood lonely on the table.

"Have you no smile for me, Ilinishna? Have a look; perhaps it will cheer you up. See what I have got for you from the Germans. Why are you bare-headed?"

"What have you got for me, boyar?"

"Here, see. Do not be mulish, come to the table. I have procured some pictures of animals, snow-leopards, lions, birds, all coloured. I was arranging to give you a mirror for your nameday, but the silversmith bungled the work, so I have to wait."

"It is vain for you to take so much trouble, boyar. What care I for gifts? As it is, my room is overfull with them."

"But how can I please you, Ilinishna? What do you want?"

"I want to see the man who saved my life during the salt riot, boyar. That would be better than all your gifts. But for him you'd have no one to offer them to. The rebels wanted to set fire to my apartment; had they done so 'twould have been the end of me. You know, my husband, that I was lying sick at the time, quite helpless, everybody fled from the mob, and even you did not come or seemed to care about me!"

"That is true, Ilinishna. When I came to my senses a great fear seized me on your account. What sort of man is he? If he did such a thing for you and me, why cannot we see him?"

"We cannot, boyar! And so my heart aches every day. Here am I alive and able to go wherever I please, much homage is paid me, and yet I cannot say a word of thanks to the man who saved my life and honour."

"Tell me, Ilinishna, my dearest one, who is this man? Is he a churl or a villein? To such a guest I would assign the places of honour in my halls."

The boyarina stepped up to her husband and embraced him. Her face brightened, though in her eyes there lurked mistrust.

"Boyar, the man is now under arrest at the Criminal Office, and he is to be put to the torture. That man is the ataman of the salt riot."

"Razin?"

"Yes, boyar."

"Why are you blushing, Ilinishna? Yes, indeed, and why have you not spoken to me of this earlier? Yes, indeed, and how could a robber have saved your life if he were the leader of the riot?"

"You do not believe me, boyar? Well, ask the maids—he saved them, too . . . from being raped. To me he said: 'Sleep, no one will touch you.' "

"What strange things you are saying!"

"If you do not believe me, ask the serving-maids. Do you fancy, boyar, that I am telling fairy-tales or have drunk some enchanter's philtre?"

"Ilinishna, you are not given to falsehood, I know that."

"Then what makes you doubt me?"

"Only that I am unable to disentangle the riddle. . . . Ivan Kvashnin has taken up Stenka Razin's defence. Kivrin went to the Don to arrange for the man's arrest and wrote about it to the tsar. Our sovereign trusts Kivrin, and Kivrin would swallow up Kvashnin were he not too tough a morsel. Besides, Kivrin is backed by prince Yuri Dolgoruki. This very day I told Kivrin: 'Razin's arrest is an infringement of the law; his misdeeds must be overlooked.' But whether the tsar will take the same view I do not know. Again, by whom and when were you told that Razin is under arrest at the Criminal Court?"

The boyarina blushed deeply, withdrew her arms from her husband's neck and stepped aside.

"You really wish to learn whence I gleaned this news? Why, is it being kept a secret? The people are talking about it in the market-place, and I pass through the market on my way to church. Blushing, am I? Yes. But would my heart be aflame if the man who saved my life were free?"

The boyar threw the folio of pictures on the table and sat down.

"Take a seat, Ilinishna. Now we have started this discussion we had better go into the matter thoroughly."

The boyarina sat down on the edge of the bench.

"Draw nearer. Surely we are no strangers to each other? Let us think over together how best we can extricate Razin from Kivrin's clutches. To extricate him is a straightforward business, and yet it can be done only by tortuous means. I am not an intriguer, I can't do things in a crooked way."

"But why crooked, boyar, if Kvashnin considers it to be calumny?"

"Not calumny, Ilinishna, but infringement of the law. I told Kivrin that Razin was sent here with all the honours of a captain, but Kivrin is not a new hand at managing cases of banditry. He has been staying on the Don and has won over the chief ataman. Through Kivrin the tsar knows, and so does the chief ataman, that Razin was involved in the salt riot. But here, Ilinishna, crookedness comes in, and the crookedness is mine, in that before the decision of the tsar's Privy Council and the tsar's confirmation of such decision I must get hold of that Cossack and set him free. My doing so will provoke endless slander; the tsar is no longer a youth, the time has gone by when I could guide him. Prince Yuri will, I know, go against me; he is in higher favour with the tsar than Kvashnin, who is considered to be a roisterer by all men of note. I know beforehand that he will arrive not quite sober even at the Council."

"Then shower no further gifts upon me, boyar. Your words have shown me that there will be no peace for me."

The boyarina made as though to rise.

"Sit quietly where you are, Ilinishna. When I took you to wife I did not realize that Miloslavski's youngest daughter was so spirited a girl as you have turned out to be. The eldest was trained to be a tsaritsa, and it would therefore beseem her to show strength of mind, yet hers is a gentle disposition. A boyar's wife is expected to fear her husband's every look and word, since those who prove themselves refractory to his demands soon come to heel when they are given a taste of the whip. But between you and me there never has been nor shall be any question of beating. For this very reason our discussion needs to be lengthy. In the present case, the truth, which is known to you, is likewise known to me; but, you see, truth and justice are not one and the same thing. The truth is that this Cossack has been illegally arrested and at the wrong time. Justice speaks otherwise: the Cossack has committed felony, and men who act as he

has done must be arrested. Kivrin is right, for were the man set free he would relapse into the very same misdemeanour, and then all the opprobrium would fall on me. Kivrin is not alone in realizing this; the tsar does, too. Now judge for yourself: what do I hold most dear?"

"Truth and honour, boyar."

"Yes, but you are dearer to me than honour."

"I shall believe it when the Cossack is in my room."

"So you do not believe me?"

"I cannot help but doubt. Only a moment ago you doubted me, boyar, when I told you that the leader of the salt riot saved me."

"So I did, but that momentary doubt is a thing of the past, and now I believe all you have told me. Other fears assail me, however: he is young and dashing, with inhumanly fiery eyes; so much I learned from the investigation reports. What if he were to take you away from me, where would my honour be then? Pray do not interrupt me. A man of his stamp is ever ready to do what others even fear to dream of."

"What you are afraid of is the tsar's anger. As for me, I have been yours and shall always remain so."

"I wonder. 'Tis not today that I have learned what a firebrand you are. Once your heart is kindled you are no longer mistress of yourself. That is what I love in you, Ilinishna, and why I am afraid of him. The case we are discussing does not in itself present much difficulty: one has merely to get a clerk to write a paper, subscribe to it the signature of Ivan Petrov, take three steps into the tsar's presence, and Razin, your saviour, is safe. When you meet, be careful not to demean yourself. I place my trust in your conscience."

"Still afraid, boyar?"

"Afraid of you!" said Boris Ivanovich, tossing back his silvery locks and rising. "Enemies have tried to trample me underfoot many a time and oft, but in the end it was they who lay in the mud. Have a look at the pictures, Ilinishna; there is great beauty and human skill to be found in them."

The boyar laid his soft hand on the folio, stepped forward, kissed his wife and walked quickly away.

"Pictures! Pictures! Snow-leopards, lions, eagles. . . . Oh, how I wish he'd make haste and do something at once!"

The boyarina summoned her maidservants and embraced and fondled them while they plaited her hair.

## 15

Kivrin sat at his usual place in the torture chamber, his wolfish eyes fixedly staring at the empty rack.

"What have you on your mind, boyar?" asked the nobleman, with a glance at his chief.

"I am not feeling well, Ivanich, and our business is not going forward as it should. Musketeers, go and release that bandit from the rings and his feet from the stocks. Bring him hither. We shall have to postpone the torturing of him."

"Why so, boyar?"

"Well, you see, I've been to see Morozov, and he is in favour of the rebel; this is all a part of Kvashnin's machinations."

Razin was brought into the tower. He stretched his arms so as to relieve the stiffness in his shoulders. His shirt, which was hard from dried blood, had frozen to his back.

"Ah, but it's warm in here!"

"Here you, let me thrust your arms into the torture harness; such fellows as you have no right to be stretching their arms under the rack," sneered one of the musketeers.

"Leave me alone; I only want to ease the stiffness out of my arms."

"None of your games here! You are a strong man and will soon warm up once you are wrapped in the matting."

The musketeer seized Razin's hand.

"Let go!"

Razin gave the man a push and he fell down, his poleaxe clattering. He jumped to his feet, furious, snatched up the poleaxe and made a rush at Razin.

"I shall break your skull. . . ."

"Have a try, and there'll be one scoundrel the less in the world."

A level voice from behind the table ordered:

"Let him be, musketeer; you are making a fool of yourself. Don't you recall how he strangled Yumashka? And Yumashka was a champion. Why, he'd twist your neck as though it were a cockerel's. Do not bind him, let him warm himself."

A smile came across Razin's blood-smeared face.

"I did not expect this. It looks as though I'll have to say thank you to Satan. You're not a timid man. . . . What about a wash?"

"We only wash with blood in here," replied Kivrin.

"That's good! Yes . . . with blood!"

Razin walked to and fro in front of the rack, his heels ringing loudly on the stone floor and sounding still louder when he trod on the iron trapdoor. The musketeers on guard grew uneasy as they glanced at Razin's terrifying figure, surmounted by a face blackened with blood, through which his piercing eyes glared. The clerks shifted their position to the farthest end of their seats. The nobleman fidgeted unquietly. Kivrin sat motionless, never taking his eyes off the bare rack.

The massive figure of the red-haired executioner leaned against the lintel of the arched doorway, his arms bared to the shoulders, his hands tucked as usual into the leather apron bib, and his black cap jauntily set to one side of his head. He, too, remained completely unperturbed, displaying his large white teeth in a broad grin. Kivrin turned his eyes to the executioner.

"It seems to me, Kirinka, that we shall not be working together much longer."

"Why not, boyar?"

"Oh, just because . . . Make a fire under the rack and let the miscreant warm himself; he'll soon revive."

The fire was lit. A man, unknown to Kivrin, entered the tower; he was a clerk in black, wearing a velveteen cap; he bowed to the boyar and laid a sheet of paper on the table.

"What's this?"

"From Morozov, boyar."

"Come here, Efimo, and read the document."

Sedately, the clerk in red approached the table, took up the sheet, unfolded it and read aloud:

"To the boyar Kivrin, head of the Criminal Office, in response to his question relating to a case of torture:

"By decree of our great sovereign, tsar and autocrat of All Russia Great and Small, Alexei Mihailovich, boyar Kivrin is hereby commanded to transfer the Cossack Stepan Razin, captain of the Don Forces' unit, wintering in Moscow, and arrested by the said boyar Kivrin, to the *Zemski Prikaz* of boyar Ivan Petrovich Kvashnin, without fail, and bring him speedily from out the torture chamber to the entrance of the Frolov Tower, and hand him over to Ivanov's musketeers of Poltev's department, who man the guard in the *Zemski Prikaz* of boyar Ivan Petrovich Kvashnin."

"And that is all! Do you realize, Ivanich, that after toiling as we have for Russia, all our labours have gone for naught? Is the tsar's seal affixed to the document?"

"It is, boyar."

"Well, Cossack, I feel you have a great destiny before you; fly a while longer."

Razin was led off.

## 16

"Mother Ilinishna, boyarina, there is a guest to see you—the Cossack has come."

"Where is he, nanny?"

"Here, standing at your door."

"Show him in, show him in!"

The old nurse, tapping with her crutch-stick, peered outside.

"What's your name? Are you a Christian? Come in and see the boyarina."

With ringing heels, Razin entered; he wore a borrowed blue coat and his bloodstained shirt; his face was still covered with dried blood.

"Nanny, quick, wet a towel in the ewer! Wipe his face clean.

"Oh, sake's alive, boyarina, I never thought to be wiping away a robber's blood!"

"Enough grumbling; do as you are told."

Mumbling to herself, the nurse wetted a towel and handed it to Razin, who then washed his face.

"Here, asp, rub your neck and great paws. Wash properly, I say."

"Very well, you she-devil."

"May you perish for calling an old woman by such name! Had I my own way, you'd never be allowed to cross this threshold."

"Off with you, nanny, leave us alone!"

"Eh, deary me, deary me, but I'm scared to leave you alone with a robber. Shall I call your maids?"

"Go, I need no one."

Muttering to herself, the nurse went out, darting an angry glance at Razin.

"Sit here, Cossack. Come nearer that I may see your face. A thin one, to be sure, but with eyes such as I have never seen before."

"I gave my word to the boyar not to stay long."

"Who do you think went to all the trouble of getting you here, I or the boyar?"

"I do not know, but when I pledge my word I keep it."

"Then know that had it not been for me, the boyar with his sense of justice might well have left you in the hands of the Criminal Office man. But I would not allow it."

"You have my deepest thanks, boyarina."

"One good turn deserves another! You saved my life once, and now I have done the same for you. Tell me, did you instigate the salt riot?

"I led the people; but they hated the boyars long before that."

"Tell me, is there light and freedom in the steppe, in the wide open spaces? Is it exciting to go seafaring or up into the mountains?"

"The world is wide and full of light, boyarina. Man is neither afraid nor exhausted by its storms and tempests; he rejoices in them. The world is made dark and wicked, boyarina, through the doings of evil men. It makes a man's heart ache to see some people living in plenty, extravagance and gaiety, wasting time in carousals, eating dainty food, sleeping on feather beds, wearing cloth-of-gold and jewels, while others live on hard crusts; and these crusts are torn from their hands and trampled under the feet of voivodes, officials and scriveners, who shed blood and shackle men. And what for? Merely to lead an easy life themselves!"

"Because you speak the truth and see it, kiss me! I also have sensed that same truth, but I have not the courage to stand up for it. Kiss me!"

"Well, since you ask. . . . Indeed your kiss is sweet, boyarina. You have never seen eyes like mine—and I have never tasted kisses like yours."

"Could you love me, Cossack?"

"That I do not know."

"You do not know? And you dare stand there and tell me that to my face? . . . I love you!"

"I am afraid to love you."

"I have no fear."

"Do you mean to say that you would follow me, boyarina?"

"I will. I am ready for anything—even torture."

"Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Senses fly away when a woman is in love. The very heart in her burns with love, and fear is cast out. Only joy remains, the singlehearted joy of a star, which shoots earthwards from out the sky and is extinguished in its course. I am not afraid that my soul will be extinguished, or that my eyes will be darkened; I accept everything, and the greater the shame the more beautiful the joy. Kiss me again!"

"No, I cannot."

"So that's the sort of man you are? You think I am one of those who live in luxury and despise the simple folk—one of those who rejoice in the common people's misfortunes and penury. Is this so? Yes?"

"I believe you are serious in what you say, boyarina, that you are not like all the rest. But know me, too, as I am!"

"Well?"

"I wander across seas and rivers and towns. Those whom I love I forsake. Even though I pity, I cannot help but forsake them. I am like a wild beast, and the boyars will track me down more ruthlessly than they would a beast of the wild. Well, I am not afraid of anything they may do! What I greatly fear is that you will imprison my soul through pity. Another thing

I must ask you : where are we to go together ? By what unendurable road shall we have to pass ? Are we to flee to the mountains ? If so, we shall be seized by the Kaidatsk mountain tribes, the Daghestan Tatars, or prince Kazpulat men—who are worse than beasts. The Tatars of the Horde and the Turks from Azov are ranging the steppes in search of plunder. I have no wish that you should be snatched away from under my very eyes and sold as a slave by the accursed infidel. Though you may not find much pleasure in your home, at least you have honour and esteem. My heart fails me when I think of how you would live without me, a suffering and beaten woman. Has your great moment in life really come that you should be willing to exchange your womanly apartments for a Tatar's covered cart ? It is beyond my powers to safeguard you, and I cannot repay kindness with evil !"

The boyarina bowed her head.

"I shall speak frankly and freely to you, and you must not be vexed," continued Razin ; "it is the goodwill I feel for you which prompts me. Before our hearts become too strongly bound to each other, let us part. Think it over again. Were I to carry you away to the Don you would find I already have a wife there ; not that a wife matters much ; what does matter is that you will pine away from sorrow awaiting my return from lengthy campaigns. I came into this world—and this I confide to you alone—to repay evil with evil. My soul burns within me to see justice, even though it come out of evil. Your heart, you say, has kindled with love ; mine burns with evil. Farewell ! I thank you for the gifts you have bestowed upon me—the gifts of goodwill, love and freedom."

Razin got to his feet and bowed low to the boyarina. She raised her head and drew nearer to him.

"Why did you save my life ? Kiss me again !"

"Oh, boyarina, we'd better not ! Well, since you insist, just a brother's kiss for a sister."

"I do not wish to be a sister to you. I detest such things. I yearn for love. Oh, Cossack, Cossack——"

"It is time for me to be going. Farewell ! The boyar is waiting."

"Tell me, are you again thinking of rebellion ?"

"I'm all on fire to avenge my father's—and now my brother's—death. So farewell, boyarina !"

"Here's something for your journey——"

"I've no place to stow it."

"Do you not wear a cross round your neck ? Fasten it on the chain."

"I had one when I was a boy, but I lost it."

"Take this ! Pray do not look at me, lower your eyes, and go hence. Nanny, show the visitor out. Nanny, where are you ? Show him out quickly."

"That's just what I've been waiting for, my little queen. Come along, you asp !"

The door closed. The boyarina flung herself, face downwards, on the bench ; her whole body shook with sobs, and she ground her teeth. A familiar step was approaching. She wiped her eyes, sauntered up and down the room and trimmed the wick of the oil-lamp. The boyar entered and spoke from the doorway :

"Is my Ilinishna happy now ?"

Quietly she replied :

"My lord and husband, my soul is at peace. From now on I shall no longer hurt you, and your gifts will be welcome."

"Do you now believe that I hold you dearer than my honour?"

"That I do, boyar."

She went up to him and held his silvery head in a tight embrace.

"Well, well, my fears were unfounded. Wait awhile, I must arrange for his journey. They will probably endeavour to recapture the young fellow; besides, night has fallen, and I dare not let him stay here until the morrow, for that would bring disgrace to the house."

The boyar turned hastily, stroked his wife's head and went out.

## 17

In the servants' quarters of Morozov's house some were repairing harness, others were patching up boots, whilst most of the younger ones were playing cards by the light of a small chip lamp. A boy sat near by to trim and replenish the lamp with chips. Many of the servitors lay on the seats smoking pipes.

The servants' quarters were roomy; the vent through which the smoke escaped was open. Razin stood on the hearth with his broad back towards the heat, thus concealing the oven door and the fireplace. He had been provided with a short sheepskin coat. The grey-haired steward now handed him an executioner's whip.

"Here, youngster, wind this a couple of times round your waist."

Someone said jokingly:

"A strapping 'youngster'; a proper executioner; fit to figure in Ivanov Square."

"Cease your tomfoolery. See, young man, executioners thrust the handle in here, in front and a trifle towards the right side. Does this cap fit? Yes, it does! I cannot lay my hand on a proper axe, ours are all choppers."

"Any kind will do."

Unexpectedly the boyar entered.

All except Razin endeavoured to look busy and started fussing around; those who had been playing cards tucked them away; the smokers closed their fists round the bowls of their pipes, while others shoved them into any cranny they could find.

"Menials, let those of you who are smoking go on doing so, for you might set the place on fire if your pipes are still alight. I am no priest in the confessional, neither am I an excise clerk."

The boyar turned his eyes to Razin.

"Are you ready for your journey, Cossack? Give him an axe, too, steward."

"We have no executioners' axes here, boyar, and I have not been able to find a suitable one."

"Take a lantern and go to the storeroom of the *Zemski Prikaz*. I do not think they have gone to bed yet. Ask in my name, and they will not refuse. Menials, I have no intention of punishing you on account of the wine and tobacco; but if any single one of you lets his tongue wag about our having disguised a young man as an executioner, take heed! That chatterbox will straightway be delivered up to the *Zemski Prikaz* and have a taste of the cudgels."

"We have heard your orders, boyar."

"Why should anyone gossip?"

"Steward, call on the clerk Ofonka as you go by and collect the travel permits: one, so that the barrier watchmen will let him through, and the other to the posting station, where he can pick up a horse. It's the one on the Kolomna road. And give that lantern to the Cossack to light him on his journey."

"Everything shall be done as you require, boyar."

"Now, Cossack, you are to make your way to the Kolomna road. Show the pass at the first posting station and you will obtain mounts. There you will find your greatcoat, pistol and sword. And never forget how Moscow sometimes treats her invited guests. Beware of starting another campaign of brigandage."

"I thank you, boyar. On my return to Moscow at a later date I shall invite you as my guest, and the entertainment will be good," answered Razin with a grin.

"Kivrin usually succeeds in inspiring fear, but with you he has apparently failed. Just look at the man, he must have his joke! Pray the Lord for the boyarina, because it was she who sought your safety. Otherwise your head would be rotting in Moscow's marshes."

"I am setting forth on a pilgrimage, boyar, so I shall have plenty of time to pray."

And so saying, Razin left.

## 18

The steward, in his dark blue kaftan, which was embroidered with silks all along the hem, stood beside the cabinets containing the silver. The table had been laid some time ago, and, because dusk was drawing on, numerous candles were burning in the silver chandeliers. Extensive dishes, containing food, and pitchers of wine were placed in their proper order on the board, awaiting the arrival of the prince from his private apartments. The prince in his crimson velvet coat took his seat at the table, saying:

"Yegor, fill two cups with French wine."

The steward promptly did his master's bidding.

"Has the order been given to admit no one but the boyar Kivrin?"

"It has, prince."

Having made his answer, the steward looked as if he had something further to say. The prince emptied one of the cups, and the servant replenished it.

"It seems to me that you have something else to say to me."

"I have been thinking, prince Yuri Olexiyevich, that the boyar Kivrin will not come to sup with you."

"What makes you think thus?"

"His clerk is in the servants' hall with a note for you, prince."

"Then why do you keep him there? Call him."

"At your orders, prince."

A fair-haired clerk in a scarlet coat entered, bowed, and presented a sealed letter to the prince.

"From the boyar Kivrin," the clerk said with another bow while retiring to the door; then he asked: "Shall I wait here or go out, Yuri Olexiyevich?"

"Wait here. Why did you waste time by not coming at once?"

"I had orders not to importune you."

Dolgoruki unsealed the missive and began reading to himself.

"My friend and well-wisher, prince Yuri Olexiyevich. I am feeling exceedingly unwell and lack the strength to wait upon you. I have to inform you that, following upon your instructions, I have finished off the rebel Ivan Razin, and again, according to your instructions, have called on Morozov to inform him about the second brother, the rebel Stenka. Morozov, however, acting in concord with Ivashka Kvashnin, took up a strong stand in defence of the leader of the salt riot and said 'his arrest is illegal'. After this refusal, and as soon as I had returned home, he sent his clerk to the Criminal Office with a paper for me, stamped with the seal of our great sovereign. The orders this document contained were to the effect that the said rebel Stenka Razin was to be delivered to Morozov so as to be dealt with by the *Zemski Prikaz*. It then transpired that, having extricated the said marauder from the jurisdiction of the Criminal Office, Morozov concealed him at his own house until a late hour. I inform you, my well-wisher, that my illness, manifesting itself in palpitation of the heart, is caused—so the German leech said—by the mortification I feel in that this pernicious vulture will quit Moscow boasting and jeering and without having suffered torture for the injuries he brought on exalted persons. And mark me, prince Yuri, such doings are unprecedented in our land. After investigation, I have learned that the bandit in question is to take the Serpuhov road. Therefore, prince Yuri, it would be wise were you to send out patrols to watch until dawn at the city gate and question all pedestrians and those on horseback using the gate, since the outlaw is to quit the town during the night. Furthermore, it is true that the document bore the great sovereign's seal, yet the order was that Stenka Razin was to be handed over to the *Zemski Prikaz*, instead of which he has been dispatched as an ordinary fugitive. This arbitrary act has been committed by the boyars Morozov and Kvashnin, and our great sovereign has been kept in ignorance of the fact. Though we did arrest the culprit illegally for the greater security of Russia—to allow him to escape is a hundredfold more illegal. Therefore, should we ourselves capture this fugitive rebel we could immediately execute judgment on him, as we did on his brother, without reference to our ill-wishers Morozov and Kvashnin. My homage to you, prince Yuri Olexiyevich, and I pray you to answer by return as you love me."

Dolgoruki looked up.

"Go, clerk, and tell the boyar that I shall do all there is in my power to do. Hi, Yegor!"

The steward entered and gave way to the clerk, who was about to go out.

"Order the groom to saddle twelve horses apart from my own. Also dispatch someone efficient to Yakovlev's musketeers section, and in my name order twelve of their company—good horsemen all—to go on night patrol. Assemble the servitors to light the way."

"Your order shall be obeyed, prince Yuri Olexiyevich."

"Wait a moment! Send me my greatcoat and a blade."

## 19

Shadows crept along the sleeping streets of Moscow. Horses' heads, now straining upward and now curbed, shot up the grey surfaces of the houses with their narrow windows. At times the black shadow of a man in shaggy cap and carrying a halberd streaked the self-same walls. By the towers and at the cross-barriers, men in bast shoes, top-boots and coarse homespuns shuffled and stamped their feet in the snow; shafts and patches of yellow light from lanterns flitted about on the grey snow, showing up the scarlet coats of the mounted musketeers; now and again there would be the sparkle of a jewel on the cuff of a princely greatcoat; a special kind of sound came from the precious Horosan blades as they struck against the stirrups; the prince's voice rang out clear and far:

"Watchman, whom have you just allowed through the barrier?"

"I hear, father and prince Yuri! I am coming."

The watchman wore bast shoes on his otherwise bare feet and a tattered sheepskin coat; he doffed his cap; the wind tore at his dishevelled hair and beard, and who could tell whether the silvery hue was due to age or to the spindrift of snow borne on the turbulent wind?

"Can you hear me?" The keen eyes of the spokesman looked stern under the sable headgear.

"I hear you, father. I was trying to recall whom it was I let through. There were many of them, and they carried lights. Those without lights and travel permits I did not let through, prince Yuri."

"Did you let through a man in Cossack uniform?"

"Nay, father prince. Cossacks cannot be overlooked. But none have passed this way. A merchant passed, kinsman to the merchant Vasili Shorin; then came boyar Kvashnin trotting along in a closed sledge on his way to the *Zemski Prikaz*; also an executioner from the Criminal Office. He carried both a light and a pass; he must have been one of boyar Kivrin's men."

"We are not searching for an executioner, but a Cossack. Shorin harbours many such stray folk, and there may be bandits among them. Is it long since the merchant went by?"

"Half an hour or so, father."

"Musketeers, detail three of yourselves to overtake that merchant and question him. Which way did he take, watchman?"

"He said he was intending to take the Serpuhov road, father prince."

"Musketeers, overtake that merchant without fail and keep him under guard till my return. Now then, open the barrier."

The watchman clanged his keys, the frozen wood paling of the gate creaked. As he rode through, the prince told the watchman:

"If a Cossack should make his appearance, do not let him through. If you chance to see one, summon the patrol and have the Cossack taken to the Frolov Tower, where he is to be handed over to the sentries."

"I understand, father," replied the watchman, bending his head low in deference to the prince.

Once more the patches of light and the shadows of men, horses and arms flitted fantastically upon the house walls and the grey snow. The clock in the Spaski Tower struck the hour; the watchman repeated it on gongs placed at the entrances to the houses, and again the imperious voice rang out:

"Hi, barrier man, whom have you let through?"

A throaty voice answered:

"I allowed a clerk to pass, prince Yuri; also a priest on his way to a dying-bed; also an executioner and many others besides have passed through; in fact, all those who carried a light and had a permit. I saw no malefactors."

"Now then, open the barriers. If you see a man dressed as a Cossack, drag him to the Frolov Tower. Now, musketeers, on to the Serpuhov barrier!"

## 20

Kivrin sat at the table in his private apartment with a casket in front of him. The old man was asthmatic; he wiped the sweat from his bald head with a silk handkerchief; from time to time he closed his eyes as if he were dozing. Over his half-length green coat the boyar wore a velvet greatcoat lined with wolf-fur, the Bohara top being made from a mixture of silk and cotton, which was dyed a red-brown colour. The old man was seriously ill, and the German leech had forbidden him to rise. But the boyar had taken no notice of this injunction and had ordered Efim to dress him. He had come forth from his bedroom unassisted and had then ordered the casket, which contained various mementoes, to be brought. Now he was sorting out small ikons and crosses, silk scarves, belts and sashes, diadems of brilliants. These brilliants Kivrin invariably called by their foreign name of "diamonds".

"Here is a Chinese silk sash, lined with velvet. See, it is embroidered with gold, but the diamonds have lost their lustre. Take it for yourself and wear it at your wedding. Remember, Efimko, I am giving it to you because you are honest."

"But, boyar, this is only suitable to a man of your rank. What a beautiful thing!"

"Take it, I tell you! I shall have no need of all these when the grave swallows me. Man is greedy, surely . . . there are some who, even on the brink of the grave, will grab whatever they can; their sight may be dim, their arms and legs barely able to move, a bitter taste in their mouths, yet they cling to their possessions. One might think they'd had enough of it all, but they continue to covet. I understand. . . . One thing I would ask you, lad: do not marry the woman whose breasts I burnt out . . . what's her name?"

"They called her Irenetsa, boyar. Is that the one you mean?"

"Yes. She gives sanctuary to outlaws. Did you go to her?"

"I meant to, but was too busy, boyar."

"Listen to the story I have been told. The thief Fomka turned informer, and on his evidence some burglars were caught beyond the Nikitski Gate in an empty homestead, and with them were two deserters from the musketeers. These men declared that the robber Stenka Razin had dug the wench out of the ground. This Irenetsa had murdered her husband. You see what sort of fish she is. That is why she clung to Razin; he had rescued her from death, and yet, according to the law, she deserved death. When I recover my health I intend to deal with her unless it would affect you too deeply. Which is the best way, do you think?"

"I have not thought about it, boyar."

"What about the robber? Did you deliver my letter to prince Yuri? I was lying almost unconscious at the time."

"I did your commission, boyar. Without delay the prince mustered Yakovlev's mounted musketeers, and himself patrolled Moscow all through the night questioning travellers at the gates. Many malefactors were arrested, but this Razin was not among them."

"Has he then escaped?" The boyar rose from his seat, but dropped back again.

"He has fled, boyar."

"So that's how the matter stands? Our antagonists must have had a good laugh at our expense, and are now, I shouldn't wonder, maligning me and prince Yuri in the tsar's ears. When I said to the robber 'you may fly a while longer—you have a great destiny before you', I meant he would fly from one cage into another. As things have turned out, the informers were right in saying that the robber was set free by Kvashnin and Morozov, and my joke was no joke at all, but became bitter truth. Efim!"

"Here I am, boyar."

"Quick, bring me my winter skull-cap and order that the covered sledge be harnessed. I am going to the tsar to fight the matter out with my adversaries."

The clerk went to fetch the cap, while the boyar tapped the table with his bony fingers, muttering wrathfully:

"Who is the tsar's favourite, Morozov, Kvashnin, or I? I shall find out which of us is the most necessary to the tsar, and which is to be dispatched to make pancakes for the devil. The robber has fled . . . yes, indeed he has fled!"

The clerk brought in the tall sable winter cap lined with velvet; the sable was covered with arabesques in pearls and precious stones.

Kivrin tottered to his feet and wrapped himself in his greatcoat, while the clerk placed the cap on his master's head. The boyar took up his staff and slowly advanced as he leaned heavily upon it. In the wolfish eyes of the ashen face an angry light was blazing.

The clerk ran ahead to open the door. At the boyar's approach he fell at the old man's feet. The boyar paused and addressed him grimly and severely:

"Why do you abase yourself thus, menial?"

"Oh, Pafnuti Vasilich, my own boyar, you are ailing and looking quite unlike yourself; pray do not go! The boyars are sure to speak malicious words, and these words will distress you beyond bearing. The German doctor left orders that you were not to be vexed. What if you were to collapse? Which Heaven forbid! Oh, please do not go, father boyar!"

"Control your emotions! Duty first—self afterwards. I know without the German doctor that I have not long to live. Support me by the elbow and escort me as far as the sledge. When you return to my apartments, go into my bedroom and look behind the ikon of Pafnuti Borovski, the one painted by Senka Ushakov. There you will find a paper which I drew up with one of the clerks of the Law Office. It contains a register of what I am bequeathing to you out of my monies and possessions, what to give the priests to pray for the repose of my soul, and the small amounts to the almshouses. If God sees fit to tolerate my sins for a little longer, and I return home after seeing the tsar, you will deposit it in its place again; but so long as I am absent, keep it by you. Wipe

those tears! Surely you are not a woman? What is the use of shedding tears over what cannot be helped? Behave like a man, as though my very image were in front of you. You never were a drunkard and must never become one; no smoker either; honest, and hold to your honesty. That is better than tears. You have learned much; do not be vain, but go on acquiring further knowledge, writing in good style and calligraphy. Do not bother to read ecclesiastical books, for the patriarch disapproves of such men, since erudition breeds doubt and heresy. Bear all this in mind and do not forget me. Let us embrace each other."

"What shall I do without you, boyar, orphaned as I am?"

"You know that the tsar must be informed as soon as possible as to what sort of man this Razin is who has been released from my control by my enemies, and what Russia is to expect from their negligence. Lead on! Keep a hold on me—the porch steps seem all misty."

## 21

The courtyard inside the palace had been swept clean of snow and besprinkled with sand. The whippers-in, some of them mounted, others on foot, were expecting the tsar's arrival at any moment for the hunt. The wide porch, with its gilded and painted balustrade, was crowded with boyars in fur great-coats. They, too, were awaiting the tsar's arrival, and, while waiting, they disputed among themselves. Dolgoruki took the lead in the discussions.

"You think yourselves very high and mighty, you boyars, but some among you are lacking in sound judgment. It is not Afonka Naschoka who stands between the tsar and me; there are others, who are more powerful and more intimate with our great sovereign."

"Oh, prince Yuri! Ivan Hovanski is not bad, yet he gets scant honour from you."

"Prince Ivan Hovanski is a bull with blunted horns!"

"Naschoka is clever, prince Yuri, whatever you may say."

"He's a good man of letters, but what's the use of that?"

"Hi, boyars, hold your peace!"

"Our sovereign is coming."

The tsar entered from the vestibule; he advanced slowly with Morozov on his right and Kvashnin on his left. The tsar was dressed in a grey velvet coat with short sleeves and chamois-leather mitts with gold-embroidered gauntlets. On his head was a sable cap of German make, the earflaps of which were adorned with pearls, as was also the collar of his coat. The skirt of the coat was embroidered with gold thread; the sash was of silk damask and amber hued; from it hung a curved dagger in a silver sheath, which, together with the hilt, was studded with rubies and sapphires. In his hand he carried a black rod surmounted by a small ball and a cross on top. The tsar said to Morozov:

"Ivanich, please call one of the falconers."

"There do not seem to be any about, sire."

"Hi, falconers!"

"Present, sire!"

A smart young man in a tight dark blue coat and yellow mitts ran up to the porch.

"Why are there so few of you? Where are the falcons? The weather is mild; there is no wind or drifting snow."

"It is not safe for them, sire, for if they get too cold they will not fly. We have two gerfalcons only, for there is nothing to hunt just now."

"What about partridges?"

"Gerfalcons will be good enough for that, sire; they are well covered with plumage and do not fear the cold."

"Is everything ready for the hunt?"

"All is in readiness, your majesty."

The tsar approached the steps leading down from the porch; the boyars crowded round him, each bowing low and endeavouring to catch his eye. The tsar did not favour them with even a glance, but asked:

"Am I mistaken? Or is there someone coming to see me?"

"Great sovereign, it is boyar Kivrin."

"I shall wait for the old man."

Slowly, panting at each step he took, tapping his staff as if he wished to drive it into the wood, Kivrin mounted the steps of the porch. The higher he climbed, the slower became his gait; the wolfish eyes glanced at Morozov and Kvashnin. Kivrin's straggly beard began to tremble, the staff rapped out a tattoo on the steps, he shook all over as he cried in a muffled voice:

"Sire! . . . Treason! . . . They have freed the robber. . . ."

The tsar, not having gathered what the old man was trying to say, answered:

"Do not hurry, boyar, I shall wait."

"As a fugitive . . . my enemies . . . Ivan Petrov's son . . . Kvashnin . . ."

Kivrin, straining to the last ounce of his strength, failed, however, to reach the topmost step, for he stumbled and fell on his face, his skull-cap rolling to the tsar's feet.

The tsar stepped forward and bent down to raise the old man, but the boyars rushed to Kivrin's assistance and succeeded in lifting him. Kivrin struggled in agony, his face grew darker and darker, and his lips muttered:

"A great turmoil will arise . . . Russia . . . Sire . . . Razin has been set free. . . . Treason, sire . . . Kvashnin. . . ."

Kivrin's eyes slowly closed, and his head drooped.

"He is getting cold," said someone.

Old boyar Kivrin was laid down in the porch. All took off their caps.

"Such is life!"

"The boyar died on the way. . . ."

The tsar took off his cap and, drawing off one of his gloves, crossed himself. All those present crossed themselves again and again.

"Ivanich, cancel the hunt. It is a bad omen when a dead man thwarts one's path."

Morozov called to the whippers-in:

"Our sovereign does not wish to attend the hunt. Lead the hounds away."

"Boyars, bear the body into the vestibule and lay it beneath the ikons."

The boyars lifted the dead body and laid it in the roomy vestibule. The benches ranged against the walls were covered with gaily-coloured mattresses, but the seats for the boyars were upholstered in scarlet cloth. Everyone crowded round the dead man. The tsar, examining Kivrin's livid face, turned to Kvashnin.

"He seemed to bear *you* some grudge or other, Ivan Petrovich."

"He was already in delirium, sire."

"Why did he leave his house? For many days he had not been feeling well," said Morozov.

"He has been an exemplary servant to the end of his days."

Dolgoruki stepped forward.

"Sire! The deceased boyar Pafnuti knew that the rebel, Stenka Razin by name, who was removed from his jurisdiction in the Criminal Office had been set free by Ivan Petrovich Kvashnin, here present; the said rebel had cost boyar Kivrin a great deal of pains to catch; but the boyar considered it his duty to safeguard Russia from a malefactor like him. This, sire, is what the old man was so eager to tell you before he died. He had already informed me about it. He further complained that his ill health was largely due to his anxiety in the matter. I, sire, with a mounted patrol of musketeers, scoured Moscow all through the night in the hope of laying hands on the miscreant; but the ataman who led the salt riot escaped, for all my pains; he was neither tortured nor interrogated; and this on account of the goodwill extended towards him by boyar Ivan Petrovich."

"Is this true, boyar?"

"It is, and it is not, sire. In order that everything shall be aboveboard and so as not to arouse your wrath, sire, I will tell you how all this came about. I take the entire responsibility upon my own shoulders. Razin, the captain of the Cossack unit wintering in Moscow, was released without trial, sire, because he had been illegally taken into custody by boyar Kivrin and hauled off to the Criminal Office."

Kvashnin and Morozov exchanged glances.

Morozov said:

"Great sovereign, captain Razin was not released by Ivan Petrovich, but by me."

"By you, Ivanich?"

"Yes, by me, sire. I released him because his capture might have created great unrest on the Don. That Razin was the ringleader of the salt riot has never been proved. At the time, he was neither caught nor tried; now he was imprisoned without trial, and the deceased had decided to present you, sire, a report on the case after evidence had been extorted from him under torture. When and where has such a procedure been heard of before? This dead man went to the Don to arrange for the capture of the rebel, and in his haste he wrote much which was false. Not all the Cossacks can be looked upon as rebels. Now, as in the days of your late father, sire, the Don and Cherkassi Cossacks serve you faithfully and send loyal delegates to Moscow. As for the young men—well, they are always restless and inclined to rebel; but the veteran Cossacks know how to keep them in leash. That is why I released Razin, and why I have taken up his defence. His arrest was an illegal action, and there is no proof of his being a robber."

"What have you to say, prince Yuri Olexiyevich?" asked the tsar.

Dolgoruki spoke in a loud and provoking tone:

"What I have to say, sire, is that the deceased boyar Pafnuti Petrov was well versed in criminal investigation. He certainly did not have Stenka Razin arrested for nothing. Russia is in a turmoil, sire. Not so long ago we had the salt riot; this was followed by a revolt at Pskov. How many persons of quality suffered want and violence? Russia needs an axe, sire; blood must be shed

without mercy; everyone who complains against men in authority and indulges in seditious talk must be destroyed! Every ringleader must be seized, tortured and flogged. The secret police, the ears and eyes of our sovereign, must be on the alert throughout Russia day and night. The robber Stenka Razin, who has been released by Boris Ivanovich, should never have been set free. Here before us lies a dead man, one who until his last gasp worked for the well-being of his sovereign and his sovereign's family—one who, feeling his end approaching, braved death to bring you, sire, a warning that Russia must be saved from sedition."

"You speak true words, prince Yuri. Since the late boyar Kivrin mentioned Kvashnin as the guilty and dangerous party, I command that he be transferred from the *Zemski Prikaz* to the Assessment Office; he can there sway over clerks and check up on the number of men, horses and property of landlords in the case of a new levy. As for you, prince Yuri Olexiyevich Dolgoruki, from this day I appoint you head of the *Zemski Prikaz* as successor to Ivan Kvashnin."

Bowing to the tsar, Kvashnin asked:

"Have I your permission to retire, sire?"

"Yes, go, boyar."

Without putting on his cap, Kvashnin withdrew.

The tsar then turned his eyes to Morozov.

"I should also administer a rebuke to Morozov, but since so many of his misdeeds have been overlooked before, I intend to overlook this one too. It is in his nature to be self-willed!"

Morozov bowed low to the tsar.

"One other thing, Ivanich. Order the late boyar to be borne with all due honours to his home."

"It shall be done according to your word, sire."

The tsar thereupon left hastily. Morozov, too, moved away, casting a searching glance at Dolgoruki.

The boyars, looking pleased in order to annoy Dolgoruki, hastened to congratulate him on the tsar's new favour. As he descended the steps of the porch the irate prince remarked furiously:

"Cease this hypocritical display, boyars. On a day to come your fate will be worse than mine. Save your smiles for the time when you have to scrape before Kvashnin at the Assessment Office. Today you do not see the need of keeping on friendly terms with prince Boris Ivanovich and Kvashnin."

Dolgoruki drove away.

The tsar's servitors brought in a coffin. The boyars got ready to disperse.

# PART TWO

# CHAPTER ONE

## ON THE VOLGA

### 1

"FROM the tsar and grand prince Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of All Great, Little and White Russia, to the governor-general of our possessions in Astrakhan, prince Ivan Andreyevich Hilkov, and to Ivan Fedorovich Buturlin, Yakov Ivanovich Bezobrazov and to our clerks Ivan Fomin and Grigori Bogdanov, greeting! In the year 1667, on the second day of May, we, the great sovereign, sent you dispatches concerning certain instructions as to how to deal with the bandit Cossacks who intend to move from the Don to the Volga in order to plunder. In that document we commanded you not to allow any robber Cossack to put to sea or to engage in any industries or trades and to forbid their presence on the Volga for the purposes of plunder. . . ."

On the fifth of March, 1667, the Foreign Office dispatched a letter to the Don Forces, saying:

"Send from the Don Forces a specially selected ataman and captain to the towns of Panshin and Kachalin with strict injunctions that the Cossacks under Stenka Razin's command be prevented from approaching Tsaritzyn and other localities."

The voivode Andrei Unkovski reported from Cherkassi in 1667:

"Stenka Razin and his comrades left Cherkassi on a marauding expedition without opposition from the Force."

Clean and tidy was the hut which Stenka Razin lived in. On a corner shelf were dark ikons, their silver haloes draped with embroidered linen runners; the floor of beaten clay was covered with gaily-coloured mats.

Smartly dressed in a new woollen homespun skirt, red trousers and boots with low uppers, Oliona was about to lay the table.

"You might lend a hand, Frolko, or call Grishutka. Where is he?"

Black-haired Frol, with his girlish face already touched by crows' feet round his brown eyes, strummed on his domra, but interrupted the music to say:

"Your Grishutka has run off with the other boys outside the town. They're playing at war."

Then he went on strumming his instrument.

"Why waste time in twanging that silly instrument? When Kornei comes you'll have your fill of music. So why not wait?"

"Ah, that old fox, that wolf's fang! I dislike Kornei, and so do you and Stenka, too."

"That's not true! Stenka is fond of his godfather and respects him."

"Our father Timoshei of blessed memory did not care for him either. The night he died he was the worse for drink when I led him home through Cherkassi, and he kept on repeating: 'Beware of Kornei, he is crafty.' Though this happened long ago, I recall it well."

"Were he not crafty, he would not have remained chief ataman all these years. No Assembly ever meets without his consent." And Oliona laughed as she went towards Frol and extended her arms above his head, wishing to tease him.

"I'm an old woman now! Would you like to embrace me? Frolko, you look too much like a girl—that's why you have not married, I expect."

Frol lowered his eyes.

"Don't want to marry; not even thought of doing such a thing." Then he added almost inaudibly: "It may seem funny to you, but I've loved you ever since boyhood."

"What? You love? You're no Cossack!"

"Life has no attractions for me; I detest war and looting. Wherever we Cossacks go we bring death in our train and boast that we show mercy neither to the young nor the old."

"Should Stenka hear you speaking thus, he'd turn you out of the house."

While Frol continued plucking at the strings of his instrument, Oliona went towards the table, rearranged the tankard of wine and straightened the cloth.

"Oh, don't keep on worrying at those strings! They're so tinny. I loathe them."

In the corner by the door was a big rusty iron cage, which reeked of putrid meat—two hooded hawks brooded on their perches facing each other, but they were separated by a wire netting. They beat against the net, tearing at the wires with their beaks in an endeavour to peck at one another. Then they quieted down again and whistled mournfully.

"They were as friendly as might be when they were small; now that they've grown up they are always at one another."

"You ought to have been a professional guitar-player, Frolko, enlivening our festivals. Stenka is so different from you. Ah, my Stenka is terrible at times!"

"He takes after his ancestors. Our father Timoshei was a dauntless man; he and Ivan Kondirev hindered the tsar's merchant in the building of the small town of Guriev. We all heard of it."

"Well, you certainly do not take after your family. You should have been born a girl—they made a mistake about you, ha, ha!" laughed Oliona, her heavy bosom heaving, her belly protruding, for she was in the early months of pregnancy.

The sun had been blazing into the hut; then its light was momentarily shut out when a tall and broad figure entered the little ante-room. The bottom of the doormats flapped, and ataman Kornei came in, doffed his cap with the sheepskin border and crossed himself with all five of his sinewy fingers.

"Aha, dancing girl! Keeping well, daughter?"

"Sit down, godfather; have a drink after your journey."

"Journey? May the bull toss you! The way was not long."

The silver ear-ring glistened as the ataman took his place at the table, obstructing the sunlight.

"Eh," he continued, "is this an evening or an afternoon party? I see the player is at his instrument. Come, Frol, give us a Cossack song."

Touching the strings lightly, Frol crooned:

"On the Don, you'll understand,
By the gap in No-Man's land,
So long ago,
A Cossack warrior, far renowned,
Buried treasure in the ground.
Armenian were those gems so rare,
From Bohara, and not from elsewhere.

"The man, for brigandage he lusted,
The jewels were with blood encrusted,
In an ivory casket they were stored.
The ivory casket which held the hoard,
Like Constantinople it was designed
With tower and mosque well intertwined,
And palace, too!
There it lies beneath a willow tree. . . ."

"Are you supposed to be singing about the buried treasure?" interrupted the ataman. "All I can say, Frol, is that you never heard that song to the end. In my youth, an old blind player sang it me quite differently. When it's sung in Ukrainian it goes . . ."

Frol made no answer.

"Give us a dance tune!"

"Hey, a sow has hatched a hen!
A piglet has laid an egg . . ."

"Come on, Olionka, dance!"

"I'm too heavy now and too old, godfather."

The ataman stamped his foot.

"A bear is a massive animal, yet it holds its own with a horse. Come on, dance!"

With the undulating movements of a swan, Oliona crossed the hut. Her abundant hair fell about her, her face flushed, her eyes shone with a dark lustre.

Frol, tenderly strumming a dance tune, was afraid to look at his sister-in-law. The ataman, while drinking potent wine out of a ladle, tapped out the measure with his foot; then, leaping up from the seat, he shouted:

"Take yourself away, Frolko. I have something to tell my god-daughter, and then I shall go away."

The young Cossack, not venturing to argue with the ataman, picked up his cap, which he had tossed on the end of the seat, and made his retreat.

"How many years," whispered Kornei tipsily, "have I wooed you? Well, I've not forgotten to do so now. Are you coming with me, young woman? The time has arrived—what have you to look forward to?"

"My husband, father."

"Your husband has no time for love-making."

"How so, godfather?"

"Have you any news of his whereabouts? I'll tell you. Many runaways from Moscow have forgathered in the small upriver towns. These tatterdemalion crowds fawn upon Stenka; he has taught them how to use muskets, has taken them out to sea, and then by way of the Don has directed them to the Volga. The veteran Cossacks wished to detain them. But whatever for? They only eat our bread and make a nuisance of themselves. I just allow them to do as they please, saying, as it were: 'Fly away, falcon, with your fledglings!' Moscow has forbidden us to let Stenka go to the Volga, but what do I care for Moscow? We veteran Cossacks have more elbow room on the Don when these rovers are absent."

The ataman stepped up to Oliona and added in a low and angry voice:

"Stenka has set Moscow against him, and it will be a long time before he can return home."

Oliona's hands dropped into her lap, and she burst into tears.

The ataman sat down again, while Oliona sank on a seat. Kornei sidled towards her and laid a heavy hand on her shoulder. The glint of the silver ring in the ataman's ear was an eyesore to Oliona, and she averted her face.

"Do not turn away, but listen to what I am about to tell you. You have grown older and plumper, besides rearing a youngster. I, too, am older, yet I'm willing and ready to abandon the wife I took from another man long ago, hand over the seal and mace to my stepson and, should the Cossacks refuse to elect him on account of his youth, tender my office to Samarenin. This being done, you and I together will make for Azov. What do you say to my proposal?"

"Godfather, I shall await Stenka's return. He will take Grishka and me away with him."

"Where will he drag you to? Will you join the marauders and plunder and fight? Stenka has not much time left him to rove, he'll soon be captured. Another thing: you are again with child."

"No, I cannot, godfather."

"Oh, Oliona, you and I will go to the Turkish sultan—he's been inviting me over and over again . . . or to the Polish king and offer to serve under the hetman; the king will give us presents of gold and pearls. I'd deck you out in precious stones of blue and red, like the Blessed Virgin."

"Nay, godfather."

"Then know everything. Moscow's talons are like those of a hawk. See how those birds are tearing at the iron bars of the cage. You'll soon see that letters will be sent to the Don, the Volga and to Astrakhan, saying: 'Capture the robber!' Capture him they will and do him to death in the torture chamber or elsewhere. Know you further that, if you are found in his company, you, too, will be racked; they will tear off your clothes and whip your bare heels." The ataman rapped his fist on the table.

Oliona screwed up her eyes.

"And your Grishka and the one which is on the way will be torn to pieces by dogs like the children of the Pskov rebels. Moscow belongs to the boyars, so it is of no avail to hope for mercy from them. If you come with me I shall be kind to you and your children . . . I have loved you for so long!"

"Oh, godfather, I am not afraid to die."

The ataman rose.

"I shall call again. Think the matter over. For you a terrible time is only beginning."

Frol entered and resumed his former seat. The slightly tipsy ataman, puffing at his pipe and blowing out the smoke, which enveloped his grey moustache and red face, cast a sidelong glance at the young Cossack.

"By rights you should be rigged out in a skirt and coif, Frolko, and sent to entertain boyars' wives in their apartments with your songs and your playing. You are no Cossack and never will be!"

He pushed open the door with his strong hand and then turned about.

"Bring those hawks, cage and all, to my house, Frolko. It is high time they were trained; they'll be useful to the rovers."

"Godfather, Stenka will be greatly vexed. They are his birds."

"I've already told Oliona that Stenka will have no time for falconry."

Treading heavily and obscuring the light as he passed through the doorway, the ataman withdrew. Oliona sat in silence, with head bowed and tears slowly welling up in her eyes. Frol, too, was silent, and the sound of flies buzzing round the mead set forth on the table filled the air. Frol began to finger the strings of his instrument, and a melody softly emerged. After a while he said:

"It is ever thus. When the ataman has had a drop too much he is beastly, and when he is not so drunk he looks crafty."

Oliona did not answer, but drooped her head on her arms.

## 2

A cannon boomed from the ramparts of the corner tower of Cherkassi, and its reverberations travelled far away into the steppe.

Ataman Kornei was about to set forth into the steppe on his black charger so as to subdue the blood which was throbbing in his veins. His eyes smarted, and his red coat, which was of Polish cut, turned to grey with the dust. The reeds rustled in the low-lying lands near the river. Out of the limitless and torrid width of the steppe came the acrid smell of burning grass. Puffing at his pipe, Kornei surveyed the landscape.

"Serves 'em right, cursed eaters of raw flesh!"

His thoughts dwelt on the Tatars lurking in the steppe in search of plunder. Steppe fires forced the Tatars to remove their war trails farther from the Cossack settlements.

The shot from the cannon spurred sleepy Cherkassi into active life.

"Afield, Cossacks!"

"Father is calling us!"

"The hunt is up! Let's get ready."

The best shots were chosen from among the Cossacks. Whips swished. There was a shimmer of dark blue coats, drawn in at the waist. The Cossacks were riding out into the steppe. The ataman's red coat was visible from far afield. Kornei on horseback posted himself on the summit of a barrow; the crack marksmen rode up to the barrow and took their stand at its base. The beaters could be heard from the reed-grown lowlands and the coverts. The ataman, from his vantage point, raised his voice:

"The animal we are after must be put up with blank shot from arquebuses and muskets!"

"We know, father!"

"Tally-ho-o-o!"

Some distance away two buff-coloured creatures emerged suddenly from a thicket of reeds near the lake.

"Boars!"

The ataman's stepson, a lithe, spare, dark-complexioned young man, riding a piebald horse, was the first to have a tilt at the beasts with his lance. The boar in the rear turned aside, but the foremost headed directly for his piebald mount.

"Now, then, youngster!"

The ataman grunted as he watched, shading his eyes with his sleeve and puffing at his pipe, for a hot and stuffy smell of burning was blowing from the steppe. Kaluzhni aimed with his lance; the beast closed in; the Cossack lowered his lance—and missed. Though the boar could not see the hunter, it sensed danger and swerved; as it did so its tusk caught in the horse's belly and gored it. The piebald horse reared, covering the grass with blood and intestines, snorted and then fell on its side; the Cossack swung himself free and stood rooted to the ground; then, without taking aim, he fired his musket. The charge grazed the beast's flank; opening its huge maw, the boar gave vent to a frenzied grunt; the tusks gleamed; darting away, the beast was halted by another Cossack, who had galloped up. Pierced by the lance, the boar bent its neck and bit the shaft clean off. Kaluzhni sprang to the boar's back and fired his pistol into its ear. Smoke rose from its head. With a stifled snort the boar sank to the grass.

"Let loose the hounds, lads, or the other one will get away," bawled the ataman.

There was a crackling here and there among the reeds. The sound grew fainter as though it were dissolving like a dying bonfire. The boar was swallowed up in the marshy thickets.

"We've let slip the beast."

"Ay, that we have; he's got well away."

The marksmen left the barrow for the meadows. The fur of a large hare could be seen loping in and out of the grass. Many marksmen emptied their fowling-pieces, but the hare got to momentary safety under the ataman's horse. With youthful agility Kornei stooped in his saddle and flourished his whip; the hare's spine was broken, and the animal spun round and round beneath the horse, whimpering like a little baby.

"Ah, my frisky long-ears!"

Kornei settled himself into the saddle again and surveyed the meadow land. He saw a Cossack pursuing a wolf, running it so close that it looked as though the animal was done for; but the Cossack's horse caught its foot in a hidden hole, so the beast got clear of the danger. On the other side of the barrow there was a hubbub of voices, and a red something on the summit stood out distinctly against the horizon. The wolf, which had escaped from danger just now, shot like an arrow up the slope, yet was met by the something, red as flame, and by the flash of steel. With a wild howl it crept down the slope on its belly, blood mixed with brain pouring from its head. Swarms of stinging flies, carried into the fields from the open spaces of the steppe by the hot wind, now descended

upon the hunt. The horses kicked, plunged, tossed their heads. Riding down the barrow, the ataman, curbing in his mettlesome steed, called aloud:

"Home, Cossacks. The stingers are on the war-path, devil take it!"

"We can see that for ourselves, father."

Kaluzhni fled the field on a borrowed horse. Servants loaded the spoils on a cart. The green steppe took on a dark blue tinge from the Cossacks' coats as they galloped in the wake of the red-coated ataman. They all alighted at the ataman's house, turning their horses' heads in the direction of the town.

"Heh, hop along!" they shouted, and their mounts, sniffing and kicking up the white, sandy dust, trotted back to their own stalls.

The ataman stood in the porch, pipe in hand, and looked around him.

"Come in, atamans and Cossacks; let us sample what the wife has cooked for us."

## 3

The ataman's wife was a tall, thin and, to all appearances, severe woman. She herself was laying the table, which she covered with printed calico cloths before placing on it the knives, cups, dishes and loving-cups. She stared at her handiwork as if to impress everything on her mind. Servants brought in vodka and viands.

The ataman's wife glanced sulkily at him as she gathered in the folds of her Polish coat with its embroidered waistline. Kornei stepped up to the table and placed his broad, stumpy fingers on the cloth.

"The ataman is not so poor as to need calico cloths on his table when he has guests," he said.

"Maybe you would like a silk damask one instead? You roisterers will spill your wine on it and burn it with the ashes from your pipes."

"What a stingy little grey-haired wife to be sure!" laughed the ataman, averting his eyes from the woman, who shrugged her shoulders as the noisy steps of her husband's guests smote her ears. Then she remarked in a hasty undertone:

"You devil's grandsire, you! You've been love-making to a young woman again, I'll warrant?"

As they entered, the guests bowed to the hostess. The ataman gave a stubborn toss to his head and with his customary gesture flung his grey forelock over his shoulder.

"Sit down, all you veteran Cossacks and rovers!" he cried.

The tall housewife did not acknowledge the greeting of her husband's guests. Crossing the room, she gave orders that the candles on the wooden shelves be lighted and then went out. The ataman watched his wife's retreat; then he went to the door and called into the vestibule:

"Sentry lads, summon the youngsters to my house to sing; also the guitar-players and pipers."

"Your word is law, father!"

Kornei drew aside one of the gay printed linen curtains; a primer lay open on the window-sill, its capital letters painted and illuminated. "God, Godhead. . . ." The ataman flung the book on the floor, growling:

"One cannot teach those who are born dull-witted," and he gave another kick to the primer.

A joyous band of young folk, dusty, exuding warmth, sweat and tar, rushed into the house. After bowing to the ataman, the youngsters squeezed through the carpet with which the door was hung and made for the back room.

"Now, guests, drink and enjoy yourselves while I take a look at the girls."

The girls walked past him. Some wore long, loosely flowing coats, others woollen homespuns and blouses with full white sleeves, printed with a flowery pattern; all had their hair in long plaits interwoven with ribbon, ending in neat bows; here and there was a maid who wore a flower tucked in just above the plait. Each one as she passed by him was stopped by the ataman, who put out his hand to stroke the girl's head, pluck out the flower and smell it.

After passing all the maids in review and thrusting the blossoms culled from their hair into his sash, the ataman took his place at the table. The guests had not waited for their host to begin eating and drinking. Raising a dipper of wine, the ataman exclaimed:

"Gallant atamans, a toast to the little sport we had today. A fine boar was killed, a horse was mauled, but no Cossack sheds tears over the loss of a horse."

The ataman's stepson edged himself nearer his father so as to clink goblets with him.

"Never mind about my steed, dad, I shall soon find another. Your health!"

"Do not trouble to search for one, my lad; you are welcome to one of mine. And now, gallant atamans, let us drink to the sovereign tsar of Muscovy!"

"Here is to him, father Kornei!"

"Let us make our cups ring for the strong arm of Muscovy, that has thrust itself into the wildness of Siberia and has curbed the might of the Tatars. Also, brothers, bid the clerk attend the feast."

"He is here already, father, waiting to be invited. The son of a bitch is fond of drink!"

"Hi, clerk," cried the ataman, raising the dipper. "You were not with us at the hunt. Hunting is not in your line, eh? But after a meal and a good drink, we'll make use of you, never fear!"

The clerk rose and bowed to the assembled guests.

"At your service, sir, as always."

"Yes, to spill ink instead of blood?"

"Business first, gallant atamans, before we get drunk."

"Father, business takes precedence of everything."

"You are right, Kusei. And where is Bizink? I do not see him here."

"Bizink is drunk, father, and sleeping it off."

"Once he was a bold Cossack, but he's old now and can't carry his liquor. Here is the business in hand: you veteran Cossacks from the lower Don cannot be unaware of the actions of our kinsman, Stenka Razin."

"He's plundering on the Volga."

"You are right. Because of his activities we have to expect no little trouble with the Forces. When my godson has ruined the Muscovites by plunder, he will be coming home."

Raising his ladle, Kaluzhi shouted:

"Whoever robs the property of the great sovereign cannot come home to us."

"Wherever my godson may be, gallant atamans, I know that he will always come back to the Don."

"If he does, we'll put him in irons and deliver him to Moscow."

"Do not forestall matters, Rodion," said the ataman, rebuking his stepson, "we shall come to a decision together. We have to bear in mind that the free peoples of the Don are fierce and put down those who plunder. The poor look to the man they love, and they are three times as numerous as the veterans."

"And is our father aware," interposed old Samarenin, "that Mishka Volotski and Serebriakov are enrolling men to join Stenka?"

"Had I not known about their actions, Cossack, both Mishka and that wolf Vanka Serebriakov would have been invited to the hunt and sat as my guests at this board."

"I think that when Stenka does return it will not be us who deal with him, but he with us!"

"That is my own way of thinking, Mihailo; we shall have to be on our guard with Stenka," the ataman replied; "on the other hand, we cannot afford to anger Moscow. In pursuance of our agreement, Moscow provides us with bread and munitions of war; Moscow disposes of sufficient Forces. Should Moscow's anger be provoked, she will close the roads to the Don to all trading folk, and we shall starve."

"You know that better than we do."

"Stenka has gone to the Volga. The Volga is a part of Moscow's belly; the river is the trading route to Persia, the Terek townships and Astrakhan. It is not for nothing that the Germans send emissaries to Moscow for a concession of the Volga trade route. Swedes and Frenchmen go to Moscow for the same reason—to acquire the route to Persia. If Stenka manages to establish himself on the Volga we shall reap the blame, and Moscow will call us to account for treason."

"Can you think of a way out, father Kornei? We agree to whatever you decide."

"Well, in my estimation we ought to exonerate ourselves without delay and dispatch a note, showing our innocence, to the voivode of Tsaritzyn."

"Yes, that we must."

"Clerk, write!"

"Write direct to Tsaritzyn."

"Has he any paper?"

"There is no need to hunt for paper, ataman Cossacks. I have here all that is necessary."

There was a scramble behind the table, and someone took the candles from the shelves and set them before the clerk; a space was cleared, and the whole assembly crowded round the writer. The proceedings were opened by the ataman Kornei, who wore a gold signet ring on his thumb.

> . . . "The fifth day of May, 1667. The Great Forces of the Don Cossacks, and their chief ataman Kornei Yakovlev, beg to inform the voivode of Tsaritzyn, boyar Andrei Unkovski, of the following: We lived in peace with the people of Azov, which peace a Cossack of our Forces, Stenka Razin by name, together with his followers, intend to violate; he planned to breach a way to the sea, but on receipt of a counter-order from us he returned without molesting Azov; on the other hand, he and his troop rowed past Cherkassi up the Don; we, the chief ataman and the Force, sent out men to overtake them; this they failed to do. . . ."

"Very true, father."
"Well put, indeed."

"Then the news reached us that the said Razin had moved to the Volga, there to plunder. . . ."

"Quite correct; he has!"

"Ere he set forth on his expedition against the Azov people, he told me, the chief ataman, that his father had been done to death before my very eyes by a boyar, and that his brother was flogged to death by judgment of the Criminal Office just about the same time, when he himself was captain of the winter unit in Moscow under the ataman Naum Vasiliev. Concerning his plans to go plundering by sea, Stenka Razin did not even confide them to me, his ataman, but kept everything to himself."

"Very well expressed."
"Father, you could not have stated the case better."
"Has the clerk set all down properly?"
"Every word of it, father."
"Are all agreed on the note?"
"Ay!"
"Then I shall set my seal upon it tomorrow and dispatch it by messenger to Unkovski. One word more, Cossacks."
"Speak your mind, father."
"Cossacks, atamans! I, Kornei of Cherkassi, order you to transfer the carpenters and diggers, now at work on the building of the Moscow church, to labour for us. We supply their food; the church can wait; in days of old we managed to keep our faith by worshipping in our own church; why should we trouble about this new erection? As I have said, transfer those carpenters and diggers to the fortification of Cherkassi. You know that the pallisade has sunk to ground level, and that the towers and glacis are crumbling. The ramparts must be raised, the stockade fortified, new moats dug. All these things will have to be done in the event of an armed invasion from whichever side—one's own kin or the Azov people or the Tatars of the Horde. Self-defence never comes amiss. The surrounding waters invariably dry up during the hot season, and this makes the approaches to the town an easy matter. So far, no fortified outposts exist."
"True enough, father."
"Repairs should have started long ago."
"Ay, we'll prepare the town for defence."
"That we shall, father."
"My last words are: drink and eat your fill today. If wine runs short, ask for more. My one request is that you do not conceal any of the cups or tankards about your persons. She is a trifle stingy at times, my little wife, and she may not allow us to have another feast at my house if anything disappears."
"We understand, father. Nothing will be filched by us."
"Make good cheer among yourselves, while I . . . What the devil are those children up to now?"
The ataman lumbered from his seat, tapping his heels and, hearing music next door, hummed:

"Brother mine, the Tatar, Tatar,
Sold his sister by means of barter,
Cheaply was a fair plait bought,
Sweet, white face yet went for nought!"

The ataman strolled into that part of his house from where the music resounded.

4

The vast springtime floods of the Volga and Ilovlia, roaring downstream, and in wavy, dim lines reflecting the nocturnal sky, seemed shoreless. Only the numerous fishing-smacks with their burning small lights, pitching up and down on the restlessly undulating surface, boded that there were banks 'twixt which the agitated waters went their way. On a distant brink of the Volga river stood a small town built of wood; it was surrounded by a log pallisade in rotting condition with little crooked towers; it seemed to be cut off from the sky above and the water below, and looked like an old and long-abandoned toy. The tiny place was known as Panshin. A mound, barely discernible in the daylight, rose above the widest expanse of the flood. At night this mound twinkled with lights. Now and again a shot was fired as a warning to fishermen not to sail too near, for there were Cossack patrols in canoes whose sides were thatched with bulrushes. Here man was of no moment; only his voice was significant. Every night the call of the sentry could be heard coming from the mound:

"*Ne-echa-i!*"

That was the password of the free Don Cossacks, the password of the rovers, who had volunteered their services. It had its origin in the name of a Zaporozhian Cossack, father Nechai. This old filibuster had more than once destroyed Persian shipping on the high seas and had made captive both Persians and Turks.

Nechai and his merry men had appeared not a few times beneath the marble walls of Constantinople. The sea had been lit up for miles around by the fires of burning Turkish villages, thus revealing the black canoes and Cossack faces under their red Zaporozhian caps.

Emissaries of the Tsaritzyn and Astrakhan voivodes became frequent visitors in Panshin. The mound, at the point which dominated the waters of the Volga, was peculiarly irritating to despotic and predatory Moscow.

Sometimes at dawn the inhabitants would hear a thunderous voice hailing them:

"Hi, Panshin, deliver up Moscow's spies and do not detain any Cossack who is on his way to join me from the Don. Beware!"

And far across the waters would come the echo:

". . . w-a-r-e. . . ."

There was not a single inhabitant of Panshin who failed to hear that terrible voice. They gave no answer. But when the Moscow envoys arrived they declared:

"We can furnish you with boats; go by yourselves. Do you want to lose your heads? We want to keep ours, so we won't go to the mound."

The voivode's scouts also never ventured beyond Panshin. They sent reports

to the tsar in Moscow, which were written on narrow strips of paper, stuck together lengthwise to make a scroll and bearing the voivode's seal. . . .

"We have not yet discovered what are the plans of the Cossack brigands, but are on the alert day in, day out. The Panshin men refuse to row our people across, and Stenka Razin with his comrades has entrenched himself on the mounds rising from the Volga floods. So far they have committed no robberies and are keeping the peace."

Mounted men arrived post haste from the Don. They were delegates from the Cossack governing body and included an ataman and a captain with bushy moustaches and long forelocks, and were dressed in crimson kaftans.

The town of Panshin bestirred itself; the town crier, a lame old Cossack, walked along the streets tapping on window-sills with his stick. A mustering of the Panshin fold replied:

"We shall not stir unless we get reinforcements of arms and men from the Don. Let the Don Force send canoes with Cossacks aboard; then we shall join you, and you yourselves can accomplish that which you bade us do: to insist that Stenka Razin shall desist from his expeditions to Tsaritzyn and other towns belonging to the tsar. Unaided we are powerless."

The delegates from the Don used threats against the people of Panshin.

"We shall report to the tsar that you are at one with the robber Cossacks."

They returned to the Don, and nothing further was heard of them. Roving elements from the upper Don flocked in their hundreds to Panshin.

"Panshin must give us boats. We are on our way to find father Stepan."

No immediate reply was forthcoming from the Panshin people, but they sent a reliable man of their own to take a look round to see if there were any strangers about. After ascertaining that no one in the service of the voivodes was to be found, they would embark the Razin supporters and row them across to the mound. They did not land themselves, but took the opportunity to do a little trading in vodka, bread, other edibles and gunpowder. To the sentry's challenge from the mound they would all exclaim at once:

"*Ne-e-chai*, coming!"

## 5

The creak of oars in their rowlocks could be heard far across the waters and on the Volga islands and hillocks. The oarsmen sang a mournful chanty, which was frequently drowned by the invectives and curses of the skippers. When, by means of curses and blows, the song had died down, the sound of nasal monastic monodies floated down the water.

Beyond the horizon of the far-flung lowlands dawn was breaking through the cool white mists. The Cossack who had been doing sentry duty on the mound stepped from his post and went towards the ataman's tent.

Razin was sitting on a wood-stump, warming his large hands over the fire; he had on a black velvet kaftan and an undercoat with a golden sheen.

"A convoy, father."

"I knew some time ago. Are the boat-hooks, falconets and men ready?"

"Everything is in order."

"Let a weaker than yourself take sentry duty while you lend a hand with the oars."

. . . The blue uniforms of the musketeers of Lopuhin's department made the water even bluer than it already was, and the bright gleam of halberds brought forth a silvery hue upon the undulations in the wake of the boats. The tsar's barge took the lead; the oars shrieked in their rowlocks, for the sails were furled, as there was not a breath of wind. Following was the patriarch's barge, making a black patch on the waves; from the deck came the nasal twang of liturgical chanting, becoming clearer and clearer as the barge drew on: "To the most pious sovereign and grand prince of All Russia." Attached to the mast above the monks' heads was a banner waving gaily; it bore the image of Our Saviour-not-made-with-human-hands, a dark countenance on a background of gold.

Then again the oarsmen struck up:

"Bold we be against all odds,
To salute you we have come,
And to help subdue the voivodes . . ."

This time the voices drowned those of the monks, while above them all a deep bass boomed:

"Curse you! Put your backs into it. We are already in Astrakhan, you galley-slaves!"

A string of low, grey craft stretched behind the two barges. On the one nearest these two someone was praying aloud in sonorous tones:

"Carry us safely past, O Lord, carry us past. . . ."

Another voice urged the oarsmen to further efforts:

"Row harder, lads! Don't lose touch with the tsar's men."

Yet another kept repeating:

"Vodka presently! Vodka! Don't lag behind, slaves."

Then, as though from the very depth of the river, a voice sounded for a brief moment, drowning the chanties, the curses, the appeals and the prayers:

"Attack the boats! Sink the boats!"

Simultaneously came the crack of a falconet-shot, then another, followed by a prolonged whistle. From the leading barge the bass boomed falteringly:

"Why this shooting? We are the tsar's men. Oh, why?"

"*Nechai!*"

"*Ne-e-chai!*"

"Ahoy! Drag 'em off the barges and scuttle the boats!"

Came a clatter of boat-hooks and axes. Thousands of different noises accompanied the short battle; ducks made a hasty retreat towards the low banks, and a large black bird circled above the carnage, croaking: "Kroo! Kroo!" Firing, wielding axes, attacking and defending themselves, men ceased to pray and lament; the blows from axes became ever more audible as, one by one, the boats were swallowed up by the Volga.

"Musketeers!"

"Hi, rally!"

From the tsar's barge came the clank of iron, a shot and a cry.

"Musketeers, you'll answer for this!"

"Make way, you pot-bellied limb of Satan!"

The blue-uniformed figures of musketeers could be seen running to and fro, smashing the stocks and chains of the galley-slaves.

"Hi, musketeers, what are you about?"

"Vaska, shut his mouth!"

The axe fell, and a body, clad in boyar's apparel, splashed into the water.

## 6

As the sun rose a scent of grass and salt spread over the Volga from the lowlands.

The banner bearing the image of Our Lady of Kazan had been torn from the prow of the tsar's barge, and its place had been taken by a large piece of linen with the Seal of the Don Assembly belonging to the Cossack Force.

The tsar's barge was piled high with boyars' coats, and there stood beside the heap a cask of vodka; Razin, his sword unsheathed, sat on the cask. The Cossacks brought in the commanders of the musketeers.

"String that one up! Flog this one! Hang that one up by his feet!"

Like bunting, the masts were decorated with the boyars' long coats and the colourful uniforms of musketeers. Someone, uttering ear-splitting cries, was dragged towards Razin; the man crawled to the ataman's feet, whining:

"Honoured father, we are bondmen! Spare our lives, father!"

"Who are you?"

"Everlasting debtors to a merchant."

"Assistants to the wealthy merchant Shorin."

"If I let you off, you will as likely as not report to the tsar."

"Father, torture will not make us speak."

"By Our Lady, and by God!"

"Let them off, Cossacks, and tell them to begone."

"God bless you and keep you!"

They made the sign of the cross and, trembling with a mixture of fear and relief, made their way over the bulwarks.

"And here, father, are some tatterdemalions."

"Thrust them into the boat!"

"See, some of them want to join us."

"Those that are for us may be allowed to stay."

Pandemonium still raged aboard the patriarch's barge, which had been drawn up alongside the tsar's. Curses, groans and shouts accompanied the fighting.

"What are you waiting for? Fire the arquebuses!"

Black cowls mingled with the red caps, axes flashed, one head with a tousle of long hair towered above all the rest, and a deep voice trumpeted:

"Do not yield, brethren. Emulate the monk Osliabia, that famous man of Troitsa, who fell on Kulikovo field in the fight against the Golden Horde."

Razin stepped towards the patriarchal barge, his black velvet coat-tails flying, and his yellow satin undercoat glistening in the sunshine.

"You devil!"

Stenka's sword gleamed, and the arm of the tall monk brandishing the axe fell limply to his side.

"Damn you, you've not had a taste of Volga waters yet?"

There was a splash, and the monk went toppling overboard.

"See how he's caught in the eddies. He was a dauntless man."

"Father, there's another awaiting your sentence over there, and he says:

'The ataman knows me; let him be my judge.' So we dared do nothing till we had your orders."

"Ah, well, bring him along."

A boyar's son in a red coat was pushed before the ataman; his face was thickly overgrown with curly black whiskers and beard; long, tangled locks concealed his eyes. Razin, with a frown, took his sword in hand.

"An old acquaintance, devil! Yes, I remember that day by the baths . . . the woman. . . ."

"I am he! You have me in your power—slay me if you will."

"Bring him a priest if there's one left alive."

"I do not need a priest, ataman. Though I am in the service of the patriarch, to the devil with them all!"

"Unloose his cords!"

"Ah, arms and legs free to move. Give me a cap; I do not care to die without something over my ears."

"Your name escapes me, fellow."

"In that case, I shall repeat it; I am Lazunka Zhidovin."

With his left hand the boyar's son smoothed his curly beard; his right arm was bleeding.

Razin looked grim; he bowed his head, trying to recall something; then he sighed and drove the point of his sword into the blood-drenched deck.

"Give him a cap," ordered the ataman as he raised his head; when someone clapped a monk's cowl on the pate of the boyar's son, Razin's face brightened. . . . "Cossacks, did he put up a good fight?"

"Beelzebub himself could not have done better, father. He fires his pistol without taking aim and scores a hit every time, damn him."

Said another Cossack:

"He has flung many a man of ours into the Volga. We meant to string him up at the spot. 'Never mind,' said he, 'but I will see your ataman first,' he said."

"A man cannot be condemned for putting up a good fight. That's what a fight is for." Razin raised his sword; the boyar's son met the ataman's eyes unflinchingly and puffed out his chest.

"The cap smells of incense! It must be a monk's, it certainly is not mine. Cut me down, ataman!"

Razin laughed, lowered his blade and asked:

"In what capacity did you serve the boyars?"

"I served them loyally according to my ability."

"Can you read and write?"

"From childhood's days I was taught in a monastery; that is why I am in the patriarch's service."

"You first-born of Satan! Will you try to escape from me, or will you serve me?"

"Whose bread and salt I share, him I am ready to serve."

Razin put his sword back into its scabbard.

"Live, then, and serve me."

"I thank you!"

"Men! See to it that his arm is bandaged. It is bleeding."

"Lads, turn the barges about!"

To the accompaniment of a boat-song the barges were headed towards the

mound. The decks teemed with the blue uniforms of the musketeers who had now joined the Cossacks.

White mist had settled on the lowlands as the light spread in the sky. The broad expanse of water rippled with blue and silver and also red, for the Zaporozhian caps were reflected in it. A smell of grass was wafted across the water from the wide meadows, where roamed wild and ferocious mares of the predatory Nogais. Vultures shrieked greedily as they settled on the dead bodies and swayed with the surging of the vast river's waves.

## 7

From the Tatar side of the Volga two sandy shoals protruded into the water, where abandoned barges, their sides black with pitch, lay on the sand. Above the river, about a mile away, stood a tavern surrounded by fields. In the shimmering haze the timber walls of a town, with a wooden gate, could faintly be discerned through the blue. This town was rectangular, and there were no towers at the angles. Beyond the town was a monastery; the tall church was white-washed, its windows lance-shaped, the domes of tin-plate.

The solid folding door of the tavern stood ajar; from inside issued the murmur of drinkers' voices and the occasional squeal of a tipsy woman. On a stout pole was the tavern sign—a hearth broom. Sitting on a stone, leaning against this pole, was a musketeer in faded red uniform. The glare from the Volga dazzled his eyes, so he screwed them up and traced designs in the sand with his halberd. He would like to have been doing what two soldiers with short swords were about a few paces away—hugging a red-cheeked woman far gone in liquor and ploughing up the sand with their worn bast shoes. They muttered drunkenly:

"Throw my cloak over you, sweetheart. It's crazy you are, my wench! It will shelter your baby, too. See, what a burning sky!"

The infant had cried itself blue with fatigue and now lay helpless in the woman's arms, merely moving its lips.

From the low, mastless barges men were carrying sacks of flour and grain and stowing them away in the riverside warehouses. Bronzed, bare backs, covered with scars, sores and abrasions, glistened with sweat. Barefooted, the workmen in their coarse linen hose, weighed down under their heavy load, waddled across the long planks to the shore. A thin, sunburnt overseer in a soft felt hat stood in the stern of one of the barges, whip in hand, shouting at intervals and flicking his top-boots with the lash.

"Lower 'em carefully! Don't rend the sacks!"

An acrid stench of salt fish and smoke spread along the banks of the Volga. Barrels had been piled up as though to make a bonfire on the very edge of the water, and near by a fire, pale in the blazing light of the sun, was being lit. Three barefooted men, bareheaded and ragged, were roasting a sheep.

"Has no one among you fellows a suitable piece of iron wherewith to make a spit for the roast?"

"We'll never roast that meat on sticks, they burn too quickly."

"It'll melt in one's mouth; mutton's tender!"

"Samara! Just now the town is full of boyars and voivodes—may their mothers be roasted alive!" grumbled a Cossack in a dark blue jacket and

trousers, his russet boots covered with dust. The man was heating water in a wooden dipper at the same fire where the sheep was being roasted, by means of dropping some small red-hot stones into the dipper.

"What are you up to, Cossack?"

"When the water is hot enough, I'll mix in some oatmeal."

"Your water will take longer to boil than our mutton to roast."

"I'll be quick."

While heating the stones, the Cossack kept looking up the slope. Against a background of gold on the lower plane and blue on the upper a mounted figure could be discerned on the summit of the hill overlooking the shore: it was a Tatar with bandy legs, riding a small shaggy pony without stirrups, a quiverful of arrows at his side and a bow slung on his back; his head was covered by a pointed, reddish-brown felt cap trimmed with fur. From time to time the Cossack yelled out the same words:

"Murza, watch that horse of yours!"

Equally monotonous was the Tatar's reply:

"Russian, here is the horse, here!"

The Cossack's horse stood quietly flicking the flies off with its tail, a bundle, a rifle and a sword attached to its saddle.

Inside the tavern the noise and swearing had grown louder. Squatting in a circle on the filthy floor, some drunken soldiers were playing cards. The tavern servant, in a sackcloth apron and torn felt shoes on his feet, rebuked the soldiers:

"You know as well as I, soldiers, that it is forbidden to play at dice in the tsar's taverns—or cards, for that matter!"

"I think you must have made a mistake! However, here's the ace."

"Which I cover with my knave of hearts."

"Hi, soldiers!"

The servant complained to the host:

"I've done my best to turn them out, Ivan Petrovich, but the soldiers refuse to listen."

The tavern-keeper, standing behind the solid wooden bar, stroked his splay beard, paying no heed to the men, but shouting at the women:

"So you thought you would cheat the tsar's exchequer, did you, you hags? I'll hand you over to the police."

The women brought water from the Volga in leaking cauldrons to rinse out the casks; then tripping over the barrels and sprawling on the floor they drank the watery dregs. An usually brazen one, who was the worse for liquor, tottered up to the publican and made an obscene gesture.

"Here!" bellowed the tavern-keeper. "Out with the trollop!"

The servant clutched the woman and, without giving her time to pull down her skirt, dragged her outside.

Two soldiers were on their feet in a second, and shouts were heard from the group of card-players.

"We'll learn you to chuck wenches out of a public tavern."

"And as you value your beard, don't you lay hands on the women!"

The publican called back the servant:

"Let her be, Fedko! Come here!"

The servant went to the bar and leant over towards the tavern-keeper, while the latter, with a sidelong squint at the soldiers, whispered:

"I see some musketeers about. Maybe they will deal with this unruly soldiery. Anyway, go and have a talk with them."

The servant obeyed his master's bidding and went over to where the musketeers were sitting round a table in a corner, drinking vodka, their weapons piled together against the wall, their faces flushed, their caps askew; they were talking in low tones and glancing furtively around.

"Lifelong service . . . one escaped . . . one's caught, flogged in the market-place, and when a man's worn out he gets nothing, neither land, nor trade, nor wages. . . ."

"Just left to die like a dog in his old age. . . ."

"Alas, brothers, life is one long misery. . . ."

"What do you say to trying our luck like Lopuhin's men have done?"

"Ay, ay! I've heard it said that during the fight on the Ilovlia Lopuhin's men went over in a body to Razin's side."

"Don't do anything rash. Many rumours are floating about—we'll have to nose around a bit."

"Quite true! It's possible that the rumours will turn out to be false. Now, then, what are you doing here, man? Eavesdropping, eh?"

"Me, eavesdropping! Oh no. I've come about the soldiers; you're the tsar's men; maybe you could stop them from gambling."

"We're not their officers and superiors; they've got their own major."

"Best leave 'em to themselves, fellow. After all, that's what a tavern's for."

"A fight is brewing."

"They can settle that among themselves. It'll be far worse if you try to turn them out; they'll spill all the wine and beat up the publican."

The servant moved away. The overseer from the grain barges on the Volga brought the tavern-keeper a batch of news. He leaned over the counter, gathering his fair wisp of a beard into his fist so that it should not get wet, and said, with a nod in the direction of the bartender:

"As a servant of the tsar, Ivan Petrov, you should send this fellow to the voivode."

"What for, Klim Mitrich?"

"Because an infidel with two horses in full battle array is posted on the hill behind your tavern; a Cossack is in touch with him from below; and three vagabonds are roasting mutton over a bonfire. To all appearance, these are alien bandits. Warning should be given so as to forestall any possible attempt at arson or robbery. Those vagabonds are in tatters, and yet they are roasting a sheep. That sheep has not been come by honestly, I'll wager. It has not been bought, but plundered."

"You talk mighty good sense. But just have a look at this ant-heap of mine. I'd be driven crazy were it not for this servant of mine. I set more store on guarding the tsar's coffer than I do on my own life. Think of it, Klim Mitrich, I alone am responsible for the drink money, and the moment one's head is turned there's a leakage. You have plenty of men to dispose of. Choose a reliable one; the tip for this trouble will be mine; but do not delay in sending him to the voivode. Well, do you agree?"

"Ivan Petrov, believe me, the Cossacks on the barges are as bad as any tramp, and as for the Volga folk—well, most of them were jail-birds before ever they took to the river! The merest whisper, and you'll lose your head. I tell you that at the slightest mention of the voivode all's up with you."

A soldier approached the bar and brought his fist down on the overseer's thin, curved back.

"Stand up straight, you clothes-prop. I crave for vodka, and you're in the way."

The overseer sprang away from the counter.

"I can't see there is any reason for breaking my spine, you bandit," he cried. "I shall report you to your officer."

"Report away! Have you ever walked the plank? The Volga is deep enough; have you ever plumbed it?"

"So you threaten to drown me, do you? Well, here's the publican to bear witness, and you'll soon be jailed if I have my way."

He waved his hat and bolted from the tavern.

"Hey, lads, fling this muck-worm into the Volga!" shouted the soldier from the doorway; and from the Volga came the thundering answer:

"Down oars, brothers!"

The musketeers in the tavern seized their weapons and rushed to the water's edge.

"Razin!"

"Is he going to raze the place or to rob it?"

"Have a good time, folks. The only wealth a poor man can boast of is his baptismal cross and his lice!"

Again the voice, which was like none other, thundered from the Volga:

"Do not run away, drunkards; we mean you no harm; we come as guests!"

The publican crossed himself, fidgeted behind the counter and muttered to himself:

"Oh, mother of mine, the tsar's money . . . of a surety I'll be flogged! I'm done for, the hour of my death has struck!"

The servant ducked behind the bar and edged his way towards the tavern-keeper:

"Shall I fetch the voivode? Shall I make for the town?"

"Wait awhile, or you'll be caught."

The soldiers stowed away their cards and crowded to the bar, slapping their fists on the counter.

"A barrel of vodka on the house, or we'll set fire to your beard!"

"The guests have arrived; now for a drink!"

"Devil take the major!"

Dishevelled and tipsy women in tattered clothing clustered round the soldiers holding out their bare arms.

"Don't grudge us a goblet! We want a drink, too."

A short, golden-hued coat gleamed in the doorway, and Razin entered the tavern, his black velvet overcoat hanging from one shoulder. The soldiers and women retreated from the bar.

"Set the tables in the middle of the room!"

In a twinkling the tables were moved. The servant wiped them clean with his apron and pulled up the seats.

"Sousers use seats, but we are falcons."

Razin seated himself on one of the tables. A cask of vodka and iron mugs were placed upon the one next to him.

"Musketeers, drink your fill!"

One by one the musketeers filed up, took Razin's proffered mug, drank the

contents, bowed and gave room to the following comrades. When all had drunk, the senior among them stepped forward and bowed.

"Here we are, father ataman! I am spokesman for all my men. We are weary of the thraldom which keeps us as servants of the boyars. We wish to taste freedom. We want to lay down our lives in your company. Take us, for we are yours. We shall serve you right loyally."

"If you are intending to serve me, then have another drink. What about these soldiers? Do they wish to fight us? Eh, soldiers?"

"Ah, no, ataman! We have missed the reveille, and were we to join our regiment now it would mean the bastonnade."

"I do not understand you. Do you want freedom or the bastonnade?"

"We want freedom, ataman. We'll join you. The musketeers follow you, and we shall follow them."

"That is well! Have a drink."

The Cossacks led in three young men from the riverside and stood them in front of the ataman.

"Whither are you bound, brothers?"

"Wherever our feet may carry us. We're looking for work, but have found none; we're starving; sold up all we had for food."

"And today?"

"We're in luck today. You are come; take us with you. We're good for nothing with the arquebus, but we can row."

"You'll be put to the oars at first, but meanwhile you'll be trained as arquebusiers. Now have a good time."

A Cossack strolled up from the bank of the Volga.

"Where have you flown from, vulture?"

"Vulture yourself! I'm a falcon from the Don. I want to see the father."

"Here he is."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Ivan Serebriakov, ataman. We've been chasing after you all along the Volga with a peace-loving murza; the horses are jaded, gadflies swarmed in places; it was very hard going."

"Well?"

"Ivan Serebriakov sent us after you and bade us tell you that he has brought about a thousand peasants from the lower Don to Tsaritzyn; Mishka Volotski has mustered as many or even more volunteers from the river townships. They seized the canoes and barges at Tsaritzyn and lie in wait for you among the islands of the Volga."

"Drink! Your chase has not been in vain. I've not much use for sober men."

Razin himself poured out a mug of vodka for the Cossack.

"Drink, then hasten back with the murza. If you contact Serebriakov before we do, tell him his horsemen must hasten to the banks of Cherni Yar. They must not travel by day with the horde, for, because of the many lakes and gadflies, we should lose many horses."

"I quite understand and shall deliver your message, father. Thank you!"

"What is your name?"

"Fedka Shpyn."

"Did you not always go as captain when Vaska Uss went on his expeditions?"

"He also intends to join you."

The Cossack went on his way.

Elbowing forward through the crowd of soldiers, the women made tracks for the vodka.

With a glance at them over the heads of the men, the ataman said:

"When we go campaigning we never take camp-followers. Turn these trollops out and see to it that not one of them gets into town till sunrise."

"As you say, father, so shall it be done."

"What about patrols on the road and in the fields?"

"They've already been dispatched. None can get through without the password."

A musketeer stepped forward.

"Father, it so happens that one of our men has slipped off to town."

"Ah! When?"

"He was sitting on a stone by the tavern, and when you approached in the canoes by way of the river and landed, he slipped away."

"Damnation! May his mother and old grandmother be . . . Well, if the voivode gets ready, we'll fight. Today's set apart for jollifications and performing the task we are here to accomplish."

"We'll do whatever you command."

"Those abandoned barges will have to be hauled up from the sand-spits; they'll have to be repaired and rigged overnight; loaded with flour from the warehouses and with fish, too; then away we go singing our songs. Where is the overseer?"

"He's floating in the Volga, father, suspended from one of the barges. As soon as you came into the tavern, the stevedores put a noose round his neck, throttled him and flung him into the river. He behaved like a brute to the labourers. Those men are now tending bonfires by the water's edge; they want to join you."

"Good! Enjoy yourselves, brothers!"

Razin shot a glance at the tavern-keeper from time to time. He noticed how the spy, who was acting as bartender, sidled up to the publican, and how they whispered to each other. Casting his eye round the room, Razin saw that the so-called servant was no longer present; he had mingled with the women when they were being hustled out.

"Hi, publican, send your servant to change the mugs."

"Where has he got to? I do not know, so help me, God!"

"The devil you don't! You sent him to report!"

The tavern-keeper tugged at his beard and mumbled:

"We're free people, ataman. I know nothing; he bears no message from me; he's a hired man."

"You first-born of Satan! If you've sent him to denounce me, you'll receive short shrift."

A commotion could be heard outside, and the servant's whimpering and imploring was plainly heard:

"But, brother Cossacks, I only went to town for some bread."

The tavern-keeper trembled and sat down on a cask behind the counter. When the so-called servant was roughly pushed into the room, Razin shouted:

"Light a fire in front of the tavern and find a piece of iron!"

"Father," said one of the Volga stevedores, "we were roasting a sheep on

wooden stakes and tried to find an iron spit; well, we unearthed one at last, and it's lying down there by the bonfire."

"Bring it hither!"

The labourer sprinted down the hill and soon returned with the iron rod. Opposite the tavern door the Cossacks had lit a charcoal fire and threw the rod on it to heat the iron. The informer-servant was held as in a vice by the musketeers.

"Now, you fellow, if you don't tell the truth as to why you went to town, it will be the worse for you."

The man began to wriggle his legs as he cried aloud.

"Here, musketeer, put on the gloves and take the iron out of the fire."

The spy in servant's disguise shot a glance at the tavern-keeper and confessed:

"Ivan Petrov sent me to denounce you, my good ataman."

"How?"

"He had told me to be quick and inform the voivode that the robber Cossacks were come; that Stenka Razin himself was here; that you are all swilling without paying; that you are planning arson and plunder."

"No need to use the iron; he's told us all."

"You Judas of a tavern-keeper, what are you trembling for? Looking forward to judgment being passed on you?"

The tavern-keeper ran out from behind the counter, fell to his knees beside the table on which Razin sat and began to jabber.

"My mind is all in a whirl, free ataman. I must have gone mad. I confess: yes, I sent the fellow. We are ordered to guard the tsar's drink-money to the death; it's the truth I'm telling you; one gets flogged if any of it goes astray. I took an oath to the tsar; I was to watch over his revenue from drink; was not to serve anyone on credit, not even were he my father, my brother or any kin whatsoever."

"Go back to your place! We'll think over what we had better do. Now then, mates, let's get on with our job and drag up the barges."

Everyone left the tavern except the tavern-keeper, who was pulling on his homespun trousers, his informer-servant and two armed musketeers doing sentry duty at the door.

"Yes, brother, it's high time we were given a taste of freedom. I've just about had enough of this everlasting service. Why, even if a man wants to stand against a fence, his commander is loth to let him."

His comrade smoked on in silence.

The blue trails of the evening light swept across the Volga from the heights beyond Samara; the sun dropped behind the hills; the scent of new-mown hay floated, widespread and persistent, along the river.

On the tongues of sand, men were splashing about and wading round the abandoned barges.

"Damn!"

"Heave-ho, and hold your tongue!"

"Push it from under the bottom."

"You'd better lash a hawser round it, or it'll burst!"

"My, what a weight!"

Came a tremendous cracking of timber.

"Don't smash it!"

"We'll have to repair it in any case."

"Now, then, mates, to work!"

At no great distance from the bank one of the big barges was moored to a smaller one, between which and the shore a gangway had been set up; alongside this men carried sacks of flour from the warehouses to the river and loaded them on the big barge; others were engaged in rolling up barrels of fish. The air was filled with noise and shouting.

"Look where you're going, you!"

"You're crushing my legs, you devil!"

The waves of the vast river broke on the banks; the barge quivered from stem to stern from the weight of the cargoes which were pitched into it. The deep blue waters of the Volga shimmered with silvery patches of light, sending their white-crested waves to nearby shores and those far away. Turbulently and incessantly chasing one another, the waves were blustering away as though they, too, were zealous to pass on and spread the anxious gossip of the tavern-haunters.

"Razin!"

"Razin has come!"

Well before the sun rose behind the steep heights of Samara the barges were afloat again, caulked, and their tarred sides reinforced with patches of white wood. They put out from their anchorage in full rig. A man in red cap and black overcoat stood at the stern of the leading barge, and his mighty voice resounded across the waters:

"Guard the tsar's coffer, you cur!"

Countless voices joined in a cheer for the prodigious ataman. Day was breaking. On one of the sand-spits a naked man sat upon a green chest, which was filled with coppers. He was the tavern-keeper; round his neck was an iron collar from which a rope attached him to the coffer. He trembled as he crossed himself. On one side of the coffer was an inscription which ran:

"He who does not drink at the tavern, but drinks his own brewed liquor at home without stint, is a thief and a cur, for he deprives the exchequer of revenue."

## 8

Perspiring profusely, his elbows dug into his baggy paunch, the voivode lay reading his steward's account book. . . . "On the second day of July, delivered to the voivode Mitri Petrovich Habarov sixty pounds of pork and also some sturgeon for thirty kopeks. . . ."

The note dropped on the blue silk shirt, as did likewise the puffy hands which had held it; the voivode began to snore.

The governmental hut was well heated and had no chimney; the mica-covered windows were tightly shut as a protection against the swarms of flies without. The sun beat down fiercely on the street. The heat outside increased the stuffiness of the smoke-begrimed hut, which reeked of perspiring hair and some other acrid smell. The voivode lay behind the table on two feather mattresses, piled one on top of the other and placed on a broad wooden bench. In the vestibule the clerks talked in muffled tones, not venturing to walk about or to move.

Something must have disturbed the red-bearded boyar, for he groaned in his

sleep, scratched himself and shuddered. He scratched himself again and, without opening his eyes, began to fumble under his shirt. Half awake, he smacked his thick lips and grunted: "The clerks have made the place smell; bugs, too, crawl through the partition."

He smacked his stomach and sat up, groaning. His yellow silk trousers, embroidered with arabesques, slipped down to disclose his hairy thighs. The voivode thrust his hands down inside his trousers.

"Ah, you gluttons!" He caught a bug and bared his teeth. "I'll put you to the torture, devil; here goes!"—and he crushed the life out of the bug.

On the table stood a carved wooden bowl filled with kvass. The voivode drank some and then proceeded to examine his couch.

"A mere insect! Yet it bites like a dog. What can bring it to life? A stink? When I petitioned the tsar to appoint me to a lucrative post he had the same smell . . . and if the tsar exudes it, how can we humbler folk be without it? Ah, you devil, you'll catch it! There!"

The voivode again bared his teeth and crushed the insect. He raised his head as those in the vestibule were becoming noisy, and shouted:

"Who's making all that commotion? Surely you know that I am resting?"

A clerk set the door ajar and through the tiny aperture thrust his tousled head, saying:

"Forgive me, father voivode, but I'm trying to prevent a musketeer from worrying you."

"What's his business?"

"Secret information, so he declares."

"Very well, let him in."

A musketeer in a faded crimson coat was ushered in. He was unarmed, and bowed from the waist.

"Greetings to the voivode!"

"What is your business?"

"I bring you tidings, boyar."

"When you address me, I expect you to use my full title. What have you to say? Speak the truth without reserve."

"Voivode, boyar, father! Early yesterday morning some canoes came up the Volga and dropped anchor below the tavern, and . . ."

"Well?"

"Robber Cossacks! Razin and his band have landed."

"What's that you say? Don't dare tell me lies!"

As the voivode sprang to his feet his trousers slipped down to his ankles. Stretching his legs, the voivode paced the room, trailing the trousers behind him and exposing his bare paunch from under his shirt.

"What harridans these girls are! I've ordered them a hundred times to sew on my buttons properly and to let out the waist. But have they done it? I button them up, they cut me like a knife round the belly. You, don't stand there gaping at my buttocks, musketeer! Get on with your news!"

"I do not know everything, boyar!"

"Trying to be secretive, are you? You just wait, and I'll tear out your grey beard!"

The voivode took a step forward; thereby he became entangled in his trousers, flushed, and stooped painfully to pull up the flowery silk while groping for the buttons.

"Razin did you say? And where is he now?"

"I think he sailed downstream."

"Gone? Why did he land in Samara? Robbers do not come here for nothing. Why didn't you find out whither they were bound?"

"Well, boyar, as I sat——"

"Didn't I tell you to give me my full title?"

"Well, voivode and boyar, as I sat by the tavern I looked down on the Volga and saw the Cossacks sailing upstream."

"The 'robbers'!"

". . . the robbers sailing upstream. So I hurried off to warn you. They climbed the hill in my wake and posted patrols in the fields. I hid in a ravine among the grass and crawled nearer to hear what they were saying."

"What did you hear? Wait a minute! Damn these trousers, they have twisted themselves round my legs. I'll slip them off—you aren't a woman; give me my long coat, it's there on the seat."

The musketeer brought him the garment.

"As I lay there, voivode father, I overheard them saying: 'Let's raise the barges from the sand-spit, repair them and set sail for Tsaritzyn.' So it seemed to me that Razin meant to take away the abandoned barges."

"That's no great loss! Have those bandits done any damage? Committed arson? Or plundered, that you know of?"

"I reckon they left by the Volga, boyar."

"Now mark: 'Boyar and voivode'! How many times have I told you to address me properly? Well, if they have left and done no damage, there's no need for me to send in a report. I hate reporting."

"Only then, voivode and boyar, did I venture to move. I peeped through the grass, having first taken off my cap. I saw the overseer, who was in charge of the tsar's corn barges on their way to Astrakhan, running up the hill, waving his arms and screaming, while after him came men from the boats—two of them. They lassoed him and dragged him down to the Volga, there to drown him presumably."

"Where were the musketeers? They were posted as bodyguard on the barges and placed in control of those labourers."

"I heard, voivode and boyar, that these same musketeers went over to Razin's side."

"Gone over to him? Traitors, rebels, disloyal to our great sovereign! But the soldiers were there, too, surely?"

"While I was still sitting on the stone by the tavern, voivode father, the soldiers were spending all their time in drinking and gambling. I think they, too, have gone over."

"Gambling is prohibited. The publican will have to answer for this infringement of the law."

"What could he do? While I lay in the ravine the publican dispatched a messenger to inform you, but he was waylaid by the patrol and brought back to the tavern. I crawled through the grass to the town, lay low for a while, and here I stand before you."

"No doubt you're standing before me now, but you know little; nevertheless, if what you say is true, and the bandits have left without causing damage, then —well, I ask you, musketeer, not to alarm the townsfolk; and if you encounter anyone spreading rumours about the robbers or scattering leaflets, you must

bring him to my office. Should he offer resistance, summon the patrol and have him arrested. Where's the publican? And where is his—hem—servant?"

"I fancy, voivode father, that there will be no difficulty in finding the tavern-keeper. He's sure to have bribed the robbers with vodka to let him go free. As for his servant, where can he go to? He's sure to turn up."

"Now go! I trust you to keep your ears and eyes open."

As evening drew on, the heat moderated, though the air still remained stuffy, and the tin-plate dome of the monastery church shone fiercely in the sunset glow.

Two grooms led the voivode's horse up to the porch. With the aid of a groom he climbed into the saddle and rode home. He cast a possessive eye along the streets as he passed in his tightly buttoned coat.

## 9

The voivodina, an enormously fat woman, lay dozing on a low, broad settee upholstered with velvet. Though the room was spacious, the air was stuffy, because of some herbs with white flowers which were strewn about under the seats. She wore a green silk sarafan with cuffs of the same hue buttoned up with pearls. The gown stuck out over her fat stomach. The voivode himself, apparently absorbed in thought, paced the apartment, hands behind his back.

"Mitri Petrovich, boyar, what are you always worrying about? You must be weary of constantly having to work with clerks."

The voivode pinched a fold of her ample stomach and shook it lightly.

"Maximova, surely you are not with child again?"

"Thank the Lord, no! I am well."

"Fat has taken up all the room!"

"Oh, master, it's yourself who's bulging with fat, not I. I am not pregnant yet, but the major's wife is."

"I'm thinking——"

"Why think so much? Drop it."

"I should like to, but cannot. It seems that those Cossack bandits are out on the Volga again."

"This is not the first year they are out, so why worry?"

"You see, Maximova, should they be led by bold atamans, then you and I will not be able to remain here for our full term of office, but will have to quit. We have a goodly number of menials, and neither of us is lenient to them. The townsfolk are discontented, and the common people, though they say nothing, are in a sullen mood."

"You have spoilt them, master, you are too indulgent. That's why your imagination runs on wicked people. You ought to treat them roughy. Again, you insist on inviting the steward to meals."

"I don't invite him to no purpose; he brings me gifts and keeps me informed as to whether there is any unrest in the countryside." The voivode sniffed the air. . . . "This smell has afflicted my nostrils for a long time, but I have only just discovered whence it comes. Why do you make a hayloft of our house, Maximova?"

"'Tis to discourage the bugs; you bring swarms of them from your office, and we'd have no respite from them were I not to take precautions."

"That's good, boyarina; keep an eye on them." The voivode drew aside the skirts of his coat. "These herbs of yours remind me——"

"What a shame! Fancy a high-born man and voivode like you going about with no trousers on him! What do you do it for?"

"What for? How often have I ordered that the waist of my trousers must be made wider, and the buttons sewn farther apart? I am not a labourer, but a boyar! Now I have to look indecent before my clerks and other officials—not to mention you."

"Every day, master, I tell the maid Nastasia that she has to sew on your buttons properly. But she does not heed my words, and no sooner is my back turned than she is off to the bondmen's hut. I expect she is on the lookout for a husband."

"For a husband? That's good. Serfs may be bought, they are slaves, and their children, too, are slaves; our menials bear fruit for our benefit."

"So yesterday I thrashed her with a birch."

"Thrash to your heart's content. The rod teaches wisdom, and menials like it."

The voivodina began to breathe heavily, and the settle creaked.

"Do not trouble to rise; listen!"

"I am doing so, master."

"Today a musketeer reported to me that ataman Stenka Razin sailed up to Samara."

"Well, you should inform the major so that he can have his soldiers and musketeers ready. Also there should be an inspection of the arquebuses and cannons. Do you know where this terrible man has gone to? He must be wicked indeed if half the tales I am told about him are true."

"The musketeer did not know everything, Maximova. I have dispatched my own men to find out the truth and to lay that tavern-keeper by the heels. He is to be taken to my office. He knows for certain when the robbers set out, and whither they went. The major is not to be relied on; he is a drunkard; several times he has been had up for misdemeanour, and the soldiers under his command dislike him. He fails to issue them the regulation food and clothes, he beats them to death, so the soldiers take to the woods to escape him. I place my hope in the peasantry, and—no matter how much you scold me—I intend to invite the land bailiff to a meal next Sunday."

"What, on Sunday? Why, that's Oliona's name-day, master."

"Precisely!"

"Very well, let him come with a gift, only you had better tell the man that the boyarina is affronted because he gives her only twenty-five kopeks. I think he might make it thirty; then I'd have enough to buy rouge and face creams."

"I shall give him your message. Only you must remember, Maximova, that the gift has been regulated everywhere and amounts to twenty-five kopeks."

"No harm in telling him, all, the same!"

"Sunday is a holiday. It is better to celebrate our daughter's name-day on a Sunday."

"Father, who is going to bring me gifts, and what will they be like?" The voivode's daughter had come running into the room. She was heavily built like her mother and wore a pink silk sarafan with a yellow silk under-bodice, decorated with pearls on the full short sleeves. On her head was a maiden's coronet.

"Oh, light of my eyes, my bright moonbeam," exclaimed her mother fondly.

"I agree she is a moonbeam and a ray of sunshine, but it is not seemly for her to run out of her own apartment into ours so unceremoniously. Suppose a stranger should see you? What a disgrace!"

The voivode spoke with a merry twinkle in his eye. He advanced towards her and, with an effort, raised her in his arms.

"I am a voivode and not a market clerk, but nevertheless I know something of weights and measures. You must weigh about thirteen stone."

"And thank God for that! She has an excellent appetite."

"If we could only marry her to someone of high birth, someone with a place at court."

"Father, do find me a husband; I want a husband, but he must be young and slender and not fair-haired! I like slim men with black hair."

The voivode laughed.

"You wait! I intend to marry you to a tavern-keeper; they are always thin; the high-born can eat as much as they wish . . . and run to corpulence."

"No, no, no! I never . . ."

"Mitri Petrovich, master, how can you bring yourself to mention such horrible things? The mere idea of her wedding with a barman!"

"Little daughter, go back to your room. Mother and I are going to discuss whom to invite for your name-day. Besides, it is improper for you to be here. Strangers might drop in at any time. Go!"

The young girl left for her apartment. The voivode went to the door and banged it with his fist. A servant thrust in his head without entering.

"What is the boyar's pleasure?"

"Remember, menial, that you have to address me as 'boyar and voivode'. I want Grigori."

The servant disappeared, and his place was taken by a dignified steward with a bald head and a long grey beard; he was dressed in a long, tight, dark blue coat. He crossed himself several times before the ikons.

"Grigori, you're like an archpriest!"

The servant bowed silently from the waist. As he walked up and down the room the voivode came quite close to where the steward was standing. He paused and stared at the man, who again bowed to him.

"What day is it?"

"A fast day, boyar and voivode—Friday."

"Ah, I want you to go tomorrow and call on the land bailiff Ermilka, and invite him to bread and salt on Sunday. He knows about the donation, but there must be a separate one for my lady Daria Maximova. She is angry because he only brings a gift of twenty-five kopeks. In future it will have to be thirty kopeks . . . or more! You must also take invitation money from him: two kopeks, or as much more as he will give. Now go! If you can manage to do so, invite him today. Also some fancy bread for the name-day child."

"He is probably asleep, boyar and voivode; who then will answer the door?"

"You'll have to wake him up. After all, he's only a peasant, and will wake at a boyar's summons."

The servant bowed to his master and mistress and went out. The boyarina said:

"Of all our servants I prefer Grigori. He never grumbles at anything and always does as he is told."

"He is no longer young, and the cudgel earlier in life improved his intelligence. He's had countless beatings. He says nothing, but he'll extort that invitation money out of the bailiff, you may be sure."

"Yes, cudgels teach wisdom. I shall give that girl Nastasia a whipping today. You'd better go, master; it is unseemly that a man should gaze on a girl's young skin."

"What a quaint notion! As if we did not thrash menial women all over the body at the office!"

"Look on, then. It's all the same to me."

"When you call the maids, send one of them to my office to fetch my trousers. I shall be at work deep into the night, but I do not wish my clothes to be left lying about. Order them to give me the new and more roomy trousers."

Once more the settle creaked when the boyar's wife rose to her feet.

"Gi-i-ir-rls!"

The maids, with silk bandeaux on their plaited hair and coarse, gaily coloured homespun gowns, entered noiselessly and remained glued to the wall one on either side the door. The voivodina was at her prayers. She turned to her maids with a puckered brow.

"Call Nastasia, and bring some rods—not willow, but birch; they are more supple; cut a few bunches in the orchard."

The maids went to do her bidding.

The voivode drew a low, wide bench from under the seat.

"Though you have never witnessed my punishments, you know very well what I use for them."

"You should keep a whipping-post in your little room, Maximova; a lash, too, would not come amiss."

"I shall get one, Petrovich."

## 10

The servants' hall was stuffy and full of tobacco smoke. The smoke-vent was open, but it served only as a passage for flies.

Cheerfulness reigned in the hut reserved for the servants until an inmate was summoned by the voivode or his lady for punishment. Fair-haired, stocky, full-bosomed Nastasia looked into the hut on her way from the maids' room. Ready to beat a hasty retreat at a moment's notice, she lingered at the door.

The slim, dark, sly-eyed young potman from the tavern had arrived that day as usual. He often came with denunciations for the voivode from the tavern-keeper, and on the strength of such reports the voivode would dispatch musketeers to the tavern. The young man was known to Nastasia; he had winked at her more than once, had tried to take her hand in passing, had whispered:

"Darling, will you love me?"

At night, in the maids' room, Nastasia would occasionally muse:

"To love such as he! We have to suffer enough at the hands of our masters; he acts as a denouncer, and, thanks to his activities, many people have been dragged by the musketeers to the voivode's office. I should blush before my fellow servants were I to bind myself to any kind of official. And a potman is much the same as an official."

"I am a free man," the potman would whisper to Nastasia. "I serve the tavern-keeper, and if someone better turned up I should serve him. Don't look at my clothes. I have money, and there are clothes to be had in the market. I don't drink, and I can read and write."

He had no secrets from Nastasia, for he considered her to be at one with him, and mentioned quite openly in her presence whom he was ordered to denounce to the voivode, but only when the servants had already forgathered in the hall. The servants were rather afraid of him, but hobnobbed with him all the same.

"We bondmen cannot get anything for ourselves," they would say, "and at least he treats us to vodka from time to time."

Today, however, he seemed in some way different from his usual self; his expression was one of pride rather than cunning; he had brought with him a jug of vodka and had distributed it to everybody; and when the liquor had gone slightly to his head he started to tell a tale; but he had not got far with his tale before one of the servants interrupted him:

"Hi, you, potman, what did you come to see the voivode about?"

"I've no intention of ever seeing the voivode again, brothers; I came as a guest to see you. I've given up my job at the tavern. Let them engage someone else."

"Eh, lad, sounds too good to be true!"

"Before he goes on with his tale he must tell us what happened today on the Volga."

"Better not; you'll hear about that when the time comes."

"I'll wager he's been forbidden to speak."

"Then he'd better get on with his narration."

". . . Once upon a time there lived a slow-witted young fellow whose parents were very old. This young fellow was single—just I am myself—and it was high time he got married." At this remark the potman glanced up at Nastasia, who drooped her eyelids. "Now because stupid people make excellent husbandmen, this peasant's farm was in fine condition; he had a new house, horses in the stables, and cows. So a wench coveted the nitwit; but she was no longer a virgin, for she was walking out with her fancy man. The foolish peasant asked her hand in marriage, and she consented to be his bride. . . ."

"Stop, my lad, you'd better tell us what happened on the Volga today."

"By and by, lads! Let me go on with my tale. . . . The lass got married, and on the very first night she began to play pranks on her husband; she turned all the cattle out into the road, and when the newly-wed couple were going to bed she said: 'Have you ever had a wicked man among your kin?' Astonished at that question, he retorted: 'What do you ask that for, wifie?'—'Look into the yard; all the cows and horses are gone; you know there are cattle-lifters abroad.' —'Mercy on me! I must set out to find them.' So he began to dress, but she would not give him a chance. 'Run out quickly, I don't suppose they've strayed far.' So the nitwit ran out almost naked; meantime, of course, her lover was waiting in the outhouse. She fastened the yard gate, bolted the door of the house, and then consoled herself with the other one. The nitwit ran along the street and rounded up the cattle. But, lo, on his return he found the gate of his house barred! He knocked and knocked, his teeth chattering with cold, for it was winter-time. 'Let me in, Matriona, let me in; it's me, your Ivan!' The bride looked out of the window: 'That's a lie; my Ivan is at home; the wedding

feast is but just finished, and the groomsmen and other guests have gone home to bed, where we, too, are at present. Off with you, crazy pate!' . . ."

One of the servants interrupted the narrator:

"We've been told that Razin bound your tavern-keeper to the coffer containing the drink-money and left him on a sandy shoal. Is that so?"

"I know nothing whatever about that. Well, to continue my story: . . . The nitwit ran to the priest and tapped at his window. 'Father,' he said, 'things are not going well in my house; dad and mum are old and deaf; the young woman refuses to let me in; you married us this morning.'—'That's none of my business, my hearty.'—'How so, none of your business? You're a priest and teach us all.' —'Very well, we'll go, and I may admonish her.'—The priest knew the wench for a trollop, but he had been bribed, and for the sum he had received he had married her to the nitwit. So the priest slipped on his fur coat and marten cap, for the night was very cold. When they arrived at their destination the priest knocked and battered at the door, and the bride began to scold: 'Take yourself off to the devil! How dare you come here?'—During the absence of her nitwit husband she had driven the cattle into the shed and had made the gate even more secure."

Here, again, someone interrupted the tale.

"We've been told that the Cossacks tortured you with a red-hot iron."

"If they had I would not be seated here drinking with you, would I? . . . Well, the young bride said: 'My husband, Ivan, is at home with me. You yourself married us, you old greybeard; yet here you are bringing a tramp to the house. I shall lodge a complaint to the voivode by and by.' The priest was frightened at her words and only then noticed that the young fellow had nothing on but his shirt. So the priest turned back, and the nitwit followed him and tried to catch him by the coat-tails. The priest began to run, but Ivan kept pace with him; the priest felt too hot in his fur coat now, so he cast it aside, together with his cap, and sprinted away in the cold. Ivan picked up the coat, put it on, and continued in pursuit of the priest, who made ever greater speed until he reached home, where he hastily locked the door, leaving the nitwit alone in the street. Ivan gave way to tears, though he was no longer cold. He wanted his wife; so he howled and howled like a wolf. After a while he thought: 'I shall go to grandma.' The old woman lived near by; she was esteemed a witch, but helped those overtaken by misfortune without charging them anything—quite unlike our judges and officials. Ivan reached her hut with the tears still streaming down his cheeks; learning from him his adversities, the old hag said to him: 'Go to bed now, your business will keep until tomorrow.' And Ivan lay down and fell asleep."

There was another interruption:

"Hi, potman, how is it that you saw nothing? People say that the Cossacks dragged the barges off the sandy shoals, patched them up and loaded them with flour from the warehouses."

"Go and find out for yourselves, lads. I know nothing."

"Why, if any of us ventured to go down to the Volga the voivode would give him such a beating that the man would have to pluck the splinters of stick out of his flesh afterwards."

"He refuses to tell us anything because he's brought a secret message to the voivode."

"Those who have legs, eyes and ears—now is their time to act. Such as they have no need to fear the voivode," replied the potman.

"Did you hear what he said? It seems that he really has not come to see the voivode."

The servants exchanged whispers; then one of them, a stalwart lad, went up to the potman.

"You have no need to be afraid of us; none of us will denounce you to the voivode. We're all on the lookout for better times, for fewer beatings. We're prepared to join the Cossacks. For such a cause we don't grudge sacrificing our lives."

"All right! You'll soon know why I came to see you. It wasn't to denounce anyone to the voivode."

"If that be so, you might as well finish your story."

"... Next morning the old woman told Ivan: 'Here's a kerchief, a unique one, for you; go home, say nothing to your young bride and do not let her set eyes on you; keep everything secret. When evening twilight is breaking, crawl under the bed, and as soon as your wife lies down with her lover, tie a knot in this kerchief—it will do its work—and then you will know what to do with this pair of lovers! Have it out with the priest as well; he knew whom he was marrying you to, and why he accepted a bribe from a slut.'—Everything happened as the old woman had foretold. Night came, Ivan crawled under the bed, and it was not long before the young wife went to bed with her lover. A little while afterwards the nitwit tied the first knot—in a moment he heard the pair of lovers scuffling on the bed; the woman swore and tried to push the man away from her, but all in vain. The woman and her lover seemed inexorably joined to each other. Day broke. By now it was time to tend the cattle and milk the cows. At last they were forced to cry for help. First, Ivan's old father came, then his mother; they stood crossing themselves and spitting. Ivan's mother seized the oven fork, but it was useless. They sent for the priest, saying: 'Evil has befallen the house; let him bring the cross!' The neighbours brought in the priest; he read a prayer—no use! The deacon swung the censer—no use! They all sang hymns, the sexton aiding—nothing availed! Ivan, under the bed, kept tying one knot after another in the kerchief. When he tied a knot, the priest was hurled on top of the pair of lovers and could not detach himself from them. Yet another knot, and the deacon became glued on top of the three. Another knot, and the sexton suffered the same fate. Finally the nitwit crawled from under the bed and found a cudgel. He made good use of it! Then he untied one knot and allowed the sexton to go free. The deacon's knot was also untied, and he was freed. Before letting the priest go he administered ten blows to him. Having finished with the priest, he killed his wife's lover. . . ."

Two maids came running into the hut.

"Nastasia, we've been looking for you all over the place. Mistress bids you to go to her at once."

"Such is our life! When a mistress sends her maids to seek out another and orders more to be brought into her presence, it means one of them is going to be flogged."

"Remember, Nastasia, I shall deliver you from your mistress' hand," called out the potman.

The girl started, shot a glance at the story-teller and, with lowered eyes, walked away to the voivode's apartments.

## 11

At the twentieth stroke Nastasia ceased screaming. The voivode ordered that she be taken into the yard and soused with cold water. He readjusted the sleeves of his coat, blew out the candles and, approaching his wife, put his arms round her fat waist and gave it a squeeze.

"Why, master, what are you about, pinching me thus?"

"You are that buxom, I can feel the sap oozing out of you."

"God made me as I am."

"You speak but the truth. Still, a meal would not come amiss; I'm hungry. Order supper to be served."

"Right as usual! I could do with a bite myself."

"I shall have finished work at the office by midnight. The clerks will suffice; I shall not need the executioner."

The servants peeped out of the windows and the slightly open door, which gave on to the yard; they wanted to see how the whipped girl was getting on and were whispering to one another:

"Listen here, brothers. So far it has only been a fancy in my mind, but now I have decided to escape and join the Cossacks."

"You never have been flogged, and yet you propose to run away; we are whipped three and more times every day."

"The birch is but a trifle; we are beaten with cudgels."

"When the winter frosts come, a thrashed back becomes as woolly as a sheepskin."

"You have much to put up with."

"We are biding our time; 'twill come sooner or later."

"I am quite resolved to go this very day and join the Cossacks. But take care not to denounce me to the voivode. The ataman gave me some leaflets to distribute among the peasants in town, so I'll do that and then be off."

"What does the ataman tell the people?"

"I've told you a good deal already, but if you want to hear the leaflet, I can read you that, if only we could find some out-of-the-way corner."

"Here's a suitable place, behind the stove."

They settled altogether in a corner; the potman struck a spark, lighted a chip, dropped to one knee, and from the bosom of his shirt pulled forth a yellow leaflet; duly caring that the light was properly held and couldn't burn his neck, he held the leaflet close to his eyes and read it out syllable by syllable:

> "Peasants and townfolk of Samara! Escape with me, Stepan Timofeivich. If I live, I shall release you from the unbearable yoke of the boyars. To townsfolk and small traders I shall grant the right to buy and sell and ply their trades free from the burden of taxation; I shall distribute land to the peasants, and those who own possessions will be allowed to keep them; as to clerks, boyars, judges and voivodes, I intend to destroy them without fail.
>
> (*Signed*) ATAMAN RAZIN, STEPAN."

"Now see, lad, this is all very well, but there is never a word about us menials."

"As to you menials, if he kills off all the boyars, then who will be left to keep you in bondage?"

"True! Still, there ought to be something about us in the leaflet!"

"Hi, Fedor, keep a keen eye on any musketeer!"

"There's one dilapidated specimen who comes regularly to report to the voivode. He's hanging around at this moment."

"I know the sort of persons to beware of. The leaflets will be distributed to trustworthy individuals, and I shall make good my escape tonight."

"There are sure to be some in the market to pick 'em up."

"You too, lads—those among you who feel they cannot stand life as it is must take their way to Razin."

"We'll see about that."

"One thing holds me back. I should like to have a glimpse of Nastasia and have a word or two with her."

"Better not try! Don't you know that until she is fit for work again she'll be locked up in the outhouse with a guard at the door? Should you be caught with the leaflets on you it's all up with you."

"Yes, by and by, when you return as a Cossack, you'll set her free then."

## 12

The voivode, wearing a loose coat of crimson velvet over his blue silk shirt, sat in his usual place on the mattress in the government office. The room was lit by a chip fixed into the sconce of the stove and by a candle placed on the table. A clerk was sitting at the end of the table, nodding his head, whose long locks were fastened with a snood; he bent over the table, holding a paper close to the light and reading it.

"Clerk, who has been brought in today?"

"A wench, voivode boyar, by name Dunka Mihailova."

"Hi, you, bring in the woman Dunka."

A door creaked, and a dishevelled but rather pretty woman of about thirty was thrust in. A red shawl hung from her shoulders, and a light-coloured blouse rose and fell with her breathing; she was hard put to it to restrain her sobs.

"What are you whimpering for?"

"How is it, father boyar . . ."

". . . and voivode! Give me my full title!"

". . . boyar and voivode . . . that I, an innocent woman, should be taken from my house? A friend of mine was sitting with me; he'd come to see me."

"Oh . . . but more correctly said: 'sitting and lying down'! Moreover, he entered by the wrong gate, not by way of the yard as honest folk would have done, but under your gown."

"Nothing of the sort! Your spies have invented the lie."

"Spies? You mean 'informers', the tsar's informers!"

"Informers, voivode and boyar. But why should they molest an innocent woman like me? They have slandered and insulted me and had not had the decency to allow me time to wash my face. I've not even been able to fetch drinking-water. My place is swarming with bugs; one can neither sleep nor lay one's head on the pillow."

"Clerk, go into the vestibule with the attendant. I must teach the wench to lead a virtuous life."

"Now listen to me, Dunka. I do not intend to do you any harm today, and if henceforth you live in obedience to me you may become a wealthy woman. Go on living in sin and do not be afraid. I, the voivode, am master here, and I shall not prosecute you for acting as you feel inclined. But there is one thing I must insist on : if people with money arrive in town for business purposes, or any other reason, you must entice them to your house, offer them strong mead ; and you have no need to worry, for I stand behind you as your protector. Find out how much money each of your customers has, and if you are able to lay hands on it, so much the better. Should this prove to be impossible, then you will have to describe in detail what the man in question looked like, and how he was dressed. In case you steal the money, make no secret of it to me, but come here and hand it over to me, and I shall give you enough to buy yourself a new gown or any other garment you require. Well, why are you silent ? Has your throat dried up ?"

"Boyar and father——"

"And voivode !"

"Boyar and voivode, I agree to do this for you, but on one condition : your spies must not drag me to the court of justice to my shame, for I have been an honest widow."

"Should anyone harm you, report to me ; but they will not dare ! I myself may visit you—hem—at night to partake of a jolly meal together, eh ?"

"You'll be made most welcome, father boyar and voivode."

"And you'll do everything as I wish ? Hi, clerk ! Sit down. And you, attendant, escort the young woman home."

The woman bowed and walked out.

The clerk relit the chip from the voivode's candle and again buried his nose in his papers.

"Clerk, who else is there ?"

"Eplaha Silantieva, voivode-boyar."

"Let the prisoner Silantieva out from the lock-up and bring her here."

The voivode's command was answered by a mighty creaking of wooden doors, and a second office attendant ushered in an elderly woman with iron-grey hair, dressed in a coat embroidered with worsted. Her expression was defiant. No sooner was she near the table than she launched a volley of invective at the voivode :

"What are up to, old pot-belly ? Never in my life have I been in a torture chamber, never have I been thrown as food for bugs—and all this without any cause !—nor have any of my kin been dragged to the public lock-up."

"Why are you puffing yourself up like a toad, Silantieva ? Your kin do not seem ever to have known a just voivode. As for myself, those who have never tasted prison have never lived under my rule."

"To blazes with you and your 'just' rule !"

"You say you have been arrested without cause. Well, Silantieva, the cause is not far to find. It is your scurrilous talk ; you speak in the market-place exactly as you have now ; you have threatened the boyars ; you have used foul language against myself, the voivode ; and, which is worst of all, you abetted the robber Cossacks who landed today near Samara. You knew—through whom I was unable to discover—that not all the Cossacks would be sailing down the

Volga, but that some of them meant to ride along the banks, and you offered to guide them to a spot where they could obtain horses. And yet you say you are not guilty, harridan."

"Pot-belly that you are, have you a cross round your neck, or have you cast it away? You involve and bind me in a death-trap."

"Crosses are beside the point. I'm no monk and am not versed in Church affairs. But if—— Clerk! Retire with the attendant to the vestibule while I question the woman in private."

Both the clerk and the attendant left the room.

"Now listen, you violent and aggressive woman," said the voivode, as he leant forward upon the table: "if you refuse to tell me where your husband keeps his cash, I shall leave you to be eaten alive by bugs in the torture chamber."

"Oh, you sinner! Oh, you pot-bellied devil! You'll have to die some day, and yet you live without a cross; you are no Christian! You have absolutely no conscience! Now think for once. If I disclose where my husband conceals his profits, and you take them, when my husband returns from his business journey and finds out what he has lost he'll maybe kill me. No, I'd rather endure the bugs till he comes back. If I die, the sin will be on your head; but my husband's wrath and displeasure are more terrible to me than your tortures."

"Clerk and attendant, come here!"

Both men entered from the vestibule.

The clerk sat down at the table, while the attendant stood by the stove. The voivode addressed himself to the clerk:

"You can go home. You have worked enough for today, and I shall not need your services any more."

The clerk bowed and withdrew without putting on his cap.

"Here, fellow, seize the Silantieva woman. Bind her and shove her into the lock-up. When you have done with her, send me the tavern-keeper."

The woman let loose a torrent of abuse, yelled, bit the attendant's hands—but he was strong and in a moment mastered her and dragged her away. When her yells and sobs had subsided, the wooden doors creaked again, and a shuffling of steps could be heard approaching. The tavern-keeper appeared. Shaking out the tails of his long, dark blue coat as he walked in, the man bowed to the voivode.

"Had a sound sleep, Ivan Petrovich? Since we bear the same patronymic, we can discuss everything as between two brothers; and brothers never wish to bring harm to one another."

The tavern-keeper sat down on a bench.

"Have you thought out ways and means whereby we can make profit together like brothers?"

"I have thought things over, but have not quite come to any conclusions yet, Mitri Petrovich."

". . . and voivode."

"And voivode, Mitri Petrovich. I tremble when I think how on earth I shall ever be able to lay my hands on my precious Fedko. Why, it makes my hair stand on end and fair raises my cap to think of it."

"Now, Ivan son of Piotr, you know me, the voivode?"

"I do, voivode-father."

"You know that I have power to do anything I please; to make white black and black white. For instance, I might report that your potman joined the Cossacks, and that at your instigation."

"I shall swear by the cross, voivode; I shall produce witnesses to testify that the bandits chained me naked to the coffer containing the tsar's revenues and left me thus on a shoal."

"But your potman escaped to the Cossacks, didn't he? And he escaped with your connivance."

"I'll swear by the cross that I had no hand in it."

"Rubbish! You may swear by the cur's tail for all I care. Where are the witnesses to prove that there was no collusion between you and your potman Fedko? I, the voivode, will testify that you were the instigator."

"Boyar-voivode, why should you do so?"

"Oh, my reasons for it? I give them. You refuse to realize, Ivan son of Piotr, that neither the tsar nor the boyars would prosecute you if you consent to co-operate with me. Now mark my words: let us divide the tsar's drink revenue between us. Do you fancy that the tsar will question the thief and ask: 'What sum did you extort from the tavern-keeper in Samara in 1667?' Hear me to a finish, Ivan son of Piotr; there will be cases far more important than the sums from public-houses. We need your money to get farther away from the Volga and nearer to Moscow."

"Boyar, I took the oath of fidelity to the tsar. How dare I besmirch my soul? I implored Razin, the robber, so desperately that he should not take the money, and he touched not a stiver of it."

The boyar drew himself to his feet clumsily and caught his paunch on the table as he did so. Then he said to the attendant, who had entered the room at this moment:

"The musketeers are on guard over the prisoners, so you can lock up the premises and go home. Come, Ivan Petrovich!"

In the vestibule the tavern-keeper began to murmur:

"Boyar, it was my potman who denounced me to the bandits, because I had sent him to warn you."

"Well, your potman has taken French leave, so he cannot be brought to account; but you, Ivan Petrovich, you can! You will be searched and questioned as to how your potman managed to escape and join the Cossacks."

"I will swear by the cross! Produce witnesses. . . ."

"I strip people naked notwithstanding the cross; and if the cross happens to be a gold one, I take it too. You sit in a public-house and drag in the cross on every occasion. I know the worth of such oaths, Ivan. I've something in mind which I am going to confide to you."

"Let me hear what it is, father-voivode."

"Bugs must have been created for some inscrutable purpose; once they are born into this world, it is a sin to starve them. So it has occurred to me that I shall engage you as my—hem—fosterer of the bugs. . . . I shall therefore remove your clothes, bind you and allow them to feast on you, say, for a week, or maybe two, or even a month, so that your sin may be expiated."

"Oh, father-voivode, why do you choose me?"

"You are too intractable . . . but when we divide the drink-money—well, that will be quite a different story. Now be off with you and think matters over, but don't be too long about it. Otherwise I shall prosecute you for having let your Fedko escape."

The musketeers kindled their lanterns, hoisted the massive boyar into the saddle, and a number of them were detailed to light him on his way home.

## 13

On the following Sunday after Mass, boyars and their wives could be seen on horseback making their way to the voivode's house in order to celebrate his daughter's name-day. The courtyard was crowded with their retainers. The whole house shook with the loud chanting of priests. Townsfolk, people from the suburbs, farmers, gaped from across the fence into the widely opened windows. Everyone could see the voivode's fat wife, arrayed in silk, gold and pearls, as she sailed into the reception room and took her stand in the corner of honour by the ikon.

On the farther side of the fence gossip was rife.

"She's come downstairs to make her bow."

"Ah, but she's a heavyweight!"

"The boyarina is bowing from the waist."

"And our pot-bellied fox is also bowing to the ground in front of his guests."

"Look, the steward is helping him to rise!"

They saw the voivode approach his wife and salute her with a kiss on the cheek. Then he requested the guests to follow suit, according to custom.

"Shame upon her! As if she were Our Lady!"

"Don't blaspheme, woman!"

"What fun; each guest is giving a kiss and bowing to the ground."

"See, there's also the land bailiff, old goat's-beard!"

"How did he get in?"

"No bailiff is allowed to kiss a voivode's wife."

"He may be a bailiff, but he's no better than ourselves."

"The voivode is asking the guests to partake of wine out of his wife's hands."

"She'll be drinking first."

"You silly! Don't you know the custom? The hostess always drinks first and then offers wine to all guests in succession; and then the guests kiss her and bow to the ground."

"Now she's gone to join the young ladies in their own apartments."

"What about setting fire to the lot of them, lads?"

"Hush! The musketeers!"

"By and by we'll drive the coloured coats to the wall."

"Have you read what Razin wrote?"

"Yes, in the market-place. The potman gave me a leaflet."

"He said: 'I shall come soon.'"

"Hold your tongue! The musketeers!"

"Be quiet and beware of eavesdroppers."

"Otherwise you'll be thrown to the bugs in the lock-up."

"So Fedko, the potman, has gone off to join Razin?"

"They've started singing again with the priests."

"Their voices sound tipsy enough."

"What's being drunk matter to them? Their servants will carry them home."

"Hush! The musketeers!"

"Hi, folks! The voivode orders you be chased away from the fence."

"Well, you need not whip us, we'll go of ourselves."

14

That same night the land bailiff wrote in his clumsy hand on a scrap of paper by the light of a chip lamp. He plucked at his goatee with his fingers. The ink he used was faded.

> "In July, on the name-day of the voivode's daughter, Oliona Mitrevna, I presented the voivode and boyar with a large cake, baked by Mitka Tsagin. Also gave him ducks, bought for the sum of thirteen kopeks. Further, some turbot and other fish for fifteen kopeks. That same day I was invited to a meal and took him fifty kopeks, wrapped in paper. Gave his man Grigori five kopeks as invitation money. . . ."

"Eh, tarry a while Ermil Fadeich! What about his lady, the boyarina? Blast the man with his pot-belly! One could go on writing till dawn and not state all that I had to take him on that thrice-damned name-day. However, it's got to be entered in the book and a separate letter to himself. 'Maybe you've written too much?' Ay, too much for such a greedy fellow as you. 'And how are the peasants?' As though I'd ever tell you how they were! 'Maybe you have noticed someone reading the bandit's leaflets or passing them on?' Well, what if I have? I am not going to report to you about it. When, oh, when will the time come for us to rid ourselves of you?"

The bailiff laid the note on the table and smoothed it with his palm.

"I feel quite upset with all this writing."

A cockroach crawled along the table with its bag of eggs, but sensing the bailiff's pursuing finger, it dropped its burden and scuttled away.

"Aha! You were puffed up like the voivode, but now you are scurrying off without your load. Oh, if it were only possible to crush the voivode as one crushes vermin!"

He again fingered his beard, yawned, struck a fresh chip into his lamp, knelt down in a corner and, bending his head towards his right shoulder, gazed at the dark ikon. Repeatedly he crossed and prostrated himself. A white wooden comb dangled from his belt. His lean form and his goatee beard cast black shadows on the yellow wall. The narrow window-panes were slid back into the side logs, and the cool, still air floated into the hut.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE TSAR'S MOSCOW

1

THE intense heat of that summer day made the latticed windows of the palace appear as if they were veiled in blue haze. The white domes of Uspenski Cathedral could be seen to the right; they looked like huge coifs in their shining whiteness, and the roofs and slits of windows were like pools of dazzling

light among the cupolas of this unique masterpiece of the Italian Fioraventi. To the left of the palace rose up the Cathedral of the Archangel, the creation of a Milanese architect. The Granovitaya Palace, flanked by these two fanes, was, with its six big windows and beautiful porch, in itself a superb building. From time to time the figures of haughty men would walk about this porch; they were clothed in velvet and held their tall hats in beringed fingers. The boyars were overcome by the heat, else they would never have dreamt of doffing their hats.

From the cupolas and shell-shaped domes of Archangel Cathedral a bright halo spread its effulgence. The sound of bells filled the air and mingled with the chatter of jackdaws, which swarmed in bevies on the glittering cupolas so that they cast a patch of dark shadow on them. No sooner had the booming of bells died down than an angry tumult came from below—Ivanovski Square was in an uproar, for prisoners from all parts of Russia were being judged and punished at the great sovereign's pleasure. That was why the tsar was so indifferent to these human cries and so indulgent towards the executioners, who flogged the miscreant not only in front of the government offices but also at a separate whipping-post beneath the windows of the Granovitaya Palace. The floggings were each of a different nature, some being merciless, while others were given in accordance with the custom, and the strokes carefully counted.

Wooden sidewalks led from cathedral to cathedral and to the palace. These were renewed at appropriate intervals so that the tsar's morocco-leather boots might be preserved from the dust and dirt of the roadway. Above the fantastically ornate domes the wind sighed and the birds twittered; below men cried and entreated and groaned and cursed. The tsar himself could do nothing to stop the din.

Menials dawdled about the Kremlin from morning to night; now it would be retainers on horseback, richly caparisoned in silver and pearls and gilded copper harness. They had been given strict orders to wait where they were, while the boyar had audience with the tsar. Though the men were hungry, they dared not leave; being thus reduced to complete idleness, they passed the weary hours in pestering the passers-by and wrestling with each other.

Near the Spaski Gate were the governmental offices, with their steep stone stairs jutting forward into the roadway—the Criminal Office, the *Zemski Prikaz*. Facing the stairways were blocks, which had become polished by the stomachs of criminals; they were smeared with blood and human excrement. Gallows on platforms stood between the stairs and the buildings. Hour after hour fresh victims were brought to be flogged and steeped to the eyes in their own blood. The executioners and attendant clerks were changed at frequent intervals.

So accustomed was everyone to these detestable and cruel floggings that there was a saying which ran: "Moscow does not believe in tears." Few people paused to glance at the executioner, and no one ever listened to the sentences read aloud by the clerks.

At the foot of the stairway leading to the Law Office a crowd of plaintiffs in cloth or coarse homespuns or wide coats gathered in at the waist stood waiting for the clerks, and the judge himself, all of them habitual late-comers despite the tsar's express command: "Judges and clerks must arrive at their offices earlier and leave later." There was a further order to the effect that boyars' servants should wait with the horses behind Ivanovski Belfry. But the unruly throng went riding all over the square and would fight with one another

even in the porches and within the precincts of the palace and on the sidewalks reserved for the tsar's use.

The inquisitive, should they be so disposed, could listen to the shouts of the retainers and learn many a thing.

"The princes of Trubetskoi are traitors and have sold themselves to Poland and have kissed the Roman crucifix instead of the Orthodox cross. Prince Golitsyn is obdurate on the question of precedence and has for this reason been exiled to Bielo-Ozero direct from the tsar's wedding feast."

"I shall report you to the prince."

"D'you imagine my tongue is palsied? I'll report you——"

"Sh! The musketeers!"

"Here, you retainers, off with you to the Ivanovski Belfry. That's where you belong!"

"Stand there yourselves, old hags!"

"Pot-bellied devils!"

"Curs!"

"Cease swearing, or we'll call the guard."

"Call away, scoundrels!"

"Trounce the blockheads with a bludgeon!"

"No one can cope with the curs."

"Hi, folk, here come the heralds!"

"Let 'em come! Bawling like that through the square!"

The windows of the Criminal Office were wide open on account of the heat, and from them issued a woman's heartrending cry:

"Oh, worthy fathers, what's Nikon to me? I've never been guilty in word or deed against the tsar."

Two heralds in golden-yellow coats halted their white steeds in the square opposite the attorney's tent in which "title deeds" for the whole of Russia were assigned. The tent was propped against the belfry of Ivan the Great, and its canvas roof was covered by a thick layer of dust. Through the opening could be seen a table, some benches, scriveners sitting at the table, and a clerk in the background reading the law code.

The heralds held long rods in their left hands. At the tip of each rod was a banner, made of cloth-of-gold; kettledrums were fastened to the saddles. Having brought his horse to a standstill, the elder of the twain beat his kettledrum with the handle of his riding-stock and proclaimed in a loud voice:

"People of Moscow! You remember that about a year ago their holinesses the oecumenical patriarchs sat in judgment on the former patriarch Nikon. Disregarding the decree of our great sovereign, he resigned from his high office and, in the Uspenski Cathedral, donned the mantle and cowl of a friar, after which he retired to the Voskressenski monastery."

The second herald beat his kettledrum and continued the proclamation: "And henceforth be it known to you that the said Nikon is no longer patriarch, but a monk, of the name of Anika, in the Ferapontov monastery."

The first herald now went on: "Friar Anika, and many monks whom he had seduced on account of his former rank, entered the Uspenski Cathedral and interrupted divine service. For such ignominious behaviour common folk are punished with the lash, but by the graciousness of the great sovereign and autocrat of Russia, Alexei Mihailovich, Anika was admitted to the Voskressenski monastery."

Again the second herald interposed: "Friar Anika, who by his misdeeds has incurred the punishment of God and the displeasure of the great sovereign, who insulted the Council of the most holy patriarchs by branding it as an assembly of Jews, who called venerable priests vagabonds and beggars, has failed to reconcile himself to the fate of a cloistered friar, but has absconded from his place of detention and is roaming the land seducing the people. He says a patriarch cannot be removed from his office and that God's judgment will fall upon those responsible for his treatment."

The first herald thereupon wheeled his horse about and brandished his rod before concluding the announcement:

"People of Moscow! Be not beguiled by the former patriarch Nikon, pay no heed to the frenzied outpourings of those possessed by the Devil, nor the false prophecies of Nikon's dupes. Turn your backs upon him, do not pay homage to his satanic pride, and know without doubt that the former patriarch, now Friar Anika, has had anathema pronounced upon him by the fathers of the Church, has been deprived of Holy Orders, and has incurred the wrath of our great sovereign."

As the heralds rode away the crowd began to murmur:

"It's the boyars who have pronounced anathema on the most holy patriarch."

"That's common knowledge! All that the heralds have been telling us is false; they're just spreading lies among us."

"They're afraid of Nikon."

"Nikon, the patriarch, is the sort of man who will leave any cloistered security to stand up for the people against the oppressors."

"Take care, there are ears everywhere."

"Musketeers?"

"The musketeers are to be trusted; what we have to be on the lookout for are spies."

"Listen to me," shouted a perspiring man in a sheepskin cap and flapping coat; "it's nearly a year since the Don Cossacks began their marauding expedition on the Volga."

"Oh?"

"Yes, by the holy cross! And Stenka Razin is their ataman."

Dripping with perspiration, and gratified by the attention he had excited, the man went on shouting at the top of his voice:

"'Tis said they have sunk the tsar's and the patriarch's barges in the Volga, and that the musketeers have gone over to——"

"Hold your tongue, fellow; have you forgotten where you are?"

"What do you mean?"

"Fool, do you not know that we are just beneath the windows of the Criminal Office?"

"Well, I was merely telling the truth as it was told to me."

"Musketeers, seize that man in the winter cap. He is seducing the people."

The musketeers caught hold of the man's coat-tails. The individual who had ordered the arrest wrapped his rough peasant coat tighter about him while trying to hide a kind of tambourine concealed up his sleeve. But the instrument slid down in spite of his efforts, and he pulled his felt hat far down over his eyes.

"A spy?"

"Of course; that's why I warned the fellow."

Raising a fine dust, the throng scattered from the spot. The musketeers hailed the spy:

"Hey, you spy, where shall we deliver him?"

"He's a ringleader, so you'd better take him to the Criminal Office. I am coming along."

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish! I am no ringleader. For Christ's sake let me go."

"Make no mistake about it, they'll soon find out who you are."

"Now then, fellow, best foot forward; you've not far to go."

"Gracious sakes alive! I only repeated what I heard. . . ."

"You'll have time for singing out in the Criminal Office. Do you hear the woman singing?"

"Let me go, tsar's men!"

"No use struggling, you devil."

A crowd of retainers had dismounted alongside the wooden sidewalk near the cathedrals and were wrestling, with many a shout and a shrill whistle. Others, pushed off the pavement, rolled into the dust and, picking themselves up, caught the horses by the mane or the stirrup and rode away. The fighting grew fiercer, the crowd more dense. Suddenly the fighting, yelling and whistling ceased—a dead silence ensued as though the place had been emptied of people. A grey-haired boyar in an azure blue silk coat, adorned with pearls, advanced slowly alone the sidewalk leading from the Archangel Cathedral. His head was bare, and he wiped it with a handkerchief of coloured silk. He paused in his progress to say:

"Uncover, men! Those who refuse to obey will be flogged here at the whipping-post. The great sovereign of All Russia, together with His Holiness the Patriarch, are marching in procession from the cathedral."

Those who were close to the pavement immediately bared their heads. The procession was preceded by the cross-bearer; then came the boyars, in silk or velvet robes and coats of brocade. In the centre of this bejewelled group shone the cap of Vladimir Monomakh, the insignia of tsardom. As the sovereign passed on his way, the crowd at the edge of the pavement prostrated itself, but beyond and throughout the length and breadth of Ivanovski Square the roar and noise never ceased; none heeded either tsar or patriarch. For what crime the person in the square was being flogged none could tell. The clerks shouted the verdicts incorrectly, but their voices were drowned in the wrangling, whistling and general uproar caused by the retainers on their mounts, by the commands of patrolling musketeers, the buzzing and droning of clerks in the tent, the wails and complaints of petitioners in the Law Office, the oaths of police and assistant clerks in their vain endeavour to put an end to the foul language used by the thousand-throated multitude. This human hubbub merged with the cawing of crows and jackdaws, which circled among the domes and towers of green tiles and white-belted walls of the Kremlin with its many brick merlons and loopholes.

## 2

The tsar looked forth from the ornate and widely opened window. He could clearly hear voices rising from the square. He was wearing a blue satin kaftan of Turkish make, buttoned on the left side with diamonds; his short

sleeves scintillated with precious stones and pearls. On a console beside him lay the cap of Monomakh, and his rod of office with its golden cross above the grip was also near by. From time to time the chamberlain, a bearded boyar in a kaftan with a high stand-up collar and taken in at the waist, passed through the room, bending his neck respectfully each time. The tsar had ordered that tables be laid for a feast in the adjoining chamber so as to converse with the boyars. Business was so heavy that the tsar had permitted his more intimate boyars to settle certain questions without consulting him. Beside the tsar stood a high-backed armchair bearing a design in gold and colours, also a footstool upholstered in blue velvet.

From his vantage point at the window the tsar saw a hirsute clerk being led out of an office and across the sidewalk to the solitary whipping-post. This post in front of the Granovitaya Palace served only for the punishment of those who by word or deed had insulted the person of the tsar.

The executioner took his place and unfurled the lash; the sleeves of his red shirt were rolled up and his collar loosened at the neck. The assistant executioner, having no time to spare, tore the clerk's long coat off without troubling to unbutton it. Impassive to all around him, the condemned man had dropped his dark blue cap into the sand and, while shuffling his feet, trod upon it; his hands were trembling, his teeth chattering and, in spite of the heat, his face was blue with cold. Another clerk held the text of the verdict in hand. Raising his head towards the tsar's window, the victim threw up his arms and flung himself to the ground, crying:

"Great sovereign, have mercy, forgive me!"

"Of what is he accused?" asked the tsar.

The clerk who held the writ was a practical man, and on hearing the tsar's voice he bowed from the waist without raising his head, then answered at the top of his voice so as to be heard above the universal commotion:

"Sire, the clerk Lazarko, whether in his cups or from sheer carelessness has not been ascertained, has made a mistake in the writing of your patronymic."

"To what is he sentenced?"

"The verdict is that this malefactor shall be flogged ruthlessly."

"Give him thirty strokes and keep strict count of them. The word 'ruthlessly' is to be erased, and the man is not to be dismissed from the civil service. We demand that he goes on writing and remembers what he writes."

Folding up the writ, the clerk bowed low to his sovereign, while the accused rose from the ground. Thereupon the tsar retired from the window and seated himself in his armchair, saying:

"Judgment is the Lord's, and it is to the honour of the tsar to love justice."

As the chamberlain again passed through the room the tsar issued an order:

"Boyar Nikita, tell the life guards they need not be in attendance any more today."

"It shall be done, sire."

The man then went on his way, and the tsar was about to close his eyes when he caught sight of Boyarina Golitsyna, head of the royal nursery. She waddled hurriedly across the chamber in her embarrassment.

"Little mother, it is prohibited to pass through this chamber, for the boyars come here on important matters of state."

The boyarina turned to face the tsar and paused respectfully to bow, taking care, however, not to dislodge her heavy headgear with its frontal of gold and gems.

"Pardon your servant, sire, but the tsarevich has run off into the next room, and I am going after him. He is too quick for me, and it is difficult to overtake him, God bless him and grant him a long life."

"I understand. Just now it is quiet in here, so no harm's been done. You had better not allow the tsarevich to run about too freely, for some of the stairs are carpeted, and there may be nails or other dangerous things underneath. Take good care of the little lad."

"I do my best, sire."

As the boyarina turned to go, the tsar called her back.

"See that the windows in the tsarevnas' apartments are secured so that my daughters may not hear the foul language being spoken in the square."

"I have already taken my precautions, sire."

The boyarina left the chamber, and the tsar once more thought to take a nap, musing drowsily:

"There is no rest for tsars."

The boyar on duty entered, bowed low and paused at the door.

"Well, what is it now, boyar?"

"It is boyar Pushkin with his clerk from the Criminal Office. Is he to be admitted or not, sire?"

"You may admit the boyar, but not his clerk; his presence here today would be inconvenient."

A stocky, black-bearded boyar prostrated himself in the doorway, rose, advanced, and again bowed to the ground.

"Why did you not come alone, boyar?"

"Sire, we have received fresh intelligence from the Volga about the bandits, Stenka Razin and his men. I do not read easily, and so asked my clerk to come with me to read the letter."

"In view of the importance of your communication, the clerk can be admitted."

A man with fair hair and beard, his head uncovered, bowed sedately and took his place behind the boyar, where, with a discreet cough, he unfolded the missive.

"Read, clerk!"

"On the twenty-ninth day of July, written from Sinbirsk to the tsar and grand prince Alexei, autocrat of All Russia . . ."

The tsar kicked away the footstool, sprang to his feet and stamped. . . .

"Are you reading the paper aright, clerk? Where is my patronymic and my title of great sovereign?"

The clerk turned slightly and bowed, while the sheet of paper quivered in his hand, but he met the tsar's eyes squarely.

"Sire, it is not within my competence to read anything but what is written in the letter."

"Give it to me!"

With a bow the clerk handed the paper to the boyar, who in his turn bowed and presented it to the tsar. The tsar opened it to its full extent, examined the lines and paid particular attention to the glued portions of the sheets. An angry flush suffused his face, which was framed in a thick, well-trimmed beard. Ignoring the boyar, the tsar handed the document back to the clerk and ordered

him to read it. After a pause the tsar addressed himself directly to the boyar:

"We shall deal first with the letter, boyar Ivan Petrovich, and must make a memo to write at once to the voivode in order to discover which of his clerks is responsible for writing this dispatch; the police must bring the miscreant to Moscow, and here, beneath these very windows, he shall be well scourged. Now, clerk, read what has been written."

> ". . . the chamberlain, prince Dashkov, sent a questionnaire concerning the Cossack bandits; hereat is to be reported: Evidence has been given by a certain Fedka Shelenok, a workman on a Sinbirsk barge, to the effect that the Don Cossack ataman, Stenka Razin, and captain Ivashko Chernoyarets, together with one thousand men and some hired Volga labourers who have been induced to join their band, at the confluence of the Volga and the Ilovlia rivers above Tsaritzyn intercepted a convoy bound for Astrakhan. As these robbers sailed down the Volga past Tsaritzyn they were fired on by the cannon, but not a single shot went home, for all that the powder came out through the vent. . . ."

Again the tsar sprang to his feet and stamped his impatience.

"The gunners are thieves! They secretly purloin the ammunition from their commanders and colonels. That voivode is a fool! Continue your reading, clerk!"

> " . . . and the robbers landed about three miles from the town and dispatched a captain to Tsaritzyn to demand delivery to them of Lev Pleschayev and a Persian merchant; . . ."

"Why not have asked for the voivode himself? What a heritage the late nobleman Boris Ivanovich and boyar Kvashnin have left us! Owing to my youth, I had appointed Kvashnin to the Assessments Office and—to please Morozov—had degraded prince Yuri. . . . Now I am wise to their machinations, for I know that they secretly saw and released this Razin from Moscow after taking him from boyar Kivrin's custody. I remember how the old man begged and implored me not to let this Stenka Razin escape. Why, he even lost his life in service to his country!" The tsar crossed himself.

"Certainly that was a grave offence on the part of the senior boyars, sire; but there was no one who dared oppose Morozov."

"Such things are sure to happen when the boyars are given too much liberty. Read on, clerk!"

The clerk had turned towards the ikons and was crossing himself.

"Your devotions are untimely, clerk."

"Sire, Pafnuti Vasilievich was my teacher and benefactor, and whenever his name is mentioned I always pray for him."

"Praiseworthy, to say the least of it! Read, clerk!"

> ". . . they also took from the voivode an anvil with a smithy's outfit and bellows. The voivode gave these things to them out of fear, inasmuch as this ataman and his captain are immune from attack by sword or arquebuses or any other arms, and they are very careful of their troop. They looted

convoys, and the merchant Vasili Shorin's barge was not the only one they broke up and sank in the river Kamyshenka; they also plundered many barges and other craft belonging to tradesmen, and they murdered some of the latter, and also released convicts, who were being taken to Astrakhan; these same convicts were worse than the Cossacks themselves in the murder of service men on the boats. Stepan Fedosiev, a Sinbirsk man, was chopped to pieces and thrown into the river; they also tortured and beat two tavern-keepers from Sinbirsk, who had been commissioned to accompany the tsar's grain cargo as far as Astrakhan, and the banner from the patriarch's barge was seized by Stenka Razin, and he beat and cut the arm off an elderly monk who was in charge of the barge, and drowned him. Also three more patriarchal retainers were hanged, so also was the bailiff of the merchant Vasili Shorin; and the banners and drums were seized by the Cossacks. The hired labourers from Shorin's barges, sixty men in all, have joined the said Razin, also one hundred from the patriarchal barge and from the tsar's barge, musketeers and convicts alike, also a patriarchal retainer, the boyar's son, Lazunko Zhidovin. Some of these pirates have sailed down the Volga, while others, having secured mounts, have ridden off to Yaitsk township to seek aid."

"We shall discuss the matter this very day during our meal. I think it would be better to dismiss Hilkov, for he is no good as a voivode."

"Is the great sovereign aware that prince Ivan Prozorovski has been dispatched hither with his brother?"

"Yes, I know."

"By your decree, sire, we are likewise transferring Andrei Unkovski."

"And Turgeniev will step into his shoes. But will he be any better? Everything pertaining to these piratical Cossacks is to be referred to prince Dolgoruki."

"We have been doing so long since, sire."

A crooked smile flitted across the tsar's face, and an expression of mockery came into his eyes.

"Unkovski writes confidentially from Tsaritzyn, but what is there to be secretive about? 'He, Andrei, dares not send out men—there being too few of them—to deal with these Cossacks, for up to May 17th reinforcements have arrived in Tsaritzyn neither from Astrakhan nor from Cherny Yar.' All these voivodes wrangle among themselves and intrigue against one another, having no concern for the interests of the state. The flame of revolt is spreading, and by and by, when it reaches a particular corner, and the time comes for stamping it out, they will begin to clamour: 'Great tsar! We pray you to send some men with money, horses and arms!' Boyar, they must be ordered to behave with the utmost discretion both in Cherni Yar and at the fisheries. They must find out all they can as to the activities of these predatory Cossacks; for that they'll need more spies and informers. See that you attend to this, boyar. Draw the necessary funds for this purpose from the Treasury."

"Sire, you have already granted us the power to enlist smart men. This we are doing. Furthermore, you decreed that we lay our hands on any kind of instigator so as to prevent the spread of rumour, subversive words or deeds and hysterical behaviour on the part of women with their old-wives' tales."

"The sternest orders must be issued," said the tsar vehemently, and as he waved his arm the glint of jewels on his sleeve danced on the walls. "The said

Cossacks must be prevented from marauding on the Volga and adjacent rivers and must on no account be allowed to put to sea. A letter to this effect must be sent to Astrakhan. Meanwhile, boyars, we shall first of all discuss what is happening today in Ivanovski Square. Another thing, Ivan Petrovich, you must write not only to Astrakhan, but likewise to prince Yuri Dolgoruki in Kazan and to Grigori prince Kurakin and to Sinbirsk and Samara. . . ."

"Sire, the voivode of Samara is Dimitri Habarov. Only yesterday I received a confidential report about him from the local mayor, Johann Busch, who wrote: 'The voivode oppresses persons of all ranks and keeps them in the torture chambers; he makes profits out of the fornication committed by unmarried women.' It seems to me, sire, that this voivode is true to stock. If your illustrious memory can recall the fourth year of your reign, there appeared at that time a certain explorer, Ermoshka Habarov by name, who went to Siberia with a view to subduing the independent princelings."

"My memory fails me in this instance, boyar, but continue your tale."

"There is not much to tell, sire. Ermoshka Habarov took as hostages from these princelings the women and girls and raped them all. That was the end of his exploits."

"Each denounces the other! The voivode in his turn denounces the mayor Johann Busch, saying that he is a great roisterer, that he presses married peasants with families into the services, whereas the law prescribes that only single men may enlist. He does not accept single men, but forces the other peasants to do musket drill every day, thereby causing great damage to farming."

"Well, sire, I beg your leave to send spies to Samara so that we may have correct information concerning both the mayor and the voivode. The local inhabitants will be able to furnish reliable intelligence; there are the priests, merchants, publicans and the common people."

"Yes, pray do so, boyar; but first of all write to each of the voivodes and likewise to the Tereks that they should live in peace together, without quarrels and with the greatest circumspection. Furthermore, you'd better send out detectives to assist the voivodes. Only after preliminary communication with me are they to march against the brigand Cossacks, should any appear on the scene."

"Everything will be done as you wish, sire."

"Clerk, you can take your leave now; the boyar will stay."

The tsar watched the clerk as he departed and then remarked:

"A clerk of sense and good address—how came you by him?"

"I inherited him, sire, from the late boyar Kivrin. The clerk is a man of education; he does not drink, he is honest and does not accept bribes."

"Splendid! Send him to me occasionally to deal with my own affairs."

The tsar was so hot that he perspired visibly; so the boyar knelt and unbuttoned his sovereign's coat.

"Wherefore, sire, exhaust the flesh in such a heat as this?"

When the boyar had risen to his feet again the tsar graciously extended his hand to be kissed.

"In the first place I intend to talk to you about Ivanovski Square. Who is responsible for sending out mounted heralds? A foot herald costs less, for he is paid only four rubles a year. A mounted one is far too expensive; there's his horse, kettledrums, rod and boyar's apparel. . . ."

"Those items, sire, are their own private concern, and their wages are the same as those of the foot heralds."

"One thing more, boyar: Nikon is for ever trying to get in touch with me; is he not a danger to us?"

"Sire, since Nikon drank your health and received your gifts at Eastertide he has been filled with pride, and the abbot and monks of Ferapontov monastery have resolved to pay him the honours due to a patriarch. But without asking anyone's permission he has returned to Moscow——"

"Hoping to see me, I expect. Was he prevented?"

"The people are ignorant, sire. They are, moreover, hostile to the boyars. The people know very well that Nikon, who was raised to the patriarchate by yourself, sire, comes of peasant stock, and they side with him. Wherever Nikon goes he maligns the boyars and thereby incites the people. Already some hysterical women have begun to use foul language and to make false prophecies against the Church. So together with prince Trubetskoi we have had the friar Anika transferred under guard, but unfettered, to Ferapontov, with strict injunctions to the abbot not to allow the prisoner out any more. This we have done without preliminary instructions from yourself, sire, in order to preserve you from affliction and to keep your heart at peace. As to the false prophets, we have had them tortured and have sent out heralds with a proclamation to the people to be read in all the market-places and public squares throughout one whole day."

"I cannot temporize with my conscience . . . I pity Nikon, boyar. It was not I who raised him to his exalted position; he was a prominent figure in the Church before my time; but you and prince Nikita know best what is to my advantage; so I say nothing."

"One further petition, sire. We consider it expedient to place Ivanovski Square out of bounds for menials and retainers. They create disorders and commit robberies in broad daylight."

"We cannot do that, boyar. I suffer most from their presence, since my windows give onto it, and my ears are afflicted by the obscenities I have to hear. Were the retainers prohibited access, the noble boyars would have to come to see me on foot. You know as well as I how they pride themselves on their horses; and we have to remember that they are the descendants of ruling princes. How do you expect a high-born boyar to approach his sovereign's porch on foot? No, boyar!"

"We shall act according to your gracious pleasure, sire."

A chamberlain entered and announced in loud and solemn tones:

"Sire! His Holiness the patriarch is on his way here to bless the board."

Abruptly remarking "Boyar Nikita, see that there is sufficient wine for our meal," the tsar rose.

The dignitary made a deep obeisance.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TO ASTRAKHAN

#### I

RAZÍN convoked his Assembly on the wooded island of Katerininski, in the middle of the Volga. The Assembly was attended by Ivan Serebriakov, an old Cossack with a big grey moustache, and two captains, the one a stalwart Don

Cossack named Mishka Volotski, and the other Razin's adjutant, the fair and curly-pated Ivan Chernoyarets, while the boyar's son, Lazunka, his head and face a mass of black locks, ensconced himself as secretary on a large flat stone with all the necessary writing paraphernalia around him.

In the dusk of this summer evening, boats and barges with musketeers and oarsmen were anchored off the island.

The Assembly awaited the ataman's speech.

"Falcons!" Razin began. "Suppose we are compelled to go upstream again in search of bread and shipping as we had to at Samara?"

"Why should we, father?"

"We have too few barges and too many men."

"Couldn't we send the surplus overland, father?"

"Do you fancy I have overlooked the fact that we have not sufficient arquebuses and powder for such a venture? We should do well to remember that a man with an axe does not make a good warrior."

Thereto Chernoyarets observed: "Let your mind be easy, father, about arms. When I took that blacksmith's outfit from the voivode of Tsaritzyn I issued orders that the armoury and munition stores should be pilfered also."

"Excellent! . . . Now, gallant atamans, I have received information from our scouts that Beklemishev, the voivode of Astrakhan, on orders received from Moscow, is sailing up the Volga with a force of musketeers to intercept us and cut us off from our outlet to the sea. The Yaitsk men have neither come to our aid nor answered our summons, so we must obtain bread from the voivode's store, make our way to the sea through the Yaik. How are we to get hold of the voivode?"

"Pirushka island is not far from here. Why not try that way?"

Volotski, toying with his sword, added:

"We'll smash the voivode off Pirushka, father."

Old Serebriakov, tugging at his moustache, listened in silence; then with a determined toss of his head he spoke his mind:

"The Volga is too open off Pirushka; that island offers no protection against the voivode's musketry."

"Oh, but Ivan, that does not help us!"

"Think for yourself, father Stepan; all I know is that Pirushka is unsuitable for military operations."

"Falcons! The shores of Pirushka are not suited to a flanking attack; they are steep and apt to crumble under a man's feet; so I deem it better to engage the voivode beyond Pirushka—let us say on the Mitiushka. The big barges must lie in wait on the Volga at the mouth of the stream, and the canoes we shall send out in a line, one by one, in a flank attack. The country between the Mitiushka and the Volga is thickly wooded, but portage of canoes over to the Volga is a light job. The voivode is sure to attack the barges, and then our men, emerging from the mouth of the smaller river, will strike at him from the rear. Meanwhile, we shall make a frontal attack; we have five gunners. Moreover, the voivode's musketeers are in vacillating humour—anyway, so I've been told."

"You've thought out everything very well, ataman," said Serebriakov in comment on his chief's speech. The others remained silent.

A pale moon, rising from behind some chalk cliffs, lit up an equally pale sky, making everything take on a ghostly air in its dull white radiance; the shapes

of the men in their red caps and crimson coats, their faces with moustaches, and their swords and whips hanging at their sides, shone dimly; one figure alone stood out clearly: it was that of a man in a black, loosely flowing kaftan, red Zaporozhian cap and a copper-tinted coat—Razin. Without awaiting a reply from the Assembly, he advanced with a swinging gait to the bank of the river and, with his arms akimbo, took up his stand on a steep cliff overlooking the water, which was as white as chalk, its farther reaches shimmering softly in the moonlight. He heard the general clamour behind him:

"Father, we'll fight the voivode on the Mitiushka."

"Speak, father!"

Not only the men harkened to the figure in black, but also the dreaming woods, the distant shores, the barges and canoes.

"Lights out, no songs, no noise! Row off to the Volga!"

Water was poured over the rowlocks to prevent them from squeaking. The long line of barges and canoes left a deep, shining trail in its wake, thus marking the course taken along the river. . . .

## 2

Beklemishev, the brutal and stubborn friend of the princely voivode Boryatinski, was a man who had developed to the full his chief's slogan: "The more a soldier and musketeer is terrorized and beaten on the face, spine or anywhere which comes handy, the better." The Council of boyars had now invested him with special powers by order of the tsar, and he was openly advancing to encounter the forces of the free Don. His bestial cursing and burst of fury against the crews roused the echoes from drowsy shores. The progress of the voivode's barges was being watched from the banks by hostile Tatar scouts. Two heads in peaked caps moved among the thickets; two bowstrings twanged, and two arrows darted swiftly over the Volga. . . .

"The tsar's jackal has started to bark."

"Tatars!"

The plash of oars and a hum of human voices carried far across the waters.

The voivode was a heavily bewhiskered man; he wore a blue coat of the same hue as the musketeers of Lopuhin's division. He stood at the bow of his barge on the lookout for shoals and sandbanks.

"Hey, don't strand the barges on a shoal!" As he stooped forward he could hear the keel grating on the sand and swore:

"Scoundrels! May your heads become carrion-fodder!"

By way of answer there came from his rear the explosion of an arquebus, followed by another shot. Smoke trailed through the cloying air. The voivode turned and scuttled along the deck on his stumpy legs, plying his lash indiscriminately as he went.

"You'll catch it in the spleen, you rogues! Whom are you shooting at?"

"There are Tatars hiding on the bank."

"They are shooting arrows at us."

"Swarms of them, like gadflies."

"I'll give it you!"

The voivode walked back to the prow, while the shots continued to ring out and send up smoke at short intervals. A captain, in a cap with the badge of

his rank, slightly the worse for drink, clattered up to the voivode in his hob-nailed boots:

"Voivode and boyar, what is to be done? There's foul play going on among the musketeers. They're firing their arquebuses at the gulls."

The voivode looked stern. He glanced over his shoulder at the tall man, and the sight of a tall man invariably aroused his wrath. The captain was not holding his arms to attention, but had them behind his back and was stooping forward the better to hear.

"You drunken swine! May all your kin perish!"

Thereupon the voivode swung round and gave the captain a resounding box on the ear.

"You tipsy cur, don't you know that this is the way to treat them?" Again his fist descended with a mighty blow on the officer's ear. Though the voivode had put his whole strength in the blow, the officer never so much as budged, and it seemed as if his large head on its short, tough neck could withstand anything. The officer stooped to pick up his cap, which had fallen off, beat the dust off against his coat, put it on and walked away with the remark:

"You'd better look out, boyar. Though I'm not much of a hand at fisticuffs, I can deal you something to remember me by."

Someone called to the captain: "Piotr, knock the devil down!"

"Who's that shouting? Speak out—who is it? Starting a riot, are you? I'm not afraid! I'll string all you curs up on yonder gallows!"

The voivode, lash in hand, pointed to the bank of the Volga, where a gaunt gibbet stood out black on a sandhill.

"And who is going to hang them?" The voice was a solitary one, but it was supported by a general guffaw.

Again the voivode roared:

"I warn you that anyone firing his arquebus will be strung up by the legs from the halliards."

The barge crew rowed on in silence. Standing at the prow, the voivode muttered to himself:

"I abused Vanka Prozorovski, and out of spite he has detailed robbers to serve under me instead of musketeers. No matter, they'll cool down after a fight."

## 3

At the spot where the Mitiushka crept out of the undergrowth and pine thickets like a thief, Razin placed his own barge bearing the flag with the emblem of the Don Forces; he lined the remaining barges at his rear.

"Canoes into the Mitiushka!" came the command.

One after the other the canoes were rowed upstream from the Volga into the Mitiushka in order to outflank the voivode's barges on the Volga. The Cossacks were plying their oars lightly and noiselessly. No word passed the men's lips.

For a long time silence reigned supreme. Once only, an abrupt command rang out from Chernoyarets:

"Canoes halt! Strap on the falconets! Take your muskets and go ashore!"

And again:

"Portage the canoes over to the Volga!"

The plash of oars accompanied the voivode's running commentary of invective, and could be plainly heard, as also his order:

"Gunners, one in the guts for you! Get the cannon ready, clean out the touch-hole, and mind there's no foul play against our great sovereign."

Meanwhile the Cossacks portaged the canoes from the Mitiushka to the Volga. . . . Like rumbling thunder Razin's powerful voice resounded:

"Musketeers of the voivode! I bring you freedom! Why should you serve in bondage and penury? Have you not had your fill of beatings? The time has come to avenge your wrongs on your enemies, the commanders!"

Pushing their canoes into the Volga from the portage, the ambushing Cossacks sent up a stentorian yell:

"*Ne-e-echai!*"

And like a sonorous echo resounding from the banks the voice of Chernoyarets rang out clear:

"To the attack!"

"Crrrr-ush 'em!"

The falconets were discharged; the oars went up, shedding a cascade of silvery water; the boat-hooks clanged as they grappled the sides of the voivode's barges.

"Musketeers, here come the bandits. Fear the Lord and our sovereign!" the voivode squealed.

From the crowd of rose-coloured coats came the jeering reply:

"Bandits? May your mother be——"

"Seize him! Knock him down!"

"Hey, officer, we've bound him, come along and give the voivode a punch on the jaw."

## 4

Razin's barges lay on the Volga awaiting nightfall. The voivode's three barges formed the tail end; they were occupied by musketeers, who strolled about the decks, while former rowers stretched their stiff arms and shoulders; all were either wrestling or embracing each other. From the voivode's leading barge a barrel of vodka had been rolled ashore, and there were five casks of French wine, which had been transferred to the ataman's barge. Fires had been lit along the shore, and round them were gathered Cossacks and musketeers, busily cooking their food. The scene was colourful under the blazing sunlight; blue coats of musketeers, belonging to Lopuhin's command; rose pink to those of Semen Kusnin's; all intermingled. To these were added the dark blue jackets and coats and red trousers of the Cossacks and the red caps of the Zaporozhians, faded to a reddish brown. Bound to a withered tree, sticking out from the sloping bank, voivode Beklemishev, without a shirt, drooped in his blue silk trousers. He had been robbed and beaten, yet he calmly surveyed the rollicking crowd of musketeers which had betrayed him. The Cossacks shouted:

"Musketeers, by and by, when our father ataman has had a drink and a meal, we'll bring your pot-bellied, full-chested voivode to the judgment seat."

"Roast him a bit over the fire."

"String him up on the gallows tree where the voivodes hang our brothers, the free Cossacks."

The voivode's breasts were almost like the breasts of a woman. Cossacks and musketeers as they passed tugged at these breasts and jeered:

"Shall we milk you, pot-belly?"

"There's no milk to be got out of him, only the Devil!"

"It's a pity we can't make an end of him without the ataman."

"We'd show him, the foul-mouthed brute!"

The voivode's glance remained defiant; the men shook their fists at him and brandished their weapons over his head; but the expression on his face never altered. A captain, fully a head taller than the tallest among the baiters, approached the voivode.

"Petrushka Mokeyev!"

"Why not smack his ears to avenge the beating he gave you?"

"My lads, were I to deal with him in the way he did me there'd be no trial for him. We would have to bury him."

"And bury him we would."

"Let me have a word with him."

He stepped up close to the voivode.

"Voivode, had you not acted like a darned idiot and struck me, you'd have met your death on the deck of your own barge, and not have had to lay down your arms."

"You're a robber, Petrushka, not a boyar's son."

"Maybe I am; but I'm not going to allow myself to be beaten by a fool."

"You just wait. . . ."

"I reckon you're afraid of death."

"I am afraid of nothing. Leave me to myself, bandit!"

## 5

Captain Chernoyarets' voice hallooed from the deck of the ataman's barge:

"Comrades! The ataman says you may drink the voivode's vodka!"

"Good! Our thanks to him. Now then, mates, turn the barrel upside down and strike off the bottom, only be careful not to break the hoops. I'm a carpenter by trade. See if you can find some cups; if not, goblets of birch bark will do . . . There now, the feast is set!"

The sun was about to sink into the horizon, and as the evening drew on a current of warm, sand-laden air spread to the Volga, whereas from the Volga came a saline coolness. Sand drifted over the fires. Musketeers and Cossacks strolled along the bank with their arms round each other's shoulders. They began to sing. The tall captain had had a good deal to drink. The musketeers surrounded him.

"Piotr, you're a good fellow; you're one of us."

"Where would I have been were it not for you?"

"Give us a display of your strength."

"Is he all that strong?"

"The devil he is!"

"I'm not all that strong, but I can stick to the barrel longer than any of you."

"Well then, sit down."

"Why sit for no purpose?"

"Here, let's make a bet on it. But suppose you can't carry the liquor?"

"Then I'll stand you two barrels. D'you hear? Two barrels!"

"Take a seat, commander Mokeyev."

"Chikmaz from Astrakhan should have been here. He's a big fellow, too."

"Chikmaz is an executioner turned musketeer. He's a past-master in the art of chopping off heads."

"Chikmaz is not so strong as all that."

"Sit down, commander. If you stick it out, and we take Yaik, the vodka is yours."

In the cool orange light of the evening Mokeyev threw down his dusty coat and pulled off his red shirt, displaying his athletic torso. He sat down on the barrel.

"Look at him, he's like a bull!" The barrel sank into the ground. "He's a heavyweight, the devil!"

"Hey, let those that strike hardest come forward!"

A tall, long-armed musketeer took off his coat, rolled up the sleeves of his blue shirt and seized a six-foot bludgeon.

"Strike away!"

Mokeyev stuck out his chest, and the musketeer struck it with all his strength.

"Good for you, boyar's son!"

"He's been fed on good, wholesome bread—none of your fancy stuff."

After the first blow Mokeyev said:

"Don't strike below the belt, or I'll get up and punch you."

The echo of a sonorous whack rolled across the water.

"Come on!"

"How many strokes shall I deal him, comrades?"

"Five!"

"Not enough! He's that strong you'd better give him ten."

Mokeyev puffed himself up and, sitting astride the barrel, made nothing of the blows. While dressing himself and listening to the echoes dying away over the water, he remarked:

"You've forfeited the vodka."

"We have that. You're a fine fellow, Mokeyev."

"The ataman!"

Razin, accompanied by Chernoyarets, had come ashore. The musketeers doffed their caps; the Cossacks bowed.

"What's the fight about?"

Mokeyev continued to sit on the barrel.

"We were just having a lark, father."

"We lost our wager, father; he stuck it out to the end."

Razin approached Mokeyev and felt his arms and chest.

"I expect you can pull a big weight, Piotr? Your arms are like cast iron."

"Well, ataman, with a little help I could drag a barge off a shoal single-handed."

"Fine! Preserve your strength; we need such as you; strength is a treasure. Well, musketeers, how are we going to judge your voivode?"

"Just twist his neck like we do a cockerel's."

"And knife him deftly."

Razin, flinging open his black overcoat, stood with his arms akimbo.

"Light a fire nearer; I can't see the voivode's ugly mug clearly."

The embers of a fire were scattered and fanned to flame by scores of willing mouths.

"Burn brightly!"

Blue-grey smoke drifted over the foot of the slope. The wine Razin had drunk had put him in a merry mood without making him tipsy; from beneath his reddish-brown cap his greying locks shone at his every movement as though they were silver.

"Shall we melt the voivode's fat over this fire?" someone squeaked delightedly, while he blew on the flames.

Razin frowned as he turned and asked:

"Who's the man shouting by the fire?"

"A Cossack."

"Come and stand here!"

A slender, dark Cossack in a dark blue jacket and boots dusty with sand started up before the ataman.

"Unbind the voivode!"

Razin shifted his stern eyes to the Cossack.

"So you want the voivode to be burnt alive?"

"I do, ataman. When I was in Samara the local voivode flogged my betrothed every day."

"But this man is not the voivode of Samara."

"I know, ataman. Still, he is a voivode."

"Are you the man who served as potman at the tavern?"

"I am, father ataman. I also distributed your leaflets in the market-place and persuaded men to join forces with you."

The ataman's face brightened.

"That is well! A job successfully carried out should not be crowned with a bad one. As for your betrothed, you cannot have her now in any case. What use are women in a campaign? But I will tell you this much: if I reach Samara alive, that voivode will get his deserts, and you will have your betrothed back again. Now listen to me. If we acted as you wish, the voivode would be done for. Well, I wish to inform the tsar and boyars that they'll have to allow us to go to sea whether they like it or not. Would you like me to send you to Astrakhan as envoy to the voivode there, Samara Cossack? I promise you that this voivode will be treated as you desire. But you must not blame me if the voivode of Astrakhan puts you to the torture and hangs you from the pallisade."

"Wouldn't like that to happen, father ataman," faltered the man.

"Whom shall I send to Astrakhan as my messenger? Some of the musketeers captured here or a Cossack? I care too much for my own men! You find nothing to say? Then make yourself scarce, and don't thrust yourself forward by unnecessary shouting. Have a care!"

The Cossack quickly disappeared.

"Now you Beklemishev musketeers, how did the voivode treat you?"

"Whenever the fancy took him, father, he used the lash on us."

"Did he kill anyone?"

"Kill? No, it would be a sin to tell such a falsehood; but he constantly flogged us, and that's saying the truth."

"He abused us to our faces with his obscenities."

"I have no intention of slaying the voivode. He does not appear to be afraid of death—that is obvious by the expression on his ugly mug. But his

noble buttocks shall receive castigation, and the shame of that will rankle more bitterly than death; besides, it will teach him what flogging means. Musketeers, take the Cossacks' whips and beat the voivode wherever you please. The only thing I ask is that you spare his eyes and his life. Further, you must seek out the most ragged coat you can put your hands on and give him a few rusks so that he will not peter out for lack of food. Then let him go and inform them in Astrakhan what happens when we are refused access to the sea."

"What you say is right, father."

"Yes, that's the best way."

"Hand over your whips, Cossacks."

Razin and Chernoyarets rowed back to their barge.

## 6

The voivode lay prone on the sand, covered from head to foot in blood; he made a black patch in the moonlight. He ground his teeth, but not a groan escaped his lips. Drunken musketeers continued to straggle about the shore, but no one took any notice of the voivode, who lay as he was left after his punishment with a musketeer's tattered coat beside him. The voivode felt the small of his back and muttered:

"Son of Beelzebub, he gave me such a blow that he must have broken my spine. That man's not a mere officer of musketeers, but a bandit. The son of a boyar, indeed, curse him!"

A long, slender figure, which had been lying quietly on the edge of the Volga with his faded cap beside him, now began to move cautiously.

"Does he intend to kill me," thought the voivode; "has he been merely waiting for all the others to go away?"

At that moment the voice so familiar to the Cossacks rang out across the Volga with the customary cry:

"*Ne-e-echai!* The boyars are coming—ahoy!"

Men in azure and dark blue and red coats instantly began to launch the canoes into the Volga. Quiet reigned on the shores. A Cossack in a faded cap, who lay on the sand beside the canoe as before, was the one and only to remain. Rising unsteadily, the voivode groaned, with difficulty drew the tattered garment over his bare shoulders and tottered forward without a backward glance; he held the coat together with his left hand and waved the right to facilitate the going. Fear of death suddenly seized him; he dragged his lacerated legs along as best he could; he heard steps behind him, and before he could put up any kind of defence he felt his right arm pierced as though with red-hot iron. Behind him stood a Cossack in a dark blue jacket, who held an ataman's mallet, which glistened in his hand.

"Rat! Be thankful that the ataman let you off with your life; otherwise I should have given you a message to take with you to my kin in kingdom come."

Blood spurted from the voivode's arm. He reeled as he said:

"Cossack, can't you see that I'm naked?"

"Ay, naked, but alive; and that's worth more to you than anything on earth, you cur."

Thereupon the Cossack boarded the canoe and was swallowed up in the

mist which veiled the waters of the Volga. The clang of iron could be heard as the anchor was weighed on the barge.

The voivode sank to a stone, which lay in the deep shadow cast by the hill. He had ceased swearing, whether on account of the profound humiliation he had suffered, or because while he was bound to the tree he had had time to repent his many sins, none could tell. His thoughts had gone back to the people he had ill-treated; and during the actual beating the thought had occurred to him that there might be some other justice, that of the common people, of which he knew nothing. Now that the Cossacks had released him he no longer swore, but rejoiced in the mere fact of being alive. His arm smarted and bled, but this was the price he had had to pay for the miracle of survival.

"Will my legs be able to carry me as far as Astrakhan? I am weak from loss of blood; my whole body aches; I hope it does not suppurate; a pity there is no raw sheepskin about. Never mind! I am alive, glory be to Thee, O Lord!"

With the aid of his teeth and left hand, the boyar tore off a strip of his coat, poured sand on his wound and bandaged it with the rag. He still went in fear for his life, and glanced at the Volga, but the barges had disappeared. The still, moonlit air was softly broken by distant voices raised in song. Upon the broad, silvery expanse of the river there floated two mutilated corpses; then came more and more. The boyar crossed himself with his left hand.

Since he disliked the sight of corpses, the boyar turned away from the river and took a look at the hill.

"I must try to go up there."

Only then did he notice that he had been sitting in the shadow of a gibbet. It stood, gaunt and solitary, on a sandy hillock; there were no ropes, for these were invariably stolen by the Tatars to serve as tethers. The sight of the gallows reminded the voivode of the oath of fealty he had given the tsar. He mused:

"There must never be common people's justice. We boyars are the servants of the great sovereign. The common people, whether they be villeins or serfs, are our servants."

He slipped his hands into his pocket and encountered something hard; he recollected that he had been given rusks for his journey; he put one in his mouth, but was unable to chew, for the muscles of his neck and jaws were stiff and aching. Spitting out the rusk, he got to his feet and brooded: "Oh, you beaten voivode! . . . A fisherman's hut used to be in this neighbourhood, and, if not destroyed by the Tatars, will serve to shelter me. Besides, the fellow may row me as far as the town. . . ."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LITTLE TOWN OF YAIK

#### 1

"FROM the sovereign tsar and grand prince of All Russia, Mihail Fedorovich, to the merchant-builder Mihail Guriev on the Yaik river and to all his men!

"You are ordered to erect on the river Yaik a town of stone, measuring twenty-eight thousand feet, not including the towers. The town to be four-

square, each wall measuring seven thousand feet in between the squares of the towers. At each corner a tower is to be built, with other towers along the walls at distances of three hundred and fifty feet. Two of the towers must have double gates, and the walls of the said town must be of a width and thickness and with merlons to resemble those of Astrakhan, namely they must be ten and a half feet thick and twenty-eight feet high, including the merlons; the merlons must be seven feet apart so that from the intervening towers any approaching foe can be covered from every side. The said town to be surrounded by freshly dug moats, starting from the Yaik river, where there must be a strong pallisade, and in place of the former wattle fencing round the town there shall be constructed a wall with piles driven in below the water, similar to the one at Astrakhan. On the summit of the gate tower there is to be a tent-shaped chapel, dedicated to Our Saviour-not-made-by-hands, with a side chapel in honour of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. The four corner towers are to be circular in shape."

## 2

During the night a dug-out had been excavated, and here Razin and his captains took up their abode. So as to keep the barges and canoes in sight the dug-outs had been constructed to face the sea at some distance from the Yaik river. Razin was lounging on a rug, thrown over an earthen couch, with his feet spread towards the embers of a dying fire. The dry rustle of reeds, swaying in the swell of the waves, and the gusts of a sea wind came to him from the right. From the slits of windows to his left he could see on the top of a hill the bluish outline of towers belonging to the little town.

The rug on which Razin was reclining covered a sort of earthen pillow, on which he ensconced his shoulders. On one side of him stood a barrel of vodka, on the other burned a church candle, adorned with tinsel, stuck into a tall silver chandelier, which was placed on a wrought-iron coffer. Behind the barrel sat Lazunka. From time to time the boyar's son filled an iron mug with vodka.

Without looking round, Razin would extend a hand and silently grasp the proffered mug. At intervals the yellow-gold of Razin's under-jacket would reflect the orange-red glow of the embers. Dark stains showed on the breast of his coat where wine had dripped from his moustache and curly grey beard. Frequently Lazunka rose to stir the embers of the fire, being careful to sprinkle dark sand on the part nearest his master so that his boots might not get burned. Razin did not bother to eat as he drank; his eyes were half closed; he only opened them fully to survey the distant expanse of the sea. It might be thought that the ataman was dozing were it not for the fact that he stretched out his hand for more vodka.

A prolonged and shrill whistle sounded from the rear of the dug-out in a ravine where the sentries were concealed. The boyar's son crawled out of the earthen hut. Raising his eyes, Razin beheld in front of him part of a human form: the dark blue hem of a jacket, red trousers and a pair of boots. Lazunka crept back again, saying softly:

"Father, our lads seem to have caught a prisoner."

"I hear footsteps. They are bringing him here."

Lazunka sat down and listened, but could not hear any footsteps. It was only when they were quite near that he heard someone say:

"Bring him to the ataman."

Razin's hand flew to the butt of his pistol, which he had stuck in his trousers pocket.

"Father, it's the scout from Yaik."

"Bring him in. Who is he?"

The sand before the dug-out crunched; arms waved. Stooping, a tall, bearded man entered. The scout wore the uniform of a Cossack captain; he carried a lash, but the sheath of his sword was empty. His face was thin and sunburnt, and his eyes keen. Without moving so much as an eyelash, Razin fixed a piercing look on the man. The scout's hands were tied behind his back.

"Unloose those bonds!"

A Cossack climbed into the dug-out and did as he was bid.

"Return to your post, falcon."

The Cossack obeyed his orders.

Once more the ataman shot a keen glance at the prisoner and said:

"Sit down, Fedor."

"Oh, father, I thought you would not recognize me. You only saw me once. What an eye you have for faces!"

"What brings you here?"

"I cannot bring the keys of the town, father, and we don't need them. We are all expecting you."

"How do you propose we enter the town?"

"I'll sit down."

"That's right, make yourself at home."

The visitor sat Turkish fashion.

"I have been thinking to let you in this way, Stepan Timofeievich: lie hidden this night and all tomorrow. Then comes the eve of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and a service will be held in their chapel of the gate tower. As soon as the bell rings for vespers, you and your men must come up to the town gates, all wearing the shabbiest coats and with axes in your belts—say about thirty or forty of you, and order the rest to lie in ambush. As soon as the gates are opened, you rush in whistling. I shall post sentries at the gates from among the Cossacks, who await your coming, and as soon as you enter they will abandon their posts. The keys of the town are in the hands of Vankai Yatsyn, the mayor. As soon as you enter the town you must finish him off: he upholds the musketeers, who have remained loyal to the tsar; he controls the spies and scouts and sends them with reports to the boyars. He is fond of good cheer and likes wearing other people's clothing. I shall lull him with drink so that he suspects nothing and cajole him to allow carpenters to enter the town to strenghen the pallisade."

"I have a great love for my own men, Fedor."

"And what about myself? Have I written to you for nothing, Stepan Timofeievich? Fedka Suknin does not waste words."

"Good! Lazunka, we have an important visitor. Open the safe. Have we any French wine? If so, haul it out."

"Ready, ataman!"

"Bring it along, brother. Ha, ha, ha—so you are a scout, Fedor, are you? Ha, ha, ha—come, let us embrace! As I've been lying here my thoughts were of the sea; now we shall drink."

"I have no time to be feasting, Stepan Timofeievich. We shall drink together when the town has been taken. I am only permitted to go forth for a short while and during daylight; they won't allow me out at night; so I must be getting back soon. There's a job to be done concerning the mayor Yatsyn; he's crafty, and were he not a roisterer and greedy he would long since have dispatched me to the Moscow torture chamber."

"I shall not detain you, but have a drink before you go and then make what haste you can if such be essential."

They clinked each other's iron mugs, embraced, and the captain added:

"Stepan, you'd better see to it that your men do not alarm the Yaik musketeers by arquebus shots and yells and whistling in the vicinity of the town."

"My men are accustomed to tackle a job quietly, Fedor."

"Well, God speed! Farewell!"

3

The mayor, a lean, sallow man, very much the worse for drink, was trying on his host's coats, which hung from a smoothly planed wooden wall. Captain Fedor Suknin occupied the place of honour beneath the ikons at a large table. The hostess, a smartly attired Cossack woman, and her two daughters were busily engaged setting the table with dishes of various kinds.

"Fedor Vasiliev, I hope you do not mind your guest, the mayor, trying on your clothes?"

"Not at all, Ivan Kuzmich. Take whichever coat pleases you; I make you a present of it. You are the master in all the affairs concerning the town, and we are your subordinates. I know how the tsar honours you."

Tottering on his skinny legs, the mayor shook his own coat from his shoulders and replaced his aspen-coloured garment by one of a crimson hue. Then he seated himself at board and stroked his scraggy beard with one hand while making huge inroads into a baked pike pie with the other. Chewing his food, he said:

"I eat as much as I can, but a worm eats me."

"How do you make that out?"

"Though I eat well, I am nothing but skin and bone."

"I wonder why? Eat, with God's blessing, and enjoy good health."

"The worms eat all I take. A German doctor, travelling from Terek, gave me a note about this worm of mine. He said I had it inside me."

The mayor shoved his hand deep into his trousers pocket, fumbled there for a while and at last produced a yellow piece of paper much the worse for wear. This he handed to his host with a sly and tipsy leer.

"Read it, you bandit of a captain, Fedka Suknin."

"Why do you call me bandit? It is not good for such a name to stick. As to reading, I am not a good hand at that."

"Impostor! What I'm going to say ought not to pass my lips, but I am going to say it all the same. The tsar's scouts have discovered that it was you and none other who wrote to the robber Stenka Razin, inviting him to come to Yaik. Can't read, forsooth! Read this and be friends with me and give me presents, then I shall not report you."

"But there is nothing to report, Ivan Kuzmich. You know only too well

that innocent persons are often betrayed. Anyway, I know it. . . . Let's have a drink."

"I am already eating and drinking. My duty is to denounce you. But, you see, there's where our friendship comes in. My hand is not free. They write to me . . . order me . . . but I am on your side. Read now, I know you are good at that sort of thing; no need to be secretive about it. Read me what kind of a philtre the German has given me."

Slowly the captain began to read while the mayor ate and drank gluttonously, adding an occasional remark of his own.

> "Certificate issued by Doctor Johannes Stern of Mecklenburg to the burgomaster of Yaik town, Ivan Yatsyn: The burgomaster is suffering from the presence of a tapeworm in his intestines, and those suffering from this disease should kill it by various medicines so as to force the worm downwards. Some of these worms are seven, nine or ten feet long; but the disease does not affect many people. It has its origin in pernicious phlegm, and the worm grows nearly as long as the intestines, and is as wide as a finger and feeds upon whatever the person eats and drinks."

"The German doctor wrote this through an interpreter, but I'll be damned if I understand a word of the document. So, Fedor, if what he says be true, I shall die from this inner vermin. My only hope is that the German lied."

The captain continued to read.

> ". . . and because of its proximity to the intestines, those veins which provide the liver with blood and strength become blocked, and the result is that those who suffer from this disease grow emaciated and weak however much they eat and drink."

The chapel bell in the gate tower began to ring for vespers. Suknin gave orders:

"Women! Light the tapers before the ikons! The church service has begun."

He rose and crossed himself. The mayor also rose, waved his long arm tipsily and said as he crossed himself:

"I think, Fedor Suknin, that because we eat and drink like infidels on the eve of feast days, diseases are sent to us, for we forget God."

"God does not forbid food and drink, Ivan Kuzmich, but using bad language at table and planning evil against a friend, that is a sin."

A musketeer entered, saluted the master of the house and then the mayor, saying:

"Ivan Kuzmich, there are some carpenters without who wish to be allowed into the town so as to put up candles and pray to the saints. Are we to admit them? If so, may we have the keys?"

"Turn them away. There are many robbers sneaking about the town. Carpenters indeed!"

"If they truly are carpenters, Ivan Kuzmich, why not admit them? The pallisade round the town is rotting and ought to be strengthened against possible attack by armed bands; besides, there is plenty of work for carpenters in the town itself: bridges in need of repair, the chapel . . ." said Suknin.

"How many are there, musketeer?"

"About thirty, Ivan Kuzmich."

"Let's go and see for ourselves. I have little faith in your Cossacks, Fedka, but musketeers are different cattle altogether; they serve the tsar well; your Cossacks are all of them robbers."

"Do you really imagine they are all robbers? Here, take your physician's certificate."

"Come along! Oh, wait a bit, the keys of the pallisade are in the pocket of my old coat."

"Take them with you, Ivan Kuzmich."

The mayor transferred the keys, flung open the crimson coat and set out for the gate tower. Suknin followed, and whenever Yatsyn tottered he officiously supported him by the elbow.

The sound of bells in the tower increased in volume, and the chime floated away over the wide and distant spaces. As he trundled along Yatsyn butted into everything; his head was unsteady, and he muttered to himself:

"Mayor, old one, you've drunk too much . . . have you drunk too much? This won't do. Though the eyes can see, the tongue blabs, and my arms and legs don't seem to belong to me. . . ."

## 4

"Satan himself could not get into Yaik, what with its walls, its moat, its huge pallisade and its padlocked gate. Look, the pallisade is of oak! Each beam is a man's girth in size!"

"It will be as the ataman predicted; he's a magician; neither sword nor bullet can harm him."

"There seems to be a service going on in the chapel above the gate tower."

"Have you forgotten? Tomorrow is the feast of Saints Peter and Paul."

"Oh, it's the priests, who are ringing the bells and singing; there is space enough for the chimes, with the sea and the steppe."

"Yesterday a scout was caught."

"That's true enough . . . but his sword and pistol were returned to the scout, and he was allowed to go back to Yaik."

"Probably the ataman found that necessary."

"Ah, it was fine the way we beat the Polish colonel Ruzhinski not far from this spot. . . ."

"And the blackguard escaped in a small boat with a handful of musketeers, but the bulk of them came over to us; they were all from Astrakhan."

"And how many musketeers are there now?"

"We've counted over three hundred."

"All Astrakhanians?"

"Yes, those who are sent here for one year's service."

"Sh! Is that the ataman?"

"Yes."

"It's his gait, but those are not his clothes."

"'Tis he nevertheless. And that's Chernoyarets with him in a tattered coat."

"See! All the captains, too, are in old coats, and they are unarmed, only carrying axes. . . ."

"Not a sound! Do not speak. The ataman's orders were that we should be silent."

Razin approached the men who were lying in ambush among the bushes.

"Falcons! I hear voices. Keep quiet, lie down, and when you hear a whistle don't stand there gaping, but rush the gates with your arquebuses."

"We shall obey, father."

Razin, followed by his captains, walked up the hill. A log bridge lay across the outer moat of the town; beyond this was an oak pallisade with solid gates, barred and locked from the inside. The Cossacks came right up to the pallisade and took off their caps.

"Hey, good folk! Yaik's merciful authorities, musketeers, Cossacks and townsmen!"

From the window of the keeper's lodge in the gate tower there appeared the head of a guard.

"What do you want here, rabble?"

"We'd like to pray, good man, and put up a candle to Peter and Paul. We're Christians, and tomorrow is one of God's holy days."

Chernoyarets added his version to the ataman's story:

"Our boats have been wrecked in the gale. We've been tossed about for days. What a gale it was! We were on our way to the Terek looking for work."

The gate-keeper, who had time on his hands, indulged in a joke at Chernoyaret's expense:

"Well, young man, you certainly look like a robber, and our women are partial to such as you. If we could only dress you up in smart apparel—my word, all the girls would go crazy after you! And your eyes! Out and out robbers' eyes! Were you sailing to Terek for plunder, or really for work?"

"Why, for work, of course, my good man. We're carpenters—working men."

"To judge by your faces, you are no working men, but bandits. However, no matter. I'll warn the commander of the musketeers; he is master here, and if he admits you . . . how many are you?"

"Thirty or so."

The window was pushed to, and a lengthy delay ensued. As evening drew on a murky mist came in from the sea and hovered over the lowlands; but the town itself half-way up the wall towers was still aglow from the sunset.

The gates creaked; iron clanked; the mayor himself approached the pallisade. He had pushed his cap back to the nape of his neck. Between the gaps in the pallisade the Cossacks noticed the uncertainty of his gait and his drowsy, tipsy eyes. He asked:

"State your business, rabble."

The drunken eyes from behind the pallisade fixed the crowd suspiciously; bared heads were wagging on the opposite side.

"Father, we're looking for work. We've finished off our job at Cherni Yar, where we strengthened the watch towers against attacks, and then we decided to head for Terek, but lost our boats at sea in a gale."

"We are short of bread in Yaik; if we do not get our quota you'll go hungry. How many are there of you?"

"About thirty, or maybe less . . . some were drowned, and we did not count."

Hiccoughing and sniffing, the mayor fumbled with the keys, trying to fit them in the lock, but trusting no one else to do the job. At last the gates were

unlocked. His customary suspiciousness was dulled by the amount of liquor he had drunk. Without looking round or examining the newcomers, he pushed open the gates on their iron hinges. The barrier guard stood on the steps of his lodge within the gateway. The mayor went up to him, gave him the keys and ordered:

"Keep count of them as they pass in; and don't admit more than thirty! Immediately after, bring the keys to Suknin's house."

The mayor was accosted by Fedor Suknin as he withdrew inside the gates. Fedor steered the drunken man by the elbow while he himself looked back at the Cossack sentry post and waved his hand as a signal to dismiss. Then he led the mayor to his own house.

As he passed through the pallisade Razin said:

"The men in our rear must remain without and whistle when the moment is ripe."

"We understand."

"Chikmaz is a good whistler."

In the hazy dusk of the summer evening a phantom crowd of townsfolk was still milling round the booths in search of a bargain. Cossacks in sheepskin caps and loose dark blue coats, and musketeers in pale green coats, carrying arquebuses or poleaxes, mingled with civilians.

The bells of the tentlike church chimed solemnly. Razin's men were entering the town of Yaik . . . not one of the townsfolk so much as spared them a glance. Only the watchman at the gate, who had been entrusted with the keys, and therefore considered himself to have been invested with authority by the mayor, stood rooted to the same spot, his flat face, obdurate as granite and grey in the twilight, kept on shouting:

"Hey, you rabble, you were told that there were to be no more than thirty. Why, there's more than forty-five of you already!"

"You can't have counted us right."

"I can count up to a thousand by the Church abacus, you liars!"

"Then you must be a bad reader, peasant."

"Which of you bandits is whistling?"

"That's what mouths and lips are made for."

"Why should we not whistle?"

More and more men surged round the watchman: strong fellows in ragged clothing, in the van, followed by others, who loomed up in blue coats, and others in red coats, through the haze.

The watchman groaned: "This is beyond me! May their mothers be—— Hey, who's that whistling?"

"It's Ivashko Kondyr who is piping."

"He has come back from the shades to help pillage Yaik."

"And there's that bell booming! God help us, now I can't hear it!"

"Nothing to worry about, old watchman fellow."

"There is treason abroad!" and the watchman started running up and down the steps perplexedly. . . . "Help!" . . . "Where the devil have those Cossacks got to? Woe! . . . How many are you? Will there ever be an end . . . ?"

"You may be sure there will, only do not close the gates."

The guard, jostling those who were coming in, now endeavoured to elbow his way to the outside. Horsemen were riding into the town. . . .

"Treason! Treason! God help us! Treason!"

Filing before the guard's dazed eyes, figures in strange habiliments—blue, red, indigo—seemed to float by, lit up by the glow from pipes. An incalculable volume of darkness, together with a moving mass of men, mysteriously engulfed the town. Black clouds were surging up from the sea, pierced by pale saffron-coloured streaks.

"Quick, to the parapets. Oh, damnation take them!"

In large bodies, men advanced across the bridge and made for the parapet. A man, tall, dark and taut, his heels tapping loudly on the cobbles, strode in front puffing at his pipe. The guard slammed the gates to in his face and dived quickly in order to shoot the bolts, but the dark man, still puffing at his pipe, kicked the logs apart. As they flew asunder the guard received a mighty blow on the head. He made a dive for the gates, but fell before reaching them. Piotr Mokeyev, knocking out his pipe against the butt of his arquebus, stepped over the dead guard without a glance. A slender Cossack, who was close at Piotr's heels, had witnessed the whole scene. He stooped to pick up the guard's body, carried his burden outside the wall and flung it into the moat. The keys jingled as they fell from the guard's hand on to the bridge.

"Stay! The tavern-keeper in Samara also dropped his keys, and I picked them up. These are the keys of the town, and I'll take 'em, too."

The Cossack shoved the heavy keys into a pocket of his wide trousers and caught up with his comrades, who were streaming into the town. More and more were coming in. The place was black with them. They carried arms on their shoulders or dragged them along. From the sea came a roar, which echoed far and wide;

"*Ne-e-cha-i!*"

Lights flashed on the dark blue expanse of water; the barges looked like large black spots on the surface. Over the town, where only a few moments ago church bells had been ringing festively, the tocsin struck up. A voice which carried to the square and outside the gate cried out:

"Remove that tocsin-ringer!"

The tap of iron-shod heels clattered up the stairs of the gate tower; the tocsin gave forth one more twang and then was silent.

"No need for dug-outs in a town!"

"Come in, brothers!"

"See, the devils are awake and have lighted the will-o'-the-wisps!"

In the square the torches flickered to and fro.

"Maybe those are our men?"

"No, ours don't wear light-coloured coats. Those are Yaik musketeers."

The torches twinkled in the hands of the light-coated musketeers, who deployed and fell into formation. Anxiously they asked:

"Where's Yatsyn?"

"Drinking at Suknin's."

"He's lost the town through drink. Treason!"

"The bandits have entered the town."

"Summon the Cossacks and townspeople! Let all loyal to the great sovereign join us!"

"Tsar's men, occupy the corner towers!"

Strings of light like a fiery chain stretched out towards the corner towers.

"Fire the cannons into the town from the lower and upper emplacements!"

"Better wait. Where's the mayor?"

"You've already been told that he's sousing."

"Then he must be dragged out, whatever state he's in. Hey, bring the mayor Yatsyn to the tower!"

The voices of the Yaik musketeers were overpowered by another voice, which was heard again throughout the town and as far as the barges lying off shore:

"Falcons! Post a sentry at the gates. No one is to be allowed in or out without the password."

"We hear, father."

## 5

Captain Suknin was sitting at table in a blue silk shirt embroidered in bright-hued silks. The tipsy mayor, wearing his borrowed finery, lay on a seat with his face buried in his cap.

"Housewife, clear away the fish-bones and change the cloth."

When his orders had been obeyed, Suknin added:

"Refill the wine bottle, wife, and place a loving-cup of mead—but not that mead you offered this guest."

"Is there not enough liquor already?"

"Can't you hear? Company has come to town."

"Go on with you! Were I to listen to such roisterers as you there'd be a birthday or a wedding party every day of the week."

"As you will! Let's pretend that today is a birthday party. Stepan Razin has come to town!"

The mayor sat up with widely opened eyes.

"Fedka, you're a traitor. I knew that long ago. Now you just wait, you son of a bitch. Tomorrow I intend to dispatch you under escort to Astrakhan."

"Oh, Ivan Yatsyn, you must have hurt yourself. Have you fallen off the stove?" And a mocking smile crossed Suknin's face.

"I was asleep and had no fall, but was listening to you all the time. I know! You're expecting Stenka Razin here; your time is up."

"Now, then, mayor, take off my coat!"

"I've accepted your coat, Fedka, and refuse to give it back to you. It makes no odds, for by decree of the great sovereign I will have to confiscate all your property."

The vestibule door-latch clicked; there was a shuffle of feet; four musketeers, one of them bearing a torch, marched into the room.

"Mayor, why have you admitted robbers into the town?"

"Who? What? Robbers? Where?"

"Hasten to the square, Yatsyn, and issue your orders so that we may know what to do."

"Our men have occupied the corner towers."

Like a blind man the mayor groped about for his cap on the seat; both cap and coat were trailing on the floor.

"Hey, what are you loitering about for? Time is short."

Yatsyn raised his drunken head.

"Lads, seize yonder robber."

"You fool!"

"Ugh! You devil!"

"Come on, our men are going to bombard the town."

"Um, so you are siding with the robbers? Is that your idea of obeying me and respecting our sovereign tsar?"

The musketeers were turning to go. The mayor stamped his feet, shouting:

"Get out of here, traitors!"

The musketeers withdrew, and Yatsyn shook his fist at his host.

"Fedka, you will surely be under arrest this very day."

Suknin rose from the table, made a sweeping sign of the cross with two fingers before the ikons with their brightly burning lamps, stepped up to the mayor and caught hold of the collar of his gift coat.

"Now, Ivan, time to unharness yourself. Off with my coat! Your old one is good enough to die in."

The mayor said nothing and appeared not to hear what his host was saying; he stared before him vaguely, hiccoughed and strove to recall something important. He meekly allowed Suknin to pull off the crimson coat. Suknin picked up the mayor's coat and cap from the floor, dressed him and adjusted the scabbard without the sword.

"Go, Kuzmich! If you leave this world, please give my regards to my grandfather." He led the man out of the house and returned quickly.

His round-faced, strongly built and statuesque wife stood with her back to the stove, her bare arms folded over her ample bosom. Her eyes twinkled. Suknin walked up to her.

"Well, wife, that was fine strong mead you served! Let me kiss you."

He hugged his wife in his strong arms and covered her face with smacking kisses.

"I merely brewed the kind you asked for."

"The mayor became besotted after he'd drunk only four cups; he hasn't recovered his senses even yet and is incapable of finding his way. . . ."

The woman laughed and pushed him slightly away from her, saying:

"Sticky as honey! You never kiss me like that in the night. More often you are asleep."

## 6

In the flickering torchlight the musketeers in their aspen-green uniforms pressed towards the tower. Razin's men exchanged a few shots with them. Piotr Mokeyev, a torch in one hand and a poleaxe in the other, his rose-coloured coat flapping about him, yelled:

"Do nothing to prevent them. Let them get into the towers. We need planks, so you'd better smash up the booths."

In the wavering light of the torches, axes were set to work in the market-place on the booths; planks creaked, split, crashed; goods tumbled about the feet of Cossacks and musketeers with no one even dreaming to pick up all this wealth; strange forms, resembling large, shaggy dogs, crawled and squealed in the dust at the feet of the destroyers, crying out in women's voices:

"These are my wares, oh!"

"All our belongings gone!"

"We are lost! Oh, the devils!"

The womenfolk grabbed armloads of clothes, rolls of tissue, bales of linen, meat and what-not from under the feet of the musketeers in their bright-coloured coats and bore their booty away to hide it behind the grim houses.

Piles of planks and props rose up beside the threatening towers. Mokeyev's voice sounded like a trumpet:

"Hold a light!" Handing his torch over to a musketeer, he tucked a heavy log under his arm and with all his might rammed it against the door leading into the tower; the door yielded, but did not cave in; at the second blow the door, bolts and all, gave way. Mokeyev shouted a brief command:

"Throw the planks into the tower and set them afire, comrades!"

The musketeers obeyed; smoke was soon pouring out of the embrasures on the ground floor, where the cannons were emplaced. The brick wall was silhouetted against the yellow-red gleam from the conflagration. A salvo of cannon was fired from above. The six-foot-high merlons in the battlemented walls caught the light.

"Keep close to the walls, comrades!"

"Never mind us, father. They're blazing away at the sky; but we'll smoke 'em out like bugs from their chinks," shouted Mokeyev. He rammed the doors of a second tower. Here, too, wood crackled in the darkness and lit up the place with flickering flames; smoke belched from the embrasures. Razin slapped Mokeyev on the back.

"Well done, Piotr."

Mokeyev, torch in hand, was gazing upward.

"Come, brother Cossacks and musketeers, throw more fuel on the flames."

The fire grew fiercer and fiercer as the flames licked the shattered doorway. From above voices clamoured:

"Cossacks, put out the fire; we surrender."

A similar cry came from the other tower:

"We surrender, brothers."

"So you're feeling a trifle hot, are you?" said Mokeyev. "Scatter the fire with boat-hooks or poleaxes. Let the devils out."

Musketeers in pale coloured coats came tumbling down from the towers. They shook themselves, sneezed and gulped in the cool, fresh air.

"Hey, falcons, make another fire at the side tower on the right."

Musketeers, whether in blue or in pink uniforms, responded to Razin's order. Holding the torches between their teeth, they lugged at logs and planks, piling them up against the tower. Flames crackled, and the dark tower stood out russet red and seemed to come to life.

"Dig a hole by the fire!"

They set to work with poleaxes and spades, produced from heaven knows where, and soon a huge hole gaped beside the fire.

"Dig deeper and wider," thundered the voice; "put up the block."

A long pole was flung along the edge of the hole, and a heavy executioner's block with its end towards the hole was slid across the cavity.

"Hi, Chikmaz of Astrakhan!"

"Present, father."

A long-armed musketeer, belonging to Golovlenkov's command, and wearing a crimson uniform, approached the block.

"Are you accustomed to chopping off heads?"

"One gets a first-rate training for that job in Moscow. Yes, I am."

"Well, then, off with your coat and take an axe."

"Right. . . ."

"Now, you Yaik musketeers, which among you are going to join us, and which are desirous of going to kingdom come? Speak out!"

A grey-haired and bearded musketeer approached the black figure, standing with its arms akimbo, its hawk-like eyes blazing. He threw down his cap, bowed his head and drove his poleaxe into the ground at the ataman's feet.

"Here I am, free eagle. I pray you to release those who do not wish to submit to you; let them go to Astrakhan."

"I know that story! Was it you who fired from the tower?"

"Yes, ataman, I'm a gunner."

"You do not want to join us?"

"I'm too old, child. I've always been loyal to my sovereign; I don't know which cause you represent; neither, if I did, would I wish to believe in it. There are some here who will refuse to go with you. Let them go back to Astrakhan."

"Fate is against you. Deal with the old man, he'll be the first!"

There came a flapping of coat-skirts and sleeves; here and there, teeth were bared in a grin. The old musketeer was seized and laid out flat on the block. Chikmaz raised his axe. A pair of legs jerked above the pit; no one but the ataman heard the thud of the felled body.

"Now for the mayor."

Standing over the black hole in his pale coat, Yatsyn, who was still very tipsy, spread out his thin arms in surprise.

"Who are my judges? Am I asleep or not?"

"You are not asleep yet, but will be soon," replied Chikmaz. A light adroit stroke sent the mayor's head spinning beyond the cavity, while a figure clad in light-coloured clothes slithered under the block.

Throwing away their arms, a long file of musketeers with bowed heads drew near the hole.

Chikmaz' knees and boots were soaked in blood. He drew a deep breath and, looking merely at the nape of the neck of the man whose head was on the block, struck his blows.

"More fuel," shouted the stern voice.

The fire, which had been smouldering beneath the blue-black sky, now flared up anew; once again the russet wall of the tower came to life, while human shadows moved upon its surface. None dared approach that figure in black with its arms akimbo, in a red Zaporozhian cap, pushed back to the nape of the neck, and the copper-tinted jacket under the loose overcoat, for the thin face, with its curly beard touched with grey, was solemn and severe. Yet one Cossack ventured to accost him after throwing down his cap; he spoke in a loud and gruff voice:

"Father, I have served you for a long time, though you have no compassion. Do you not see how much blood you have spilled into that hole?"

Razin's eyes flashed.

"Who are you?"

"Fedka Shpyn. Remember how in Samara you gave me a drink. I came with the murza to warn you."

"Yes, I remember. But what have you come to pester me about now?"

"Merely to tell you that I am sorry for the musketeers."

"I know to whom I must show mercy and pity. And to prevent you from meddling in my affairs another time—to the block with this Cossack!"

The dark blue coat split, there was the glint of steel as a sword was knocked out of its scabbard, and robust hands seized hold of the man. At that moment Chernoyarets and Serebriakov accosted Razin:

"Spare the Cossack, father."

"I, too, put in my plea, Stepan Timofeievich."

"Chikmaz, stay your hand until we have heard what the captains have to say."

"Father, you are the brother of Vaska Uss by the crosses you exchanged."

"Yes, Ivan, I am his brother; we swore . . ."

"Vaska is fond of the Cossack Fedka, and Vaska Uss is a mighty fine fellow."

"I know that."

"Vaska Uss will mourn the death of his Fedka, and, who knows, he may harbour evil thoughts."

"I do not fear evil thoughts if they concern myself. Well, what have you to say, white falcon?"

"I will say this, father: I have seen many gallant men in my day, men who fear neither fire nor water nor the noose, and who will go forth to battle without a thought of self or of their own lives. Among these is Fedka Shpyn; he takes first place, Stepan Timofeievich," said Serebriakov.

Razin hung his head. The Cossacks, musketeers and captains, all those who were familiar with the ataman's habits, waited in suspense to see whether he would push his cap still farther back; then it would be all up with Fedka. Razin said:

"My cap is already on the nape of my neck, and there is no farther it can go. Return the Cossack's coat and sword to him and let him go."

The ataman raised his head. The reprieved man, avoiding Razin's eyes, picked up his cap and with his calm and rolling gait moved away into the darkness.

Wisps of cloud, scurrying from the sea towards the town, heralded the dawn. Chikmaz lowered his axe, looked round him, relaxed his shoulders and thought:

"Ah well, there are still a good many heads over yonder"; but he perceived that the musketeers in their aspen-coloured uniforms, their faces almost of the same hue as their coats, were waving their caps and shouting:

"We surrender to the ataman."

"We're joining you."

Running his finger along the edge of his axe, Chikmaz said to himself: "They've surrendered. That's good, for the axe is blunted, and I reckoned to cut down one hundred and seventy in the first batch—even more. . . ."

## 7

His face and hands smeared with blood, Razin, in company with his captains, went to visit Fedor Suknin, who welcomed the ataman and kissed him.

"Now, father Stepan, I intend we shall have a proper feast, and that feast will be held in a proper house, not in a dug-out."

"We've done a fine piece of work, Fedor, and, as you said to me, from here we shall put out to sea in search of what we need."

"Wife," Suknin called, "dish up the best you have to offer. Sit down, most welcome guests."

"A wash would not be out of place," remarked Serebriakov, and all except Razin followed their host to the washing-jug in the vestibule. The daughters of the house brought them towels embroidered in wool. Sunlight splashed the yellow walls of the roomy ante-room, which smelt of honey, malt and sun-dried fish.

"Fedor certainly lives in comfort and plenty," muttered Serebriakov, splashing the water.

With fresh and shining faces they returned to their places at the board. The smiling, smartly dressed hostess busied herself round the table, setting forth dishes of food; and when all her guests were thoroughly settled she spread embroidered napkins over their knees.

"So that you may not soil your coats," she explained, giving Razin a special bow by inclining her head on its shapely neck.

Razin rose to embrace and kiss her.

"Our coats are made that way, little woman," and he added, with a glance at Suknin: "That wife of yours, Fedor, is made of gold."

"She's been forged and hammered so well, Stepan Timofeievich, that I don't know what she's made of. She is a priceless piece of workmanship!"

The table glittered with silver loving-cups, tankards, gilt bowls and ladles. Dishes of jellied fish, meat and game were brought in.

"It's a long time since I sat at such a spread; it must have been when I was quite a young man; in Moscow, in the musketeer suburb. Ah, time! Where are the yesteryears?" A cloud passed over the ataman's face. . . .

"Come now, Stepan Timofeievich, let the dead past bury its dead. The time has come for us all to make a fresh start. Today we shall drink!"

"Yes, let us drink, Fedor Vasilich. We have not seen much of each other, and when we do meet it is not always at a festive board. A toast to you, host! Here's your very good health! Come on, captains!"

They all tossed down ladlesful of vodka.

The smoothly planed door was set wide, and through the aperture bright patches of light flitted across the room. A Cossack, tall and old, entered; his hands were still hard and strong, and his eyes as keen as a hawk's.

"Falcons, make room for grandfather!" And the captains shifted along the seat.

"What luck! I am fated to drink with a man who knew my father Timoshei."

"I have never forgotten him, ataman. The times we had together cannot be counted, what with swordplay and vodka and smoking our pipes! He was a fearless Cossack, strong of body, and one who spat upon Moscow and all her works. A falcon drinks to an eagle!"

"To Grigori! I am angry with Moscow. She shall have good reason to remember the Razins. I shall go there to avenge my father. The boyars rid themselves of him by poison at a feast; my brother Ivan was flogged to death on the rack before my very eyes, and his body was hurled out of the torture chamber as a mere lump of flesh, not the body of a human being." The ataman struck the table with his fist while his eyes flashed menacingly. "It may be they will seize me, too, but I intend that my capture will cost them dear, and the memory of me will serve as a pointer to the people as to the best way to smash the power of the boyars. Who in Russia has an easy and pleasant life? The influential boyars,

who, like the curs they are, lick the tsar's hand daily. There sits a captain, a boyar's son; let him say whether I speak the truth or not."

Mokeyev said in his stentorian voice:

"Boyars' sons are enrolled as musketeers for life; clothes and the tsar's favour are doled out to them as though they were beggars; but if there is fighting to be done, then they must report for duty post haste, armed and with a horse; and for their services they receive nothing but the foulest abuse from the voivodes and are often subjected to a beating. Should one endeavour to lodge a complaint to the tsar in person, then all access to the sovereign is denied by the big boyars, who will straightway calumniate the petitioner and deprive him of his rank and give him the bastonnade 'for discontent with the tsar's favours'."

Mokeyev touched the board lightly with his fist, but all the vessels on it danced, the empty as well as the full.

"Ah well," he continued, "devil take the boyars and the tsar's favours! I, Piotr Mokeyev, am ready to lay down my life in the fight to eliminate the boyars."

"Let's drink on that, Piotr!"

"Ay, father!"

The room became hotter, so the door leading into the vestibule was flung to its full width. A slender Cossack with a black moustache and dressed in a smart dark blue uniform entered and crossed himself as he turned to the corner where the ikons stood in the pale light of the lamps. Then he bowed to the ataman and said with a flourish of his cap:

"All honour to those who have found a place to feast in with our father ataman."

Razin, who was already far gone in liquor, jerked himself up against the wall and asked sullenly:

"It's you again, you fellow from Samara? Are you come hither for more nonsense, or have you come on business?"

"First of all, father, you if anyone should have the keys of the town in your safe keeping," he said, laying the keys on the table. "I picked them up out of the moat, which, you will agree, is no fit place for them."

"So far so good. You have proved yourself a shrewd man, and on this account I mean to repeat the promise I already made you: if I get to Samara alive I shall find you your sweetheart. Until that day you'd better look about the town for a woman to your taste and who would appreciate a handsome Cossack—ha, ha, ha!"

"Next thing, father, is that the fighting men are flocking to the tavern; but I have forbidden them to be served with strong drink until I receive orders from you. So they are waiting."

"Very good! You can open the tavern, lad. Count the cash in the till, and if the publican should be gone, report the sum to me. Should the tavern-keeper have remained at his post, place him under guard and see to it that he delivers the cash. It will come in handy to buy food for our men."

"All will be done as you say, father."

"Give the Cossack a drink!"

A goblet was filled. The Cossack took a sip and then helped himself to a snack, saying:

"One more word, father."

"Well?"

"The priests are asking to be allowed to celebrate Mass in the Peter-Paul chapel because of the feast day. May they have your permission?"

"Ha, ha, ha, that Samara fellow has made himself the leader of my town! It's just as well, for no one else bothers about keeping order." The ataman made a wide sweep with his arm. "Yes, let them do as they wish. If the people want to go and prostrate themselves, believing in God—there is no sense in stopping them. It's not for me to oppose anyone's belief so long as I am served well. Let them fall on their knees as much as they please. I am no longer a believer. But since my people pray, I also cross myself on occasions. Yes, lad, you may allow the priests to go to their chapel."

"And if I may say so, father Stepan," interposed Suknin, "there is no reason against this." He refilled the cups with vodka.

The Cossack went on his mission.

"We've eaten and drunk; what do you say to dancing so as to cheer the heart?" asked the ataman.

"That would be truly a good finish to our entertainment."

Fedor Suknin left the table and, after rummaging at the back of an old cupboard, produced a dusty domra. He passed his bronzed hand over the strings to sweep away the dust; then he stepped backwards to the seat and began to sing as he twanged the strings:

"Oh, had I, so young a wife, a raven black steed,
I would like to be a free Cossack woman:
I would dance, I would gallop across the green mead
And the shadowy green woodland . . ."

Chernoyarets began to dance. The long rays of gold-dusted sunlight pencilled their way through the narrow windows, and wherever the curly-headed dancer squatted, there the sunbeams glinted brighter in his silken locks. His movements were almost imperceptible and noiseless, yet the room shook from the weight of his body, and the mica rattled in the window-frames; there was nothing to be seen but the whirling white dust raised by the dancer's boots.

With a final twang on his instrument Suknin ceased playing and cried:

"Father, I've been told you are a fine dancer."

"Ah, Fedor, my dancing days are over, but to please you I'll try to bring back my youth."

Razin threw off his overcoat. The silver heel-pieces jingled, the thick boots stood on their tips, the golden-yellow jacket glinted like brocade. The sword flashed in the well-trained hand; it sped towards the wall, but did not pierce it, merely striking with the flat of the blade and falling to the seat.

"Let's to bed and sleep! The falcon's eyes are dim."

Having pushed aside the captains, Piotr Mokeyev stood with his powerful hands behind his back, stooping slightly forward and moving his heavy feet while he gazed avidly at the dancers. Chernoyarets, having ceded his place to the ataman, touched Mokeyev on the back.

"Now, then, Piotr, it's your turn to give us a dance."

"Nay, Ivan, once only did I dance, and that was in the boyarina's apartment at Moscow. I was far gone in liquor, and my dancing caused quite a commotion."

"Why?"

"Do tell us about it."

" 'Tis not worth remembering."

"Please tell us, Piotr."

"Come on, out with it!"

"The cabinets containing the silver toppled over, and some of the things fell under my feet and were trodden to pieces. There were also some trashy tables, supposed to be of oak, but they were really rotten, and I was like one possessed. On whichever table I dealt a blow, it collapsed; but I just went on dancing and dealing out blows to right and left. I grew more and more excited, and if I found a door in my way I kicked it in. Behind one door stood the steward, who got a whack on the skull, rolled down the stairs, had his arms and legs broken and his eyes injured. For this, the boyarina denounced me to the tsar through the good services of the grand boyarina Golitzyna, and instead of sending me to Holmogori, where it had been arranged I should be posted, they sent me to Astrakhan. But my family refused to follow me there. With the patriarch's dispensation my wife divorced me in my absence and married again. So Piotr Mokeyev has given up dancing; he plays too many pranks. . . ."

"Such is fate, Piotr. Yours turned out to be a lucky dance. Had you remained in Moscow you would not have joined us."

"Maybe it was fate. During the first weeks I was very depressed, father. There was nothing to see but dead fish rotting on the shores; such a stench and heat. Then I got used to it. I grew fond of the place and its smells. There is a great deal of water, and the wide spaces call to one's soul."

But now the captains were downright drunk; singing and muttering each to himself, they dispersed. Old Rudakov had succumbed long since and lay asleep on a bench with his feet towards the door. His Cossack coat lay on the floor, his trousers were unbuttoned and had slid down to his boots, thus exposing his hairy body. A bronzed arm with knotted veins lolled from the seat to the floor. His face was buried in his cap, while the bristles of his beard jerked at every breath. Razin occupied his host's place beneath the ikons. Not a wrinkle showed on his face, but the pock-marks had considerably deepened on cheek and brow; the eyes were drowsy and sad; his large fists lay on the table beside a tankard of mead. The ataman spoke to himself in rather loud voice:

"Fedka the Cossack is Satan personified . . . sorry for the musketeers? When a house is ablaze one does not stop to measure its height, one throws out one's belongings . . . counts the salvage later. . . ."

"Hey, wife, get the ataman's apartment ready as quickly as you can."

"Oh, honey, what's come over you to yell like that? I'm not deaf. The bed awaits the guest."

"I am shouting from sheer joy that we've trampled our enemies underfoot and have had plenty of wine to drink. What about another song?"

In a tipsy but pleasant voice Suknin sat on the seat, tapping his foot as he sang:

"I shall sow goose grass on the bank,
My sturdy seedlings.
My goose grass from drought was rank,
My sturdy seedlings.
The Cossack water-carrier appears,
But there's no water, so he disappears. . . ."

Razin rose and walked across the room without reeling. Suknin also rose and threw aside the jangling domra. The ataman clasped the host in his arms. "Lead on, Fedor, I'm overpowered with sleep."

## 8

A town crier beat his drum in the market square of Yaik and proclaimed to the citizens:

"An eminent official, by name Sakmyshev, has been sent here by the sovereign tsar to bid everyone go to the church of Our Saviour-not-made-by-human-hands."

Musketeers, newly arrived from Astrakhan, lined up in the square. They belonged to Golovlenkov's unit and wore crimson uniforms. The passers-by remarked jokingly:

"The aspen-coloured coats proved unsuitable for Yaik, so they've sent us raspberry uniforms with poleaxes instead!"

"And not only poleaxes, but arquebuses and carbines as well."

The bell in the gate tower jangled. The motley crowd of townsfolk, mingled with vivid splashes of blue and red uniforms, wended its way to the chapel. A warm breeze from the sea wafted across the town. Apple trees were in blossom, poplars shimmered with silvery green.

After the kissing of the cross, when the service was over, a grey-haired priest, wearing faded vestments and purple headgear, instead of preaching the usual sermon, addressed the congregation:

"People! Do not disperse to your homes; you are to be questioned by an official from the sovereign."

"We have heard you, father."

A fair-haired man, wearing a crimson coat and a sword, came forward. In front of the vestry gates he came to a stop, made an immense sign of the cross in the Nikonian style with three fingers and kissed the ikons of St. Nicholas, Our Saviour and Our Lady.

A murmur ran through the crowd: "Newfangled ways!"

The dignitary, ignoring this remark, mounted the pulpit in the side chapel, flourished his cap backwards and forwards as though he were bowing, and began to speak in a husky voice:

"People of Yaik! I am going to question you about the following events: When the bandits were here with Stenka Razin, who sailed to sea last month, what happened to the tsar's warrant, which was brought to him for signature by the envoys of Astrakhan's voivode, prince Ivan Semenovich, and was read to him and handed over to him by the said envoys? This is my first question, and you are to answer it truthfully, for in the House of God and in the presence of His saints and the representatives of the sovereign tsar you will not dare say anything but the plain truth."

"Pray be more brief!"

"I put my questions as I deem fit," replied the delegate, swaying to and fro.

"Why are you swaying like a tree in the wind?"

"Such is my custom—but that is no business of yours. You will have your say later; for the moment I want to hear what your father confessor has to reveal."

The grey-haired archpriest issued from the vestry, slowly crossed himself before the gates of the sanctuary and, without vouchsafing a glance at the delegate, replied in a thin, bleating voice:

"Before Almighty God I swear I do not know what became of the sovereign tsar's dispatch." Thereupon he quietly withdrew to the vestry.

"Have you found out a lot from that statement?"

"Find out I will! Hey, you people, who among you knows anything? Speak out!"

Bearded faces shone grey, huge hands made the sign of the cross, dark blue sleeves moved up and down, shafts of light streamed through the narrow windows of the tower into the stuffy atmosphere and touched men's heads with a golden or copper aura; a smell of incense exuded from their perspiring bodies, and the blue fumes floated above the heads of the congregation, while from below came the reek of tar from boots.

"Those of you who are not false to the great sovereign, let them speak!"

A man in a dark blue coat elbowed his way to the pulpit.

"The letter—ataman Stenka Razin . . ."

"You must say 'robber'!"

". . . Stenka Razin received the letter in due time; well, and he did turn away the voivode's envoys; yes, but he called the Cossack Assembly to discuss what the letter's purport was, then he addressed the sovereign's delegation thus . . ."

"The sovereign tsar and grand prince of All Russia," corrected the commissar.

". . . he addressed the delegation: 'A letter is a letter, but who sent it? I don't know that. How can I tell if it really is from the tsar? I have many reasons for doubting it. The tsar might forgive me, but the boyars hold me in high displeasure. In this world I don't trust the boyars!' said he. As to what he did with the letter itself, I have not the least idea."

A tradesman from a family of musketeers came forward.

"Listen, sir—I know."

"Ah! Well?"

"As the ataman . . ."

"No, no! 'Robber', I tell you—rob-ber!"

". . . Razin did not gather from that letter that the great sovereign had reprieved him for his misdeeds . . ."

"Stop, you Yaik scoundrel! To my certain knowledge, nothing in that letter said anything about the great sovereign granting the robber pardon. Not a word of the sort appeared in the letter."

". . . He, the ataman, tore up the letter and trampled it into the sand, saying: 'When I receive a new and authentic letter, then will I sue for pardon.'"

The delegate, still swaying about on the pulpit, scanned the crowd searchingly and called out loudly:

"Agents of the tsar, take down this Yaik tradesman's evidence in writing; also note his name, and find out who he actually is."

It seemed as if a hurricane had swept over the crowd.

"You've come here not to govern but to lord it over us!"

"Pokes his ugly face into the ikons while signalling to the spies."

"Eh, delegate, your justice is bad justice."

"It may be bad for you, but it's good for me. I shall find out everything, and those who refuse to speak voluntarily or prove recalcitrant will be arrested."

"Beware of trying to govern our town by such means!"

"You dwell on a seaboard. I know you have been filibusters for ages past; but the eye of the great sovereign is ever vigilant, and the right hand of the tsar is strong. Ivan Yatsyn has been done to death. . . ."

"Question us first. You can fire abuse at us afterwards."

"Another question: Whither has the bandit Stenka Razin dispatched the Tatar prisoners he took at Emansuga, near Astrakhan?"

"He sold the women and girls to the Kalmuks and carried off the men and boys to sea."

"How did he, the robber, take away the big cannon, thus leaving the walls of the town unprotected?"

"The smaller guns he took with him, and the larger pieces he plumped into the sea. He said: 'The town of Yaik must be levelled to the ground, it is too menacing an obstacle to free people.'"

"So that's how things stand!"

An angry voice cut in:

"We can wring men's necks as well as those of cockerels, you spy!"

"Who dares shout threats in God's temple?"

"You yourself are responsible for turning the church into a public-house, or maybe into a spies' office."

"Spies? Write down what these men say and find out all about them."

"It shall come to pass just as the ataman foretold: Yaik will cease to be; and we ourselves shall level it to the ground."

"Here, spies!"

"Better summon the musketeers."

Outside the tower, musket- and cannon-shots could be heard, and the smell of gunpowder filtered through the windows. The cannon reserved to sound the alarm boomed forth from the glacis of the angle tower; it was immediately answered by the ringing of the tocsin. The delegate, his belly shaking, seized a pistol in his right hand, while holding in his left his cap; he ran down the pulpit steps and disappeared within the vestry.

"Shall we wring the devil's neck?"

"Better wait."

"Who can be firing the cannon?"

"It's firing from the sea. Suknin and Rudakov have seized the reserve craft and fled."

"Have they, indeed?"

"No, the musketeers were too quick for them; a patrol was concealed among the bulrushes."

Hearing the words "the musketeers were too quick", Sakmyshev plucked up courage to emerge from the vestry while the congregation was leaving the chapel.

Behind the town gates, on the crest of a ravine, stood the voivode's delegate, commanding his musketeers from Astrakhan; swaying in his customary manner and brandishing his sword, he shouted:

"Bring those blackguards to the tower. I myself will see to them. Chain them up and post a strong guard at the tower."

About a score of Cossacks in blue coats, with their hands fastened behind

their backs, were led uphill from the beach. Foremost among them was Suknin, his officer's coat torn, its tailpiece trailing along the ground. Blood trickled from his black hair to his neck. Behind him limped old Rudakov, his grey head lowered, his keen eyes gazing unblinking from beneath heavy eyebrows; the old man looked both grim and stubborn.

Commander Sakmyshev sheathed his sword and kicked up a dust as he approached the prisoners, and, hitting Suknin in the face, guffawed:

"Here's one for you, you traitor of our sovereign tsar!" And he clumsily dealt another such blow on Rudakov's neck.

Though Suknin's nose was bleeding, he walked on as passive as before. Rudakov swore lustily at the blow.

"When I have chosen a good executioner in Yaik, I'll give you two robbers a good dressing-down and steam you thoroughly in the bath-house."

"You'll have some trouble choosing the sort of man you need, you son of a tsar's bitch. Meanwhile the falcons will have flown away," Rudakov growled, with a sidelong look at the commander.

"I shall break their legs, then they won't be able to get away."

In obedience to Sakmyshev's orders to find a solitary hut, the musketeers had for long searched the town, and at last had found one to the commander's taste. It stood near one of the gates leading into the steppe; it had a chimney and a raised platform by the stove. The story went that this hut had once been inhabited by a robber Cossack, who eventually fled to join Razin. Here Sakmyshev took up his quarters and enjoyed the added advantage of having a deaf woman to manage for him. The musketeers had received orders to fix lighted torches in the corners of the front wall. Sakmyshev himself lit four tallow candles in brass holders and set them on the table. A big loaded arquebus was installed in the corner by the door. Finally he laid two pistols, paper, ink and three goosequills on the plain deal table. His overcoat had been flung on a bench under the window to be ready in case he felt inclined for a snooze.

Sakmyshev did not feel sleepy, though he had not closed an eye during the journey from Astrakhan; he dreaded an assault by the bandits, and so here, after many days' experience, the slightest sound scared him. The quietude which reigned over the sleeping town appeared full of menace. He pricked his ears at the very first toll of the tocsin; he visualized the angry faces of citizens thinking their own secret thoughts—robber thoughts. He wanted to write, but could not, neither could he sleep. The room became unbearable to him, so he went out into the street. Five musketeers were on guard outside the hut, the blades of their weapons glimmering white in the moonlight.

As Sakmyshev passed bareheaded from the hut in his three-quarter length grey coat and his sword buckled to his side, he addressed the sentries:

"I shall buy you some vodka, my lads; keep on the alert."

"Never fear, Afanasi Kuzmich."

"If we keep standing, we shall not go to sleep."

Beyond the gate stretched the steppe, a tawny grey infinity, bathed in moonlight. A warm wind brought a smell of distant salt marshes. Sakmyshev stood awhile straining his ears to listen; a thin inhuman whistle reached his ears, then a roar like that of a camel. An owl flung itself from the wall overhead, hooting as it soared slowly up into the opal-tinted sky on its flapping and outspread wings; a hare, caught in the talons of a bird of prey, squealed near by.

Sakmyshev retraced his steps towards the town; he passed two musketeers, who were mounting guard at the gates in the wall; one of them, lit up by the moon, seemed to be wearing a dingy red coat; the other, standing in the deep shadow, looked black, and his face was of greyish hue.

"I shall see that you get some vodka; don't doze off, lads."

"We never sleep on duty."

"We're keeping guard all right, commander."

The last speaker added, when the commander was out of earshot:

"Today we humble ourselves before him, but tomorrow maybe we shall slit his throat."

His comrade replied with a chuckle:

"We'll finish off the devil!"

"I ought to go round to the tower, but my legs seem very drowsy. . . . What does it matter, anyway? There is a strong guard there . . . and yet . . . I wonder what the bandits are up to? They are in irons, I know; still, one never knows. . . . I'd better order that stones be piled up against the gate giving onto the steppe . . . in case of Kalmuks or some other nomads. . . . The musketeers —heaven knows what's in their minds—speak affably, but their faces are fierce . . ." mused the commander.

A brook ran down the hillock among bushes and tumbled, sparkling, alongside the wall.

"This water probably comes from the cache in the unused tower."

Black hovels and bath-houses huddled by the stream at the base of the slope; some were mere dug-outs, while others were built of wood. Scurrying eddies sparkled between the bath-houses.

Sakmyshev left the road leading to the gates and sauntered in the direction of the built-up area of the town. The wooden structures almost merged with the shadows of the trees, which stood out in grey-green patches in the moonlight and black in the shades. A warm wind fanned his face, he sniffed the smell of grass, his luxuriant beard was softly stirred by the breeze; the day's worries were appeased; drowsily he pondered:

"Black arabesques . . . as if trimmed with mica or snippets of flax, black on silver. . . ." Suddenly he started and cocked his ears. . . . "Sounded like someone touching the bell in the belfry. Nonsense! Devil take this darkness! It sickens me, and I cannot sleep. . . . Why is it that I have such a horror of the dark? Better set to and write. . . ."

He dragged his steps towards five gleaming blades.

"Keep a sharp lookout, lads!"

"Have no fear, commander, we're on the alert all the time."

When he re-entered his hut he noticed that the cobwebs hanging from the ceiling were thick with soot from the torches, and the candles on the table needed snuffing. He trimmed the flames. The old woman snored on the wide stove-shelf; she smelt of death and putrefaction.

"Hi, you old harridan, stop snoring! I ought to open the windows, but I am scared to death."

Came a crescendo of snoring.

"The old hag . . . deaf as a doorpost! Knock at the window with a cudgel and she'd be none the wiser."

Drawing up the bench, Sakmyshev sat down. He waved his arms above the table as though he intended to pick up a poleaxe instead of a quill, tugged at his

long beard, and from force of habit bowed as he placed a sheet of paper before him.

"I'll make a draft first, omitting the titles and all that."

He leaned over his work and dipped the quill in the inkwell.

"To the voivode, prince Ivan Semenovich, a report from Afanasi Sakmyshev. Whereas you, prince and voivode, ordered me to send reports concerning activities in the town of Yaik, so I obey on this the first day of my sojourn here. I am dispatching this report by the Tatar messenger Urunchei, and inform you, prince, as to the truth concerning the said town. Firstly, in the chapel of the ikon of Our Saviour-not-made-with-human-hands, I questioned the townsfolk about the robber Stenka Razin and your note to him. I discovered that the robber had torn up your note to him and trampled upon it. Secondly, about the Tatar prisoners captured at Emansuga, the said robber sold the women and maidens to the Kalmuks and carried the males off to sea and in four and twenty barges set sail for Gilyan on the Caspian Sea. Rumour has it, though this is not yet confirmed, that he intends to become a subject of the shah Abbas. It might be as well, prince, were you to warn boyar Pushkin in Moscow of this rumour, so as to forestall the robber through our envoy at the shah's court. In order to investigate these rumours, I would beg you, my good sirs, prince Ivan Semenovich and colleagues, to dispatch reliable reinforcements here under such men as, for instance, Vasili Boltin, for the people here are unreliable, restive and inclined to piracy owing to the proximity of the sea. Threats were shouted at me in the chapel, and while I was trying to persuade the townsfolk not to side with the robbers, but to disclose everything they knew concerning your letter, a dozen Cossacks and robber musketeers from Lopuhin's command, who had already joined the robber Razin in the affray on the Ilovlya river, robbed me and seized the boats and supplies left behind for the incapacitated by the said robber, and put out to sea firing arquebuses and muskets. But with God's help we rounded them up and placed the ringleaders Fedka Suknin and the Cossack robber Rudakov in irons and flung them into the corner tower under guard, where they will be kept pending your orders, prince and voivode. I consider that they should be tortured so that we may extract from them the names of other robbers now in Yaik, for their number here is legion! The people in the church said that the robber Stenka Razin had threatened to raze Yaik to the ground, which seemed to please them very much, and, to all appearance, they are ready to do the job themselves, and if none of the tsar's armed forces come to relieve us they will have their will. In my opinion, it would be better to move Yaik farther up the river and away from the seaboard to a spot where moats have been dug, a pallisade put up, and buildings already exist; whereas here the robbers have an easy way of escape. The task of setting up a new town will not be onerous; there is plenty of building stone in the mountains. Chern Yar was transferred to a different spot by order of the sovereign tsar to prevent it crumbling into the Volga?"

With his report unfinished, Sakmyshev suddenly sank to the table overwhelmed with fatigue from the many sleepless nights and days. Overcome with sleep, he muttered to himself: "Ah, this won't do! To limber up one's bones one must lie down. . . ." Somnolently, he rose, trimmed the torches, blew out

the candles and, without taking off his boots, unbuckled his sword, threw himself face downwards on his overcoat and forthwith fell asleep like a man dead drunk.

9

A group of musketeers, who had been posted to watch over Suknin and Rudakov, clustered in the deep shadow cast by the town wall and the tower aslant the square. The men paraded about with their arquebuses on their shoulders. A tall, lithe woman, decked out in holiday attire, crossed the square; she was followed by an equally tall girl with loosely flowing locks, who walked with eyes downcast and kicking up the dust with her sturdy feet. She wore a bright silk sarafan, and her breasts stuck out beneath her light-coloured blouse.

"Ah!"

"Hallo, wench! What's the time o' night?"

"Which of us will you be wanting, soldier?"

"Is it far off midnight? We change guard about that time."

"I reckon it's another half-hour till then."

The woman raised her head and looked at the moon.

"Ah, the devil!"

"She's a fine woman, isn't she?"

"She excites my blood, she's that fine!"

"Hey, lass, whose milk is it?"

"Nay, soldiers, it isn't milk, but honey kvass with a spot of fermented hops in it."

"Strong ferment?"

"No, just enough to make a man's heart merry." The woman paused and lowered the jug from her shoulder.

"I do not suppose you thought to bring a mug?"

"No, but maybe the girl has one. We're on our way to my brother's to celebrate his name-day. I'm taking the kvass as a gift."

A musketeer approached and peered into the jug.

"What kvass! Do let me have a sip."

"You're not a shy bird! That's all right; have a taste if you will."

"I know you are a Christian, so what's there to be squeamish about?"

"I'm of the old faith." The woman took from the girl a silver goblet wrapped in a handkerchief.

"Here's a cup fit for a voivode!"

" 'Tis a present for my brother. Drink!"

"My, but it tastes good!"

Another musketeer came up.

"You gave some to him, so why not a sip to me also?"

"You're no worse than he. Drink to your own good health."

"May I in very truth? What a woman!"

"You may all of you have a drink; I'll brew a fresh lot at my brother's. His name-day isn't till after tomorrow. We're staying the night."

"Don't mention your brother so often; leave him out of it."

"We're kind folk; stay along with us."

"Hi, you devils, give me some!"

"All of you are serving the tsar, keeping guard over robbers—plague on

them! Drink your fill! I would grudge it to anyone else, but not to the like of you."

Ten musketeers took it in turns to sip the thick liquid from the cup.

"All the folks in this town are devils; but here we have a miracle, for at last we've found a Christian soul."

"Stop swilling! That's your third, and we're only at our second. You'd lap the whole lot up were we not here to prevent you."

"Swill, but don't spill."

"May the Devil butt you with his horns!"

Eyes glistened in the moonlit dusk; tongues and hands wagged more freely.

"What fun to love such a woman!"

"Not all of you at once! Drink, sweetheart, there's plenty of time. I've been love-sick this long while now."

"Eh, devil take you, we'll serve you with half a score at one go."

"Do you hear her, fellows? She doesn't refuse to be loved. Are you a widow?"

"Yes, these four years past."

"I shall prop my arquebus up against the wall."

"Fling it down."

"The sand is dry, so it won't rust."

"I don't care a damn if it does."

"To hell with the arquebus, it's been grazing my shoulder for years."

"That's something like a brew!"

"She's got us all right. . . ."

Flinging away his arquebus, and embracing the woman, a musketeer began to sing:

"Wait, young fellow, be a man,
Don't you soil my sarafan.
My sarafan I made myself, myself,
Its bunting can't be on the shelf."

Another soldier, swaying on his feet, shouted:

"I'd like to drink of your brew all my life long."

"Witch that you are! What a brew! Head quite clear, eyes keen, but arms and legs like wood."

"I was the first to pass the time o' day with you. When it comes to tumbling you, I must be first too."

"Very well, but first finish the drink."

"That we will; catch us leaving any. . . ."

One of the soldiers, while endeavouring to pick up his arquebus, kept on muttering:

"Lads, suppose our commander were to turn up? He's merciless to the likes of us."

"Let that arquebus be! I've thrown mine down, too. To hell with the commander!"

"He, ho, when we were marching through the steppe he promised us vodka; but not a drop have we had so far."

"He drinks it all himself! I'd like to give all men of his stamp a good drubbing."

"Let's forsake him and take to the sea."

"And take him along with us?"

"In a sack? Ha, ha, ha!"

"In a sack, by God!"

"Ha, ha, there's a devil. . . ."

"Ho, ho!"

"You wait here. The woman is for you; I prefer maids."

"Nay, you wait a moment. Let's agree either for all to have the maid or none."

"All! Are we not every one of us service men?"

"What asses you are!"

"We, asses?"

The maid's silk sarafan shimmered in the moonlight. She had overheard what the men were planning and moved out into the square. The musketeers, especially the tipsy ones, were lured by the sight of her, especially when she unfastened the collar of her blouse. The soldiers shambled after her, trying to persuade one another:

"Don't run, lads, you'll frighten her."

"First we'll surround her, then we'll press her back into a corner, soldier fashion."

"Only don't run. See, she's fleet of foot, and we're not."

"Mine are not too steady."

"Neither are mine; they don't seem able to move."

"Shall we go back?"

"Yes, nearer to the sentry-box."

Three of the soldiers turned back and seated themselves on the threshold of the tower, where the door, which had been rammed in during Razin's attack, had been replaced by a rickety piece of wooden railing. The seven others stubbornly followed the girl.

"Time we got hold of the baggage."

"Maybe we'd better go back to the tower. What if the commander——"

"I'd let him have a taste of a new bast shoe."

Lissom and enticing, the girl held up the hem of her sarafan, displaying her tanned and shining knees; luring the soldiers on with her bare breast; walking a short distance ahead; winking at them and teasing them. Tantalizingly, she crept from lane to lane, through holes in the fences, into hop gardens with their cloying smell of flowers, which clung to the poles.

The musketeers trailed after her making obscene jokes; they looked as if they were all attached to a single rope, inflamed with desire, with but one wish: to corner the girl in a blind alley. Some of them complained that they did not know their whereabouts.

"We've lost our way."

"Where are the towers?"

"There are so many towers that you may search all through the night and not find the one you are seeking."

Two of the men bumped into one another, swore, clasped each other, sat down, and no sooner had they touched the ground than they dropped off to sleep. Two more fell behind asking whither the Devil was leading them. They failed to see the towers looming above their heads. The remaining three lost sight of and forgot the object of their quest, cursed the town, which—according to them

—was built on sandhills over which it was impossible to get a foothold. Their boots sank in the sand and grew heavier; they straggled hopelessly, muttering incoherent words about towers, guards, arquebuses, losing themselves in warm, somnolent lanes, bewitched by the silvery green mirage of the moon.

As soon as the musketeers had left the square the woman cast a look round, approached the prison tower, listened a moment to the breathing of the three sleeping soldiers and touched their hair; she then took from beneath her apron a small tambourine and struck it lightly with the back of her beringed hand. The delicate tap of the tambourine was immediately answered by the appearance of a youth with the movements of an animal; he had his jet-black hair cut in a circle, which covered his forehead and ears like a closely fitting cap. The woman said coolly:

"Hassan, do as we agreed. Break the railings down, climb into the tower and saw through the fetters which bind Fedor and the old man."

"I go! I will do as you say, God willing."

Doubling up his body, the odd youth hurled himself on the railings, which cracked and gave way under the impact; then, like a lightning streak, he darted into the tower, and his footsteps died away.

## 10

Suknin and all the other Cossacks and musketeers who had been incarcerated in the tower emerged, closely followed by the thin green wraith of the strange lad with the coal-black hair. The woman with the jug disappeared. The escaped captives broke up into groups of five or ten and moved stealthily betwixt shadow and moonlight. Some, obeying orders, crept on with their swords or poleaxes in hand towards the houses wherein the commander had billeted his men, and wherever sentries were encountered they were dealt with in complete silence, without a shot. The Yaik men gave short shrift to their guests from Astrakhan. Those who surrendered were searched, disarmed and escorted under guard to the square. Squads of five men each were busily digging in the right and left corners of every tower; others rolled up barrels.

The musketeers, who were asleep in the doorway of the prison tower, were dragged aside, and their noses were heartily tweaked, but nothing could rouse them from their drunken sleep.

"Fedor's wife is a witch."

"What makes you think so?"

"One gulp of her brew sends a man off his head."

"Oh, that's true enough; she's past-mistress at brewing of strong liquor."

"Have you the tinder ready?"

"Yes, but you'd better first make the hole deeper and shove in the fuse and tinder; powder won't catch fire without a tinder."

"I know that, brother! Every devil of any rank who comes here from Moscow or Astrakhan lays down the law and brings executioners and spies to torture us Yaik folk. . . ."

"Life has become very hard in Yaik; too many of the tsar's watchdogs are about!"

"Heigh-ho, if only God would lend a hand in rolling a few casks under the tsar's palace!"

"Well, it is Stepan Timofeievich who will have to take a hand in doing that. Once he comes, we'll roll the powder barrels under the tsar's walls."

A tall figure in a dark blue coat and armed with a sword drew near the tower.

"Well, brothers, how goes the work?"

"We've dug it all in, Fedor Vasilich."

"Excellent! Place longer fuses and then get back as far as possible into the square. We'll rouse up the guests, and in the turmoil which will ensue we'll finish off all those who do not join us."

"D'you think our own Cossacks and musketeers are to be depended on?"

"The Cossacks and townsfolk, certainly; we'll give the Astrakhanians a better showing than we did at sea."

"Have the ambushes been set?"

"Everything has been done."

"A trifle more digging, and then we'll be able to set the fuses."

Suknin went to another tower.

## 11

Sakmyshev heard his father's voice:

"Afanasi! There's the drum, you'll be late for reveille."

The commander rolled over to one side on the seat and tumbled to the floor. He struck his head against the boards; the nape of his neck and the heels of his boots made a loud thud. He awoke and sat up where he found himself.

"Who is speaking to me? God forgive me, but it seemed as though my dead father were saying 'the drum'!"

Shaking off the drowsiness which weighed him down, the commander rose to his feet, moved nearer the bench on which he had lain, and then heard something crackling in the corner. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and saw that one of the torches was leaning against the ancient ikon shrine and setting it on fire; the tinfoil on the ikons was already smouldering. He picked up his cap to smother the flame of the torch. A sudden roar reached his ears from without and caused him to draw back the wooden shutter from the window and then to lay his ear and chin upon the sill. Sakmyshev heard someone call, then followed a murmur of many voices. Without stopping for his cap, he hurried outside. The hafts of the guards' five poleaxes were fixed into the ground, their five blades shining like five crescent moons fallen from the sky without reaching the earth.

"Ah, those musketeers! They've deserted——"

Swaying to and fro, Sakmyshev stood facing the poleaxes; he felt as if he were being pricked behind the ears with an awl; cold sweat ran down him. Still swaying, he craned his neck and listened; a whistle, a highwayman's whistle, such as he had frequently heard on the Volga, was repeatedly answered from several quarters.

"The robbers must have landed from the sea again, I am sure of it; I must have overslept! I wonder whether I should make for the steppe; I may come across some of my men there."

He quickly returned to the hut; his teeth were chattering; hastily he pulled on his overcoat, buckled on his sword, tore off his pointed beaver hat, trimmed

with a strip of brocade to mark the rank of senior officer, shoved it into his pocket, shouldered his arquebus and went out in the direction of the gate leading to the steppe. When he passed by the gates, where the sentries were on duty, he muttered his habitual promise and encouragement:

"Keep awake, lads! I'll see that you get some vodka."

But the musketeers barred the passage with their pole-axes.

"We have our orders. No one is to enter or quit the town after midnight."

"It's my own order. I am your commander."

"Your name?"

"Commander Afanasi Sakmyshev."

"You are not wearing his cap."

"We don't know your face; it is strange to us."

"I can't make you out; what's the matter with you? Let me through!"

"Now, then, my man, be off with you!"

"If you persist we'll have no alternative but to cut you down."

Sakmyshev turned away from the gate.

"I wonder whether they are hoaxing me or honestly carrying out their duty?" he thought. "It puzzles me. Can my life be forfeit? It's too dangerous for me to go into the town alone. I can see from their expression that the musketeers are planning treason. Better hide; but where?"

Peering from side to side, he struck off the road and slid down the slope to the stream, where he thrust his heavy arquebus into a bush. Then he crawled into the ante-room of a bath-house and sat shivering on a bench while he drew his coat closer about him.

"I ought to have changed into another coat; this one is too smart; 'twas a gift from the voivode."

His ruminations were cut short by a terrific explosion. The entire mountain on which the town was built seemed to quake. Sand and rubble from the ceiling came hurtling down on him and made him jump away from the bench. A second explosion followed close upon the first.

"Well, I have failed to escape; must have been asleep while my chance was open. I felt it in my bones that the musketeers were robbers. Now we're done for. I wonder if they intend to destroy Yaik and blow up the walls?"

He walked cautiously to the door leading to the bath-house itself and groped his way to the steaming-shelf; the moon was reflected in a pool of light just beneath. He climbed to the shelf and stretched himself so as to command a view outside the window. Though his face remained in the shadow, his beard caught the moonlight. Open-mouthed, yet scarcely venturing to breathe, he listened and distinguished certain sounds. They were voices shouting to one another:

"Lads, haul out all the captains."

"Cut 'em down!"

Sakmyshev expected to hear his own name and rank; he thought:

"All's up with me; the musketeers have joined the robbers."

The last voice he had recently heard was wafted towards him:

"Shall we search the bath-house?"

"They're on me!" He crouched down in a dark corner and hid his face.

The pebbles and cinders strewn in front of the entrance crunched, the door creaked and was thrust open by an impatient hand.

"Brothers, here he is!"

"Out with the devil."

12

By the time Sakmyshev found himself in the square he barely recognized the town. It was enveloped in a whirl of silvery dust; the square itself was littered with broken masonry; fragments of stone and plaster; the front part of the town wall had disappeared as well as the corner towers; the central gate tower with its chapel stood solitary amid the ruins; its iron gates had been torn off their hinges; the surrounding moats were filled with rubble, from which rose clouds of the same silvery dust.

The place was thronged with men in sheepskin caps and dark blue overcoats; musketeers in blue and crimson uniforms. When Sakmyshev glanced at his own men he was struck by the change in their faces: they were fierce and rebellious. He overheard a voice addressing someone:

"Vasilich, what about the gate tower? Shall we blow that up, too?"

"No, brothers," replied a tall man in a dark blue coat. The commander recognized the ringleader Suknin, to whom he had dealt a blow when the Cossacks had been captured at sea.

"Listen to me," added Suknin; "the gate tower harbours the chapel where our fathers and forebears worshipped. Let it go unscathed; it is in no one's way."

"My end is near. The musketeers have played me false," reflected Sakmyshev, when the tall, keen-eyed Suknin stepped up to him; 'he's thinking of cutting me down; he's handling his sword."

"What about the commander, shall we behead him?" the musketeers asked.

"Put him in a sack. Let him fathom Yaik's depths. There's plenty of room in the river for the tsar's men!"

"Ho, ho! Come along, lads, bring the sack."

Being tall of build, the commander's head and beard protruded from the sack.

"Tighten the cords!"

Numbed with fear, Sakmyshev said nothing. He was propped up in a semi-recumbent position against a pile of bricks, while the men collected more bricks and stowed them away in the sack. Suknin, glancing in the commander's direction, recalled something:

"Ah, I was almost forgetting!" He stepped up to Sakmyshev and kicked him in the face with his metal-ringed heel.

The commander groaned, tears gushed from his eyes, blood oozed from his mutilated nose and coursed down his beard.

"That's in settlement of my debt to you and also for you to remember me by."

The commander, with the sack and stones, was hauled into a cart and dragged to the river bank by his own crimson-uniformed musketeers.

As morning broke, banks of refreshing mist rolled in from the sea. At the mouth of the river Yaik barges were being loaded with grain, flour and gunpowder. Here and there axes were hammering, and the chips of wood flew into the air and then dropped to the ground. Masts were being fitted on the barges, and cabins put up on the decks. Some of the masts were already rigged with blue and white sails. Seated on a pile of bricks at the top of the hill, a tall, smartly dressed woman was weeping, keening as women of old used to keen their dead. Fedor Suknin held her closely embraced; then he slowly rose and said:

"I stayed behind Stepan Timofeievich, and what came of it, Ivanovna?"

"Oh, sweetheart, what shall I do without you?"

"God is merciful, we shall meet again." Suknin made his way to the shore.

Rudakov in dark blue from neck to toe, with his grey head bared, shouted to him from below:

"Hurry up, captain, there is much to be done and to show the men."

"Coming, ataman!" Looking back, he cried: "Ivanovna, my precious wife, do not grieve or shed tears, we shall meet by and by!"

Scrambling headlong from the crest of the hill, the black-haired curious youth in his faded green kaftan sprang into Rudakov's barge, shouting with joy:

"I'm coming with you!"

"Very well, Hassan. We agreed that for services rendered you would be taken back to Persia."

Suknin cast another glance up the hill and could not restrain the impulse to dash up once more and kiss his wife while she clung to him sobbing bitterly.

Again Rudakov shouted:

"Do not tarry, Fedor. You know that the mounted patrol, led by the voivode, is advancing over the steppe with intent to attack Yaik. We must at all costs forestall the tsar's spies. So hasten our escape; bring over to father Stepan the musketeers and Cossacks together with Sakmyshev's men, who have joined us."

"I know, ataman; I'm coming. Farewell, my dear! These are no times for a Cossack to stay at home. Don't break your heart; go back home! . . . Here I am, ataman."

Musketeers on the beach, having secured the sack containing the weeping commander, were singing a chanty:

"Brothers, give way,
Heave uncle away!"

There issued from the sack a childish whimper.

"Steady now! Heave-oh!"

The sack was hurled above the weir, and with a heavy splash it sank into the river, sending up bubbles and drawing circles and curves on the surface.

"Pleasant swim, you voivode's friend!"

"There'll be no more spying from him."

An hour later the Yaik free forces, accompanied with songs and whoopings, put out to sea in their grey craft with its coloured sails. Rowlocks creaked as the men plied their oars outward bound on the Caspian Sea.

That same evening Vasili Boltin arrived with his forces to rebuild Yaik and to introduce order.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IN THE HVALYNSK SEA

#### 1

THE barges with the canoes in tow left long, white wakes on the indigo expanse as they ploughed their way towards the Hvalynsk Sea. Rowlocks creaked and groaned under the pressure put on them; the sails were closely furled to the

tarred masts with pennons fluttering here and there against a black background. Razin's convoy stretched so far that its tail was swallowed up in the misty distance, which merged with the deep blue of the sky. At times the rallying-cry could be heard from end to end of this lengthy string of craft:

"*Ne-e-cha-ai!*"

"*Ne-e-cha-ai!*"

Dark specks of islands could be seen emerging from the azure distance.

"Are we keeping a straight course?"

"Heading east, captain."

"Islands ahead? There should be no islands here."

In the biggest barge, with Serezhka of the Blind Eye, the ataman reclined on a rug spread over the lower deck. Candles shed a wavering light in the hold, fell over and spluttered out, to be rekindled and burn unsteadily. The small portholes were covered with ox-bladders. The two men drank out of deep cups, spilling much of the potent liquor over their coats. The boyar's son Lazunka was rummaging in the lockers in his search for copper wine pitchers. He was dressed in a green coat with round silver buttons looped over his chest. Serezhka had brought the ataman a gift of triply strong mead from his native land. The casks were firmly corded together with bast ropes so as to prevent them from rolling with the swell, and they had been stood in a corner of the hold.

"The voivodes have tried to keep me from going to sea, brother," observed Serezhka, "but me and my lads gave them a sound licking in Karabuzan. The musketeers ceased fire, and their commander escaped by the skin of his teeth. After that I joined you, bringing men and gifts."

Thus saying, Serezhka craned his neck and listened to the plashing waves, while a large ring with a gem in the setting glistened in his right ear.

"Why are you craning your neck, Sergei, like a horse sensing foul weather?"

"Because, Stepan, I have a shrewd feeling that those are not islands, but galleys from Gilyan."

"Our look-out men surely have eyes in their heads! Drink!"

"I am drinking. Why shouldn't I? But I know the sea very well. My hearing of it is more than mortal. Just now I hear sounds like a battle in a dream; I hear voices."

"Drain your goblet! The sea is calm, otherwise you'd not be able to carry it to your mouth. Now as a witness at my wedding you are compelled to give me news of my little wife. How is my Oliona?"

"Yes, I know my obligations. Your godfather is pestering her with his attentions and bestows gifts on her."

"The devil he is! What about her?"

"Oh, she's all right. She accepts the gifts, but keeps herself to herself. As to your youngsters—my word! The eldest, Grishka, is a smart lad and bold, almost fit to go to sea; he'll turn out a Cossack after your own heart. Your brother Frol—well, he's nothing but an old woman; no good at all. He just twangs his domra, plays at weddings, and so forth. Hark, Stepan! There are voices. Honest to God, I can hear them. It must be galleys."

"Let's drink. I have as sharp an ear as you and can hear from miles away. I'm not a hundred yet and can hear as well as anyone."

"Drink up and then come on deck."

Once aloft, black heads could be seen bobbing among the white horses, pale

and misty as they swirled upon the blue surface of the sea. Now and again a silver headpiece with diamond plumes gleamed against the dark background. The black points stood out clearer in the distance. Crouching on their stomachs, Razin and Serezhka lay in the stern gazing out to sea and inhaling the scents of water and wind, which now and then carried the smell of human habitation.

"Do you feel it?"

"I do, Sergei."

"And the breath of human beings?"

"Ay, both!" Razin sprang to his feet, and all down the line could be heard the call:

"*Ne-e-cha-ai!*"

"*Ne-cha-ai!*"

"Falcons, where are the captains?"

"Father, they are on the leading barge. Only one of them, Piotr Mokeyev, is asleep on this one; but I'm afraid to wake him, for he fights when roused, and you know what his blows are like. I'll have a try later on."

"Don't disturb Piotr. Summon the others."

Razin touched Serezhka's shoulder, saying:

"You know, brother Sergei, this Piotr's strength is like that of the old-time Zaporozhian Cossack Burliai; he can lift a horse if he has a mind to."

"Where does he come from, brother?"

"He forsook the voivode on the Volga. For him, going into battle is like going home; his mind is like a child's; anything pleases him. Today, when I gave him a gilt copper clasp, he almost bowed to the ground, so thankful was he. Yes, a child; but what strength!"

"Good! I respect strength."

A prolonged whistle was heard—the agreed signal of the bandits, for summoning the captains; it drowned the creaking of the rowlocks and was answered by shouts of:

"Coming!"

Ivan Serebriakov, his white hair gleaming through the mist, clambered into the ataman's barge, followed by a shorter figure, which could be none other than that of Chernoyarets.

"Where is the ataman?"

Volotski was the next to appear, his sword, as usual, rattling in its scabbard; then came Rudakov, with his long, lean shanks. The last to board the craft was a lithe figure in a semi-long coat which looked black in the darkness. This was Fedor Suknin.

"Hi, the order is to go quietly without a sound."

"Order away, Stephan Timofeievich:"

"I merely wish to ask you, brothers, what you think is ahead of us?"

"To me they look like galleys."

"No, they're islands."

"By God, captains, they're galleys!"

"From Gilyan do you suppose?"

"Ay, brothers, those are galleys and not islands. Issue orders for the Cossacks to man the canoes. The scouts warned us we should encounter the Persian flotilla. No cannon is to be put aboard the canoes; carry arquebuses and, if needs must, shoot. Overhaul the hawsers on the grappling-irons. Throw the firebrands on the enemy ships, use short axes, not poleaxes, also boat-hooks.

Keep an easterly course, but manœuvre when you deem it necessary. To relieve the oarsmen, cut down the speed of the barges and let the canoes take the lead. They are to await the signal—a cannon-shot—then attack the galleys, ripping their hulks below water level. One thing more: every ten canoes to be under the command of a captain, and one of them must be manned by musketeers under myself and Ivan Serebriakov."

"Understood."

"Good for you, father! Now, come on you fellows!"

Again a whistle and a voice:

"Cossacks! Action stations on the canoes; all speed ahead!"

In obedience to that voice and that whistle the black mass dispersed over the deep blue expanse of waters.

## 2

A large flotilla of ships had been mustered by the khan of Gilyan in the bay, formed by the east to north curve of the coast, which was surrounded by low hills covered with cypress; the khan was waiting for day to break; on board his own carpeted ship he had summoned a council of war. On the deck of this large vessel there was a sunhouse for the khan's accommodation. It was constructed of palm-wood planks, and its latticed windows were glazed with glass. The walls and floor of the khan's apartment were bedecked with rugs. At the far end was a raised platform, draped with golden Fergana rugs, the whole resembling a wide and spacious couch. It was reached by three gilded steps. Tall, carved ebony pilasters stood against the walls, and on them were placed bowls of burning naphtha. Two of these stood close to the khan, whose face in the flickering light appeared sallow, with reddish patches on cheek and brow; his long black beard had taken on a bluish tint. The potentate was sitting cross-legged, his coloured hookah in front of him; he was smoking a long ivory pipe ornamented with gold. At the khan's right stood a youth, dressed like his master, in a blue cloak. This young man's hair was black and curly, his complexion swarthy, his brown eyes protuberant; under the cloak he wore a closely fitting, rose-coloured jacket and a belt, made of silver plaques, into which a dagger was stuck. He was sucking at a hookah. On a couch beside the hookah lay a silver helmet without visor, similar to the one crowning the khan's head, though it was not surmounted by the gold panache; both were of Egyptian workmanship. Grouped in front of the khan were the mountain chieftains and the aristocrats of Gilyan in rough felt cloaks over their coats of mail; they, too, wore visorless helmets. In front of them was a grey-haired vizier, bare-headed, sallow and wizened, a grey moustache adorning his upper lip, stained to a sickly yellow by nicotine. A grey plait, twisted like a snake over his bald, bronzed skull, showed him to belong to a mountain tribe. He had draped himself in a cherry-coloured cloak, under which a dark-blue garment was tucked into azure trousers, baggy at the top and tight-fitting at the bottom; to complete his attire he had a yellow sash wound round his middle, with a dagger stuck into it. The army commander and all the nobles wore shoes with turned-up copper tips. The khan had a dislike for men with bowed heads and downcast eyes; his subordinates therefore stood very erect with upturned faces. Since the khan chose to be

silent, his men remained silent, too. Taking the mouthpiece of his pipe from between his lips, the khan spat into the flame of the nearest lampion. When he spoke, it was in Persian, the language spoken in Isphagan.

"Shebyn, my son, since you dislike wearing a coat of mail, you will have to be sent back to Gilyan today. I granted your request to be present at the battle, but seeing how obstinate you are, I repeat again that you will not join in the affray unless you put on armour."

The youth flung aside the hookah, rose, bowed to the khan and, touching his right eye with the fingers of his right hand, said:

"Your orders shall be obeyed; if the khan so wills I go to put on a coat of mail." He sprang nimbly off the dais without using the steps and was gone.

Then the khan, casting his eyes over the assembly, addressed it as follows:

"Noble Persia! The mountain prince Kaspulat Mutsalovich, a faithful son of the Prophet, has sent me a picked detachment of warriors with the warning that pirates are advancing on Gilyan from Chechnia, where their flotilla lay moored. They demanded of the prince, while they were moored by the island, wine, women and arms. To safeguard his shores, he sent them wine, after which they set sail for our domains. Not for the sake of acquiring glory—for there can be no glory in vanquishing pirates—we intend to give them battle and annihilate once and for all this plague which is ravaging our coasts, may God help and guard us! Ali Hassan, I wish to know your opinion of our army and our ships."

The commander touched his eye with his hand.

"I hear you, my lord. The mountaineers you have summoned are bold enough on land and accustomed to fighting among the mountains and valleys. But at sea, great khan, they will be more like cats thrown into the water."

"I, the ruler of Gilyan, answer you thus: The great shah Abbas the Second permitted me to enlist those only who were brave, and I have therefore selected worthy warriors."

"Great khan! You are wroth against me, an old man; but you have merely to command, and I shall keep silent, and go into battle bareheaded and lead your ships. I am not afraid, nor have I ever been afraid of war."

"Very good! Speak your mind."

"Great khan! It is not my will but by yours alone, you, the ruler of Gilyan, but I would suggest that all the fighting men be evacuated from the vessels, leaving a mere handful of menials and abandoning the ships to be looted by the giaours. The place of our warriors should be taken by a cargo of wine, which it is forbidden by the Koran for any of the faithful to drink. Place the best snipers in ambush on the coast. I have known these northern bandits all my life and know their delight in drinking wine. After they have slaked their thirst with the spoil, which befuddles the mind and renders the eye of the warrior blind to carbine shooting, and in order to lure them ashore, we should send women of ill repute to promenade along the shore in view of the galleys. This will entice the brigands to come where we want them to be; there we shall annihilate them. God's will be done!"

"Ali Hassan, yours is the advice of a giaour and not that of a true son of the Prophet. You intend to deliver up the women of Gilyan to the accurst infidels?"

"Great khan, I said 'women of ill repute'."

"It seems strange to me to have to point out to so venerable a man as yourself that in Persia there are no women of ill repute. In the land of the faithful no woman, even of ill repute, would consent to suffer the embraces of an

uncircumcized giaour; nor is there one who would break the law by unveiling her face for the infidels to gaze upon."

"Great khan! The peril we are in is great. The pirates are being led against Gilyan by an ancient whose name inspires them as profoundly as the name of our Propet does ourselves. Noble khan, that leader's name is Nechai. I can recollect how in my young days he pillaged the shores of Istambul and burnt down Sinop. He wrought havoc and devastated the villages of Iran as though the plague had descended upon the land. So long as he is among them the brigands who are advancing upon us are invincible."

"In the name of Allah the All-Merciful! We shall be victorious, and, like so much carrion, their corpses will be swallowed up in the waters of the Kuilzium Sea."

One of the mountain chiefs stepped forward at this point and, throwing wide his cloak, smote his breastplate so that it rang again; then he raised his bronzed arm and said likewise in Persian:

"Noble khan! We, free Kumiks, know these Cossacks from the distant rivers of Tanaida, where they live. Many's the beating we've given them on the Kura and the Terek, along the courses of which they push their way to Kuilzium. Cossack heads without number lie rotting in the mountains. But your vizier, Ali Hassan—may the Prophet forgive him—is old and feeble. He is by birth a mountaineer, but he has forgotten his people and no longer believes in what constitutes the glory of men bred in the mountains."

The khan gazed at the young chieftain, who was tall, sparely built, bold of eye. The khan rose.

"In the name of Allah the All-Merciful! It shall be as I said. Prepare for battle; dawn is breaking. In my estimation our foes are a contemptible band of men. With so many brave warriors around us it would be a disgrace to speak to them about mere robbers. Put the ships to sea! To you, Ali Hassan, I say: You will not be in command, I shall take command myself."

All present touched their right eyes with their right hands and answered in unison:

"We hear, great khan."

As day broke the indigo expanse of waters turned to azure. The ships weighed anchor and crowded out of the bay Along the coastline the waters were taking on a green hue. From every ship came the warning cry:

"Beware!"

## 3

Razin stood in the prow of a canoe, black coated, his left arm akimbo and a mallet in his right hand. The oarsmen were almost idle, for many of them had armed themselves with arquebuses and axes, alert for the moment to fire or strike. A tall galleon, all sails set, slowly advanced, its black sides gleaming blue.

All at once a terrible voice boomed the order:

"Gunners, make ready to fire!"

In answer to Razin's command the guns from all the barges, which were drawn up in wedge formation, sent forth a roar across the waters.

"Attack the ships!"

"Allah!"

"By God's mercy we shall win!"

"Split up the hulks!"

Almost noiselessly, the canoes swept out of the blue like sharks, the russet-coloured Zaporozhian caps forming the spine. The bow of each canoe dived in close to the bulging sides of the enemy's galleons, and hard-swung axes made yawning holes, through which Cossacks crept. There was a knocking and rolling, a clanking of chains, the shout of warriors:

"Slay the caulkers!"

"Fire their gunpowder!"

"Falcons, keep the canoes close to the ships."

The ataman's canoe passed slowly down the whole length of the convoy. Razin's men had grappled the Persian craft with boat-hooks. In the stern of the ataman's canoe Serebriakov's crouching body could be discerned among the arquebuses. The captain's keen eyes were following the fight on the ships and seeking out the commander on each; once spotted, the old Cossack fired the arquebuses one after the other; there were two flashes—one lighting up his face, the other the muzzle—and it was a rare chance that a proud mountaineer or a Persian remained in the battle, for the captain's bullets found their mark.

"Well done, Ivan!"

Serebriakov threw down a discharged arquebus and picked up a reloaded one. A musketeer, squatting in the bottom of the canoe, loaded each one as it was dropped to him.

"I'm killing off those dyed heads, father, like so many cockroaches."

"You're a fine fellow!"

One of the canoes kept darting in and out between the grappled ships. On its prow, the ring glistening in his ear, Serezhka could be glimpsed with a flaming torch in one hand and a short boat-hook in the other. His voice rasped like a knife drawn across iron as he called amid the din of gunfire and howling human voices:

"Throw the firebrands at the galley's belly."

"Hear! Hear!"

"The fire is going well, captain."

"That's right! Let her burn!"

## 4

Somebody called in Mokeyev's ear:

"Now then, old woman, wake up!"

The air shook from the blast of cannon, and Mokeyev sat up.

"Are you dead? Or have you slept all through the battle?"

"There is no need to go to the help of the goat when the wolf is already ours," Mokeyev observed soothingly.

Two heads wagged in the stern: a huge Cossack in dark blue attire and Grigori Rudakov, grey-haired and capless with the wind ruffling his locks. Rudakov yelled to his mate:

"Steer this way, Cossack!"

Mokeyev fumbled for his ammunition; his head buzzed and rang with a confused noise of voices. Beside him lay an arquebus and an axe. He felt on

his chest for the metal clasp given him by the ataman and, having found it still in place, calmed down and picked up his axe as he rose to his feet.

The azure waves were shining like flowing garments of gold in the light of dawn. Mokeyev passed along the line of oarsmen; some were stretching their stiffened arms and shoulders; steam rose from their heads; their shirts were black with sweat and clung to their bodies.

The rusty grappling-irons had by now got a firm hold of the large wooden galleons, and as they were towed along they looked like fabulous monsters. Some of the galleys had a strong list; broken masts bristled in every direction. Swarms of bluejackets were struggling through the gaping gaps in the ship's sides. The vessels, which were still on an even keel, flew their colours from the mastheads, and it seemed to Mokeyev that the sounds which dinned into his ears were roared out by the blue air itself.

"*Nechai!*"

"Cut 'em down!"

Flames leapt up, arquebuses banged and crackled, native oaths of a most profane kind hurtled to and fro, from beneath water level came the sound of axes splintering wood.

"They're sinking! Rip up the bottoms!"

Mokeyev, still drowsy, walked forward with his customary rolling gait; he reminded one of a large beast stalking its prey. He hoisted himself to the deck of an enemy vessel, where Cossacks were engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with the Persians.

"Quiet flows the Don!"

"In the name of Allah the All-Merciful!"

"I'll lend a hand!"

Forward, from water level, Serezhka's voice broke in:

"Burn, you devil!"

A terrific explosion issued from the hold of the ship: up went anchors, fragments of wood, chain links. The Persians, abandoning the fight, scampered to safety on board another ship, whilst others took to the water.

"Slay the caulkers!"

"Fire the gunpowder!" came a command from Serezhka.

"Curse it! I've slept through the battle!"

Cleaving his axe into the stern of another vessel, Mokeyev swung himself on deck. There he found Lazunka, looking like a large green beetle with a russet head, in a short coat and scarlet sash bristling with pistols. He was skipping from mast to mast and firing at random.

Near the bows stood a tall Persian, his beard dyed a flaming red. He waved his scimitar, shouting to his men and pointing towards Mokayev, obviously enraged by the efforts they were making to take shelter from the avalanche of bullets.

"May your fathers burn in hell!"

"See the fire? My God, but I'll give it you!"

Mokeyev took a step towards the Persian.

"May your fathers . . ." cried the Persian, dropping motionless within three paces of Mokeyev . . . his helmet was shot off, and his skull smashed.

"A fine shot, you devil."

Stepping over the Persian's corpse, Mokeyev made for another vessel. "I've slept through the battle," he muttered to himself again.

From below hatches on the starboard a hairy mountaineer sprang out; came a flash of eyes and the report of a pistol. Mokeyev felt something strike his chest, but the bullet glanced aside on his mail.

"May your father burn in hell!" Steel gleamed in the sallow hand. Mokeyev parried the blow with a swift back-hand stroke from his axe and, without a glance underfoot, swung forward with a ringing tread through pools of slippery blood.

The mountaineer's head, oozing blood and brains, lay on deck, while his feet jerked convulsively, and the copper tips of his shoes glinted.

"May your m . . .! But where's the fighting?" Mokeyev took another step forward, stooping as usual and keeping his hand and axe behind him. Suddenly he came to a halt. There, in front of him and lying across the deck with arms widespread as if in a drunken sleep, was Chernoyarets, his fair hair clotted with blood, and a streak of congealed blood cutting obliquely across his cheery face.

"Such a fine lad! Oh, those devils!"

"Falcons, smite them!" boomed a voice across the green and sparkling expanse of water, and in response to the ataman's order the din became louder, the clank of iron more rasping, the smell of sea, mingled with blood, more pungent.

"Save yourself, sultan of Gilyan!"

"We are still alive, thanks be to Allah."

"Ay, great khan."

Mokeyev listened to the purring of this alien speech; he saw the corpses of Cossacks all around him; he climbed over the soft and lifeless forms and on past the palm-wood apartment. Here he found that Cossacks and musketeers were fighting on the prow.

Close by, and surrounded by shaggy-helmeted warriors, a black-bearded figure in azure was engaged in combat with Razin's men, thrusting and parrying with his scimitar. The Cossacks seemed to be falling back before the onslaught of this weapon, which was dripping with blood, as was also the blue sleeve up as far as the elbow.

"For Allah and noble Iran!"

"Make room for me, lads," cried Mokeyev, swinging his axe; "here is a fine hot pancake for you!"

There was a shriek, and the glittering halves of a scimitar flew into the air.

"You're a rare guest! Have another taste!"

Like a flash the axe came down again and sent the links of chain mail flying like sparks of white fire from beneath the blue robe, and while the bright helmet tilted backwards, the black-bearded figure sank to the deck, its azure attire drenched and dark with blood. The body had been cleft in two from the left shoulder to the waist.

"Oh, Allah!"

"Noble khan!"

Mokeyev turned on his heel with a lurid oath. Ahead of him the tribesmen from the mountains were casting aside their felt cloaks and leaping into the sea, while the Cossacks cut them down with swords and axes. Mokeyev, while retracing his steps, found that his own comrades, alive and dead, were the only people who remained. The waves swept over the decks of the enemy ships.

"Swilling ass that I am to have slept through the combat, and thus to have betrayed Chernoyarets!"

Mokeyev flung away his axe. Men were still running about, and the voices of foreigners filled the air:

"Allah, All-Merciful!"

Familiar voices shouted back:

"Who is he? Gay as a fighting-cock!"

"The khan's brother or his son; who can tell?"

"Is he the khan himself?"

"Piotr Mokeyev cut the khan in half."

"Did he? He never saw the fighting, and yet he's managed to slay the khan? That's nonsense!"

"We are alive, but Volotski and Chernoyarets have been killed."

"Well, brother, if one cuts a loaf, there are bound to be some crumbs."

"Poor old Piotr! He slept while two captains . . ."

A sonorous voice interrupted:

"Falcons! Load the booty and prisoners into the canoes."

"At your orders, father!"

"And lug the khan's goods and chattels from the hut on the deck."

"What a ship, to be sure! A mighty fine one."

The din of the battle had died down, and once more the ripple of waves could be heard.

A smell like spices was wafted from the shores, which lay misty and yellowing in the light. The green, translucent swell rose and fell, breaking into myriads of sparkling gems.

"Eh, brother, even death would be sweet here; not as it is in Moscow. 'Tis good to be here. . . ."

## CHAPTER SIX

### IN PERSIA

### 1

FROM early morning till late at night a little man wandered about the squares, bazaars and coffee-houses of Isphagan; he was auburn-haired, with a short, flame-coloured goatee, and always to be seen in the self-same kaftan with its white and grey stripes minus a sash. Under his shirt he wore a baptismal copper cross. If he chanced to meet a Persian acquaintance he merrily passed the time of day, nodding his head in its dark blue velvet cap. There was a hint of the buffoon in his face.

"*Salaam aleikum!*"

Then, without awaiting a return salute, he dived in among the nearest crowd of people, chattering Persian and occasionally Arabic. After mumbling a Moslem prayer he spat to one side and said to himself:

"A pip on your tongue for doing this, Gavriushka!"

Were it not for his general attire—Russian coat, pointed Muscovite cap, russet morocco boots in lieu of the square-toed Isphagan footwear—this fleet-footed wanderer might well have passed himself off as a native, so perfectly at

home was he in the Persian dialect, though his physical appearance differed so widely from that of his Oriental fellow citizens. Whenever he came upon a chapel of the Orthodox faith, and these were few and far between, the man would genuflect reverently, light candles and, getting on the right side of the monk in charge, would anoint his hair and the palms of his hands with olive oil. His face expressed both meekness and foolishness, but his black, closely set eyes were keen and frequently concealed a lurking resentment. Though he might be laughing merrily, he always cast a furtive glance around him. Persian merchants, squatting on their counters, would crack jokes with him and even offer him a pull at their hookahs, for he was quite familiar with their proverbs and prayers.

The bazaar was filled with noise and commotion: there was the ceaseless yell of men urging their oxen to move more rapidly, and of camel-drivers, whose beasts were cluttered with bundles. Through this motley throng our red-haired man would elbow his way and climb up tortuous steps smelling of garlic, lemons and sweat. Once arrived at his destination, he would enter the gaily painted stone shops, where articles such as ink and boxes were made, and books sold. He liked to handle Arabic and Persian books, especially when they had foreign illustrations. Bargains were struck with the perpetually repeated words: "Very good, very good!"

Then the little man would stroll along the streets, up and down hill. It was suffocatingly hot in these streets, what with the glare of sun on the flat stone roofs and the stench from public privies, constructed on the first floors. The night soil ran down from these latrines into the street below, there to merge with the dust and sand till it would be collected in the morning by the market gardeners to serve as manure. As the red-haired man stepped across such puddles he would jokingly remark:

"The Moslems must be especially favoured of Allah, for they relieve nature from a height as high as a belfry!"

Then glancing round, he would add:

"But their faith is impure for all that."

If he caught sight of a Persian woman in her loose trousers, he would amble after her, musing the while:

"Who can predict one's luck? Maybe I shall hold converse with this one."

He would then doff his cap, and a sort of film would come over his ratlike eyes as he murmured distinctly:

"I am your slave."

With a sly glance from under her purdah the woman would reply:

"Come not near me, giaour!"

Red-Pate, discomfited, would growl:

"Not one of your lucky days, Gavriushka, son of Kolesnikov. You won't be able to tumble a female infidel in the flesh today, my lad."

By nightfall, the little red-haired man, after nosing around wherever possible, would crawl into his own stone hovel. The window boasted neither framework nor covering, but there was a blue nankeen curtain drawn aside, and by this there stood a wooden case with its top turned sideways, and with an ebony stool in front of it. Seating himself, Carrots would light a long pipe, adorned with a boar's head, and he would puff at it contentedly. As he smoked, his face, which had been so carefree in the daytime, became overcast with the multiplicity of thoughts gathered during his tour of inspection. Having smoked

his pipe to a finish, he would deposit a huge gob of spittle on the stone floor, grope inside the case and extract therefrom some sheets of paper, pasted together, a copper inkwell and a goosequill, all of which he laid on the top of the case. It was his custom, having made these preparations, to strike a flint, light two candles or a naphtha lamp and settle down to work. He had to make a complete record of all he had seen or heard in the city of Shah Abbas.

On this particular day he had been informed, as usual from the Secret Office, that a publican and some bailiffs from the Court of Trade were leaving for Astrakhan to collect arrears of payments to the exchequer for goods received. He put away his pipe, fixed his keen eyes on the paper and gave his practised hand full scope. He wrote to Moscow, and his business was of an urgent nature:

> "My well-wisher and the tsar's senior boyar Ivan Petrovich! I am growing weary of waiting for the Cossack envoys to arrive and pay their respects to the shah Abbas. Nor does it seem likely that they will come in the near future. Shah Abbas is absent from Isphagan, and I cannot but feel that the bandits are aware of this fact. I have heard from the local inhabitants—you know that I am very fluent in the Persian language—that Stenka Razin and his men are plundering the coasts of Gilyan, putting in an appearance now here, now there; in fact, wherever they smell booty. I am doing everything in my power not to miss the day of their arrival; as soon as they come I mean to accost them and offer them my services as interpreter. I cannot think of any other means to get into personal touch with the shah. If I succeed in becoming attached to them, I shall gain admittance to the shah's presence and shall be able then to pass on the word of the great sovereign, which you, gracious boyar, entrusted me to deliver, for I am willing to sacrifice my life in our sovereign's service. In order that no time be wasted, and following your instruction, boyar Ivan Petrovich, I have become engaged in several minor affairs. I, your humble servant, today have called upon the men of the Secret Office. They are the persons who select Persian goods for our sovereign's court. I examined the registers and the accounts and was railed at by the chamberlain Fedor Miloslavski as a man of no consequence, and yet I am wholly yours and our sovereign's servant. So I presented him with your secret pass, gracious boyar, whereupon he took to abusing you, stamping his foot and shouting: 'I am the sovereign's brother-in-law and I fear no one. I shall break every spy's back.' For all his fury, I did not allow myself to be intimidated, but managed to question the publicans, who accompanied prince Fedor here, namely: Vaska Stepanov and a certain Mitka Yakovlev, a native of Tebriz, who serves the former here in Isphagan. They were awed by the mention of the sovereign and the secret pass and revealed that, when they were passing through Tebriz, the following Russian wares had been stolen from the store at Kromsarai: Firstly, sable pelts, six score at three and a half rubles a score, making a total of twenty-one rubles. Secondly, twelve score at three rubles a score, making a total of thirty-six rubles. Thirdly, twenty-two score at two and a half rubles, making a total of fifty-five rubles. Fourthly, twelve score at two rubles, making a total of twenty-four rubles.
>
> "The thief, however, was caught in Kromsarai and brought before the chief of the bazaar police together with the stolen property. After sentence

had been pronounced, the publicans Vaska Stepanov and Mitka Yakovlev petitioned the khan to allow a search to be made, but no more than eight score skins at one ruble seventy-five kopeks were found. These were returned to the above-mentioned publicans.

"Thus the total loss incurred by the great sovereign tsar Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of All Great, Little and White Russia, through the negligence of his servants amounts to one hundred and twenty-two rubles.

"Furthermore, gracious boyar Ivan Petrovich, these same officials are guilty of other misdeeds. But so far I have not been able to discover them, though I shall do my utmost to find out everything. The said publicans have informed me that at the time the sable pelts were stolen at Kromsarai they were all very tipsy from drinking Tebriz wine, which wine the chamberlain Fedor Miloslavski had stood for services rendered. I have not yet found out what these services were, but intend to prosecute the matter until I do.

"Gracious boyar! Provided that I can lay my hand on a messenger or a traveller to Moscow, I shall send you all the available news concerning the robbers. Since you are greatly interested in the Persians, I deem it an honour to keep you informed as to their manners and customs and their vile religion. Furthermore, I shall report to you about their turbans, kaftans and their beasts, in short about everything. The emoluments granted me by yourself and our great sovereign tsar from the Secret Office, namely the sum of five rubles, thirty-one and a half kopeks, have been paid me under my signed receipt.

"Pray do not be vexed with me for not having found out everything, gracious boyar. I am taking great pains and suffering many troubles to do your bidding.

"I remain, gracious boyar Ivan Petrovich, your most humble servant and assistant clerk, Gavriushka Matveyev, son of Kuretnikov, known in the Secret Office as Kolesnikov."

## 2

Stenka Razin sat apart, drinking in silence. None but Lazunka dared approach him; even Serezhka, after a glance at the ataman from afar, would turn away and sneak off. Aboard the barges, the men were saying softly to one another:

"Father is eating his heart out on account of Volotski and Chernoyarets."

Although Razin was stern and unapproachable with everyone else, he relaxed in his behaviour towards Lazunka and, even in his cups, would occasionally listen to him.

"Father, please stop drinking."

"Ah, I came to this accursed Persia in search of gold, but I have a foreboding that I shall lose my jewels instead. Oh, Lazunka, see what gems have already fallen into the sea; two diamonds of the finest water."

"But, father, there are many fine lads left to you."

Razin ground his teeth and retired into his cabin, where he kept even the tiny portholes shut, and where he forbade anyone to strike a light. Here he

drank, slept and then drank again. At times he was so wild of eye and so drunk that he would whip a pistol out of his red trousers pocket and fire at the wall of the hold, the bullets glancing off and rattling against the casks and brass vessels.

"Father, do come up on deck; the sun is shining, the wind blowing, you will freshen up . . ."

"Damn all that, Lazunka! There is more light for the soul amid darkness . . . Ivan, Ivan . . . Mihailo . . ."

Two veterans, Serebriakov and Rudakov, sat in the stern of the ataman's barge, smoking.

"Drink will be the ataman's undoing."

"The trouble runs in the family," replied Rudakov, as his mind delved into the past; "Timoshei Razin, his father, drank heavily; he drank more than anybody. Sometimes when his heart was weary within him his head would droop, and if he were asked, 'What ails you, Cossack?' he would answer, 'Lad, my heart is sore, for I feel man's sorrows deeply.' "

The barges sailed slowly past the coast as they headed for the island of Chechnia again. Serezhka occupied the ataman's post at the prow of the leading craft. He had ordered the men at the oars to paddle along quietly, while he scanned the coast, the settlements and the towns as though he were studying the lie of the land. Caravans of camels, bearing merchandise, moved along the coastal road. The Cossack commented:

"What do you say to taking to the canoes and having a go at these painted creatures?"

"Few of them have dyed hair, for they are mostly Lezgins."

Serezhka, though he noted the Cossacks' talk, said nothing, but fixed his eyes on the distance. Townships with their crowded and noisy bazaars drifted past, the din issuing from them drowning the murmur of the waves, the roaring of camels and the ear-splitting bray of asses. At sundown, when these sounds died away, the muezzin would start his droning monotone; his turbaned figure and beard high aloft would be silhouetted against the background of the mosque tower as he summoned the faithful to prayer.

One morning the barges slid by a large town, built of white stone, every detail of which was clear-cut and bright. A half-submerged tower stood out from the shore; beyond this and coming straight from the coast were large stone slabs with inscriptions on them which no one was able to decipher. It was an ancient Christian burial ground. Side by side with these, but separated from them by a row of stones, were Moslem graves, their crooked pillars overgrown with moss and crowned with carved turbans. To the rear of this graveyard was a grey mosque with a wall running from it across the town; beyond the wall higher up the mountain were white, flat-roofed houses; at the far end of the narrow streets another white wall stretched across the whole inhabited area. Small houses dotted the flank of the mountain on the outer precincts of the wall. From beneath the icebound summit of the mountain two white towers rose. Fleecy, wind-driven clouds were piled up and puffed away among the austere crags.

Serezhka, his red Zaporozhian cap tilted well to the back of his head, stooped forward on the prow, his eagle eye probing the depths of the white town's streets and lanes. The tap of metal heels and a lazy dragging of heavy boots came from behind. A voice blared like a trumpet:

"Look, ataman!"

Serezhka turned his head. Captain Piotr Mokeyev stood pointing to his chest, saying:

"See, father gave me this gilt bauble."

"I know, Piotr. Would you care to assume the rank of ataman? If so, I shall abandon the ataman's post without more ado. Make your choice! No? Then what is it you want?"

Serezhka again stared at the town.

"You are taking what I say amiss, ataman."

"What do you mean?"

"Look closer. When that hairy devil fired his pistol he broke the pattern of the ataman's bauble, but I managed to give him a touch with my axe. . . ."

"A touch indeed! What a touch!"

"He did fall, to be sure. But he bent the ataman's gift beyond repair."

"You fool! Had you not struck that pate the mountaineer would have sent his scimitar through you as he did through Volotski."

"Perhaps he might not have! You see, I slept all through the battle, I just came up in time to give that black-bearded man with the blotches on his disgusting face a hefty blow and then flung away my axe in disgust, for there was no one left to slay."

"Well, you managed to kill the Gilyan khan himself, and that was a mighty honour. He was a fine warrior, that khan, and made away with many of our men."

"To hell with honour! The thing that matters to me is whether the ataman is angry with me for being drunk and sleeping it off during the affray."

"We all fought and had our particular share in the fight, and you, as I've just said, have the greatest glory. You silly old fool! Clear off, you're in my way."

"That I most certainly shall not! Look here, ataman, I've had too little fighting, so what about raiding and pillaging this here town today? I'd do anything for Timofeievich, that I would. Let's get to work, Sergei. Our lads are in fine fettle. We'll grab some wine, too; the Kumiks live near by. These mountain tribesmen cannot live without wine; though the followers of Mahomed don't drink the stuff themselves, they always keep a store for merchants or others who do drink it."

"Well, Piotr, the same idea has been tickling my brain too. But I am afraid that if we carry it out father will be vexed. He told us he meant us to become subjects of the shah, and this town belongs to the shah and is inhabited by Persians."

"Nonsense! Who wants to become a subject of the shah? He is mighty fond of Moscow, and boyars and informers are always to be seen in Isphagan. We shall never be at peace with the shah. Mark my words!"

"All the same, how can we begin a fight without father's consent? I'm just itching for a scrap, 'pon my word I am! Yet none of us dares go near him; he drinks and sleeps and drinks. . . ."

"Why should he be angry? Let your mind be easy, Sergei. If we can find a plaything in that town to his liking, he'll forget the dead captains all the sooner. A woman captive would be just the thing. I'd give my life for this and shall take good care she doesn't slip through my fingers. A strange town is like a thief; you can't take anything from a fire, but from a thief, now, even if he has

no stolen goods on him, you can always take his cap, though it be but a shabby one. So shall we start?"

The ear-ring flashed. Serezhka threw his cap on the deck and shouted, with a grin lighting up his countenance:

"Have it your way; let's start!"

"Hi, lads!"

Aboard all barges the drums beat a tattoo.

3

By evening the fires in the burning town were dying down. Silvery dust whirled up from the gutted buildings. Nothing remained of the city but the walls, a mosque, the gravestones in the cemetery and three towers: one of them half submerged, and the two others at the foot of the mountain. Up the improvised gangways the Cossacks were loading the barges with bales of silk tissue, rolls of carpets, silver and copper untensils. Casks of wine and barrels of fresh water were likewise brought aboard. Grey, blue and crimson figures flitted to and fro in the gloaming; now and then faces lighted up with a satisfied grin; there was a glint of gold, or the sparkle of precious stones.

The two greybeards, Serebriakov and Rudakov, who had taken no part in the raid, still sat smoking in the stern. Said Serebriakov:

"Are the barges drifting to Chechnia Island?"

"We should alter our course and set out for Gilyan again, but all depends on what the new ataman will say."

"They've made good work of the town."

"They've got wine; the devil take the rest!"

The dim, dark blue figure of Serezhka showed in the stern. His voice cut through the air like a knife:

"Hi, do not bind the women captives, only the men."

"Some of them can cross themselves, ataman."

"Don't be rough with the Christians, brothers."

"Those who behave themselves will not be molested."

A voice trumpeted from the beach:

"Here, lads, throw a strong plank across."

Piotr Mokeyev stood at the water's edge balancing a bundle in his huge paw, a Fergana rug scintillating in the moonlight.

"He seems to have found a bird in a copper cage."

"Are you blind? It's very large for a bird. Look, he's got a woman in the bundle."

"The gangway is rotten, lads; throw a sound plank across."

"He's as heavy as an elephant, so we'd better throw a double gangway over to him."

"That's the thing! Lend a hand here!"

The barge rocked as Mokeyev stepped aboard.

Still grasping the bundle, and without changing hands, he raised a corner of the rug as he made for Serezhka.

"Look, ataman!"

Serezhka took a peep and whistled:

"Well done, good old Piotr!"

Wrapped in the rug was a half-naked woman, whose long tresses hung down her delicately formed body; bracelets sparkled from wrist to elbow on her right arm; a golden ring, set with a white gem, quivered in the nostrils of her exquisite nose; she moved her head up and down and continued to say:

"*Zeineb, Zeineb, Zeineb . . .*"

"Do you think she's calling for her husband?"

"Piotr, the interpreter, will tell us for whom she is calling. The devil take you—where did you happen on such a prize?"

"Well, ataman, as soon as I caught sight of her, being hoisted on to a camel's back, I made a rush at her. Here, thought I, is a comfort for Timofeievich. They clung to her with all their might; some long-beards even tore the veil from her head. There were many of them and more coming with sharp swords and wearing coats of mail. So I belaboured them with my axe, and those who failed to make good their escape were cut down. My weapon broke on the armour, so I struck out with the butt end. When that broke I seized on anything that came handy and was heavy, and got the better of them. A few scratches—nothing to make a fuss about."

"You've done fine work."

Serezhka stepped up higher on the prow and raised his voice:

"Grandad Grigori, change the course back to Gilyan."

"Right, ataman!"

"Hi, Cossacks, swing the barges round!"

Enveloped in a fog of dust and smoke from the fires, which was driven hither and thither by the winds issuing from the gorges, the town looked like an immense smouldering bonfire. Above the ruins rose the solitary towers and the mosque, their whiteness taking on a greenish hue in the moonlight. From one of the distant towers came a cry:

"*Serkesh!*"

"Conflagration! Conflagration!" was answered from below.

Flames still leapt up from among the ruins. A wail came from somewhere:

"Faithful soldier of the shah!"

Far up in the mountains above the towers the eternal ice-capped peaks gleamed brighter than ever as though liquid silver were being poured over them by an invisible hand. Then again, amid the mysterious murmur of the sea and the faintly audible moans, a voice from among the ruins shrilled forth in Armenian:

"Oh, Lord!"

## 4

Evening was drawing in. The red-haired assistant clerk, who was on his way to the palace gate, passed by some heavy cannon lying on the ground and, as his custom was to pry into everything, paused to have a look at them. Stroking one with his hand, he smirked and remarked:

"Not much use; they are choked with mould and should not have been left to rust and without their carriages."

The Chamber of Ambassadors and the Chamber of Merchants, where treaties and contracts, respectively, were negotiated, rose one above the other over

the gates. They were but dimly outlined in the dusk, but the paintings and gold with which they were adorned could still be discerned. Beyond these buildings and the long stretch of the corridor, leading from the gateway, were gardens, whence the scent of flowers and the plash of fountains were wafted by the refreshing breeze. The entrance-arch was gilded and inscribed with texts from the Koran in rich blue on a background of gold. Here, two chiefs of the palace police in coats of mail with silver breastplates and armed with scimitars stood on sentry duty. Other guards of honour were drawn up on either side the gate. Naphtha lampions with cotton wicks lit up the whole scene; they burned in cylindrical receptacles of artistically wrought brass, which rested on marble pedestals. Bronzed reflections from these lights burnished the silver armour of the sentinels to a golden hue. Immovable, and with never a flicker on their swarthy, upturned faces, the bearded men gave the impression of massive statues.

With a sidelong glance in the Persians' direction, the red-haired clerk mused:

"Copper idols! They look as though they had been dug up from the earth. I wonder whether they are the shah's begs?"

He bent his way hurriedly from the sternly fixed countenances of the sentries.

The pilasters at the foot of the mosque were bluish in tint and formed a splendid background for the elaborate gold lettering of the sacred texts; above the mosque, terraces were lost in the blue-black expanse of the sky. To the right of the entrance door a bright red carpet, made in Shusteri, spread its length; at each of its corners there flamed naphtha lampions in clay platters; the stagnant atmosphere reeked of burned oil and dust. An ancient mullah in a huge white turban was seated at the far end of the carpet with his back turned towards the mosque, whilst behind him could be seen two scribes in sandy-coloured, sleeveless cloaks and long blue coats with the immense turbans of their craft, one white and the other green. In cherry-hued sleeveless cloaks with black gowns beneath, couples of men and women respectfully approached the carpet. Each couple in turn took its place on the sand, being careful not to touch the carpet. The husband and wife, holding one another by the hand, knelt and only loosened their hold on rising. The man, whose turn it just was, began to speak:

"In the name of Allah . . ."

"The All-Merciful," rejoined the mullah, without opening his eyes.

"Father, she who kneels beside me is no longer a wife to me."

"Any offspring?"

"She has no children."

"In the name of Allah," said the woman.

"The All-Merciful," his eyes still closed, the mullah responded.

"He who stands beside me is no longer the object of my desire; I wish to seek another husband."

"Have you had no children by him?"

"No, father, he does not love women."

At this the mullah opened his eyes and said severely:

"The law of the Prophet requires that five witnesses from among the faithful should be brought to testify as to the husband's transgressions. Beware of uttering false statements!" Silence ensued; the mullah again closed his eyes; then, in dispassionate tones, he pursued: "In the name of Allah the All-Merciful! When a man and wife abandon their home and fail to reunite by nightfall to share in the joy of the connubial bed, they come to the mosque and each pays a

gratuity towards the embellishment of the shah's ancestral tomb. This being accomplished, they are free."

The divorced couple rose from the ground, the husband paying the required fee to the white-turbaned scribe, while the wife presented her offering to the one in the green turban, who sat on the mullah's left.

The red-headed clerk, having attended this proceeding of divorce, murmured to himself:

"In Moscow we'd wear out three pairs of boots trying to settle such a question, and even then the case would not be settled."

He sidled up nearer to get a better view of the Persians' divorce procedure. At this very moment, from out the darkness round the corner of the mosque, there emerged into the pool of yellow light a man dressed in Persian attire. This snub-nosed, bearded man flashed a glance in the red-haired clerk's direction and precipitately made for the shah's square.

"Hi, you son of a bitch! Stop!" cried the red-pated man in a mixture of Persian and Russian. He caught up with the fugitive as he reached the square and seized the hem of his cloak. "Surely I cannot be mistaken! Are you not Akim Mitrich?"

"It's a bad omen to meet with a red-head by night! Where do you come from, you Moscow rat?"

"Not from heaven! I came by sea."

"I am not yet certain which of us is the son of a bitch, but to my way of thinking, it must be you, Gavriushka."

"Fiddlesticks! Why all this wrath? It was merely a slip of the tongue . . . I still had those Persians in my mind."

"This is by no means your first slip—you slipped up on me once before, and the secretary Akim Mitrich got the order of the boot and was kicked out of the Foreign Office and sent to the Volga."

"You are slandering me, Akim Mitrich, and this I swear by the Holy Trinity."

"You have no need to take the name of God in vain. I feel no rancour; the Volga is a freedom-loving region."

"Come along with me to a coffee-house. I can assure you that I deem it no small honour for me, a mere assistant clerk, to be conversing with a secretary from Moscow."

"One who used to be in Moscow, you mean. But by the grace of boyar Pushkin and a certain assistant clerk, Gavriushka by name, at present employed as secretary to the chamberlain Dashkov in Sinbirsk."

I know all about it. Did you not omit the name and patronymic of the sovereign tsar in your report on the bandits?"

"To the devil with your 'patronymics', the whole bunch of you."

"Oh, surely not all, Akim Mitrich?"

"Yes, all the damned lot of you," said Snubnose irately.

"Even the great sovereign?"

"Ay, the great tsar, autocrat of All White and Little Russia, the patriarch, the noble boyars, all those pot-bellied jackasses!"

"Oh, Akim Mitrich, life in Isphagan has befouled your tongue."

"Then why pester me with this semblance of friendship, you rat?"

Under cover of the darkness, Redpate cast a furtive look around and then said laughingly:

"There you go, losing your temper again! After observing the manner of

life here, I can assure you that I, too, have become a strong critic of Moscow."

"Including the tsar?"

"And the patriarch?"

"Yes, on account of his persecution in matters of faith and his allowing injustice to be meted out from the ecclesiastical courts."

"That being the case, let us repair to a coffee-house. I am homesick for a sound of my own tongue."

"We should have done so from the outset, Akimushka. Why stand here wrangling?"

"You are right!"

The coffee-house was formed by a roomy enclosure beneath a gaudy roof, supported by pillars and surrounded by painted wooden fencing. The owner sat cross-legged in the entrance on a small rug, a copper dish at his feet and a hookah between his knees. On entering, both Redpate and his companion gave the customary salute:

"*Salaam aleikum!*"

"Why is the entrance fee two shai today?"

The owner clicked his tongue as he withdrew the mouthpiece from between his lips.

"Two fine new boys; good, fine boys!"

In the centre of the enclosure stood a fountain, the cool spray of which relieved the sultry atmosphere. Persians squatted round it, each on a red cotton rug and smoking hookahs. Lampions in their wrought-iron cylindrical receptacles burned near the outer palings and cast gleaming reflections around them. Boys of from thirteen to fourteen years of age, with delicately girlish faces, blue and gold turbans on their heads, their arms bared to the shoulders and adorned with bracelets, their bodies covered with sequins and tiny bells, were dancing round the fountain to the sound of tambourines. From the waist downwards they were dressed in many-hued feathers with tinsel sequins attached to them. Their dark feet twinkled lightly over the carpet. Frequently the whirling feathers would fly out and reveal bronzed backsides. Some of the Persians took their hookahs out of their mouth and grinned, clapping their hands.

"The dogs!"

Outside the palings stood a gaping crowd of bearded men, their green or blue turbans making spots of colour against the dark background of the street; at rare intervals the enormous white turban of a scholar could be discerned. Whenever the dancing boys twirled their feathers more than usually high, voices from without cried:

"It's like fire!"

"Now it's like water!"

The boys joined hands, swaying and rippling gracefully, their tinsel ornaments, bracelets and lissom bodies glistening in the torchlight. At such moments a word ran through the crowd:

"Water!"

Slender as a maiden's, the bronzed legs flitted tirelessly, increasing the impression that girls were dancing. The smoke from hookahs grew thicker and more leaden, until it was dispersed by the cool breeze from the fountain into the black distance beyond the palings.

"What about ordering some wine, Akim Mitrich?"

"An excellent idea. The only trouble is that so long as I am in this garb I might be refused."

"Never fear! They'll serve it, the dyed devils."

"Our Muscovites are worse than they, Gavriushka."

"True, but however bad they are, at least they are our own folk."

The two men called for a pitcher of wine. From his vantage point at the entrance the owner scrutinized the Muscovites closely and then waved his hand. The serving-lad asked, as he placed the wine before them:

"The master would like to know whether both of you are giaours, or whether one of you belongs to the faithful?"

"Tell him, boy, that we are both Muscovites, but my companion is going to Mecca to become a true believer." So saying, Redpate pointed to Akim, adding in Russian: "Why have you dressed yourself up as a Persian, Akim Mitrich?"

"That's my business."

"In any case, when we return to Moscow we'll have to wear cotton."

"You can if you please; but as for me, I'm quite comfortable in a shawl and turban."

"But you just said you were homesick. How do you manage to feel comfortable here?"

"Now listen, you rat's eye. You know as well as I that were I to land in Moscow I'd be sent straight to the whipping-post in Ivanov Square opposite the Granovitaya Palace, and that the tsar from his window would look down at my rump. Here a man may profess any faith he chooses, or read any book that happens to come his way. Whereas in Moscow . . ."

"Ay, if you read a book not of a religious nature you are dubbed a heretic and burnt alive."

"Here you need but say you love the shah, learn the muslim prayer, know two or three texts of the Koran, and there is no need to kow-tow to every devil. Moscow loves grovellers!"

"And here, if you do not salute the shah, you'll be disembowelled in the public square and thrown to the dogs."

"It's wiser to declare your love for the shah, to attend their public functions once or twice a year. And why not? At least one gets a good view of the people."

"How do you live, Akimushka?"

The ex-secretary, though his humour had mellowed with the wine he had drunk, still mistrusted the assistant clerk.

"You are not doing any spying here, Gavriushka? Boyar Pushkin is as cunning as Satan in spite of the fact that he's as uncouth as a bear. He selects smart men for his work, and the times are such that informers multiply.

"Nay, I am on a secret mission to verify the accounts relative to the tsar's goods."

"I cannot abide informers. They are like prostitutes, women who traffic in fornication. I hate informers."

Mitrich failed to notice how his companion winced.

"I live very comfortably. My certificate as a secretary is unnecesary here. I deal in the sale of captives. Would you like to visit my place?"

"Very greatly, friend; do let us go," the red-haired man responded eagerly.

The darkness was streaked with small flashes of lightning; it seemed as if a silver net was stretched across the sky. The effect was produced by numerous large fireflies flitting hither and thither. The two men walked past coffee-houses and shops; the shah's square was lit up by lampions and torches; bearded men were busy strewing sand over the surface of the square, while others watered and beat it down.

"Is this done on account of the horse traffic?"

"Yes, to lay the dust. The shah is likely to be present at some entertainment or other; boys from the coffee-houses will be called upon to dance before him; fireworks will be let off in the square. Trumpets will make music like bellowing cows."

"I've not had any opportunity to see all this, Akim."

"If you stay here long enough, you'll see plenty of such goings-on."

By way of tortuous and narrow streets, where they often stepped into pools of liquid manure, in the darkness rendered even darker by the swarms of fireflies overhead, they reached the gate leading to a one-storied, flat-roofed house. Lampions were alight within, and the windows stood wide open. Fireflies blundering into the lighted rooms lost their brilliance, and on reaching the open again shone dimly for a while. A torch illuminated the stone vestibule; a Persian inscription hung on the wall: "He who enters this house will find joy." The place was never locked up. From the vestibule one entered a white-walled room with a red Shusteri carpet on the floor; on the walls hung whips, also cases holding several daggers, knives and scissors glinting in the effulgence shed by the lampions in their clay platters. Pincers, large and small, and bunches of bone needles completed the collection. In the corners, on carved black stools, beside the lampions stood bottles of pink and blue lotions.

They passed into another room. Here the floor was covered with similar bright red carpets, strewn with gaily coloured, though rather grimy, cushions. Little girls of about eleven or twelve years of age sat among the smoking hookahs and lampions burning along the walls. Some of them lolled about in short white tunics, kicking their bare legs during intervals of hookah-smoking; others were fashioning dolls out of rags; yet others chased the fireflies, which came in through the windows, uttering shrill cries and jumping over the cushions. Two dark-complexioned little girls were teasing a green parrot, whose copper cage stood on a wooden pedestal in a corner; they tried to prevent the bird from falling asleep by drawing a feather across its eyes; the parrot snapped at the feather, screaming angrily. At this the children went off into fits of laughter. But no sooner did the master appear with a stranger in tow than they all set about tidying up the room and, as if at a word of command, turned their faces towards the carpet and exhibited their buttocks.

"This is in your honour, my dear guest."

"Why, Akimushka, to complete this ritual you ought to have taught them to repeat in chorus one of the Moslem prayers," laughed Redpoll.

The snob-nosed secretary retained his gravity of expression and inspected the children, who lay on the cushions. Then he said to one of them:

"Bring some water!"

The little girl ran off and brought back a pitcher full.

"Wash yourself," the master added severely. With a wave of his hand he further added, in Persian as before:

"Now play!"

He tugged the red-haired man by the sleeve of his cotton Moscovite kaftan, saying:

"Lie down, Gavriushka!"

The latter did as he was told, grumbling the while:

"By my faith, Akim, you're a regular infidel. There's neither table nor bench nor so much as an ikon to cross oneself before."

The host pushed towards him a hookah, already furnished with a piece of glowing charcoal in its cup.

"Smoke! It may stop up your jabbering, friend."

Two elderly Persians, who had obviously been awaiting the slave-dealer's arrival, now put in an appearance. They were dressed in cherry-coloured, sleeveless cloaks, tight, sandy-hued coats and green sashes with fringes; striped trousers showed from beneath the coat and came down low over the square-toed shoes.

"*Salaam aleikum!*"

"*Salaam aleikum!*" replied Akim.

Taking two dark-faced little maids by the hands, the two Persians began to bargain. The ex-secretary, puffing at his hookah, and without turning his head, observed:

"Very fine wares."

"Three tuman."

"No, four tuman!"

"Three!"

"Let it be three."

"Here is a sweetmeat for you," said the old man.

Having paid the money, the old men led the girls away. The host saw his clients as far as the vestibule and then hid the purchase money. On his return he was greeted by his red-haired companion with the words:

"Now I know what your business is, Akimushka!"

"Smoke, you spawn of Satan!"

"I've had enough of smoking. Look here, lend me a wench for a while, will you? I would not keep her long. It is your trade."

"I've told you already, so what more do you want? At first I tried trafficking in boys, they fetched good prices, indeed, but it is difficult to catch the thieving youngsters; a wench presents less difficulties. What do you want a wench for?"

"This place is a hell; there are no prostitutes to be found anywhere; yet the devil rouses the flesh."

"What need have the Persians of prostitutes? You saw yourself how easily divorce is granted to a man who has lived six months with his wife. I like this country's customs; everything is done quickly and without fuss. The houses are never locked, for thieves are few; but if a thief is caught—then he is done for. In the old square, where the timber market is held, the executioner will twist the miscreants' heads round on his knee, poke his fingers into the nostrils and draw his knife across the throat. Should a man wish to trade in captives, he can do so to his heart's content without more ado. Compare this with Moscow! There, in every business, you have to obey the tsar's decrees. Now listen here! A girl's worth money. You saw how the Persians paid the equivalent of one hundred and fifty roubles for two of them. I myself paid a fair price for the goods to Stenka Razin's marauders in Baku."

"Did you see Stenka himself?"

"No, only Cossacks and a captain. I tried to catch a glimpse of him, but was not successful. His captain was a tough nut to crack, a Moscovite and former musketeer named Chikmaz. A bold lad!"

"Where do you think the marauders are now?"

"That's none of your business."

"Well, I do not wish to come across them on our return voyage."

"Judging by what they said, it would appear they intend to go back to Terek."

"And so they did! And they raided Derbent. I'd like you to lend me a wench—just for a night."

"All the same, I cannot lend one to you free of charge."

"Devil! Do you not know the tsar's decrees concerning captives?"

"When I was still in the Foreign Office, I purposely made a copy of one. There it is, hanging on the wall for reference. I read it to the Persians and explain all the restrictions imposed by Moscow. This rouses them against the tsar and boyars. Haven't you seen it? There it is for the reading."

Redpoll rose swiftly, his eyes scanning the walls rapidly as he went; he moved the flaming torch nearer the better to see what was written in bold characters on the yellow sheets, pasted together Muscovite fashion:

*Strict orders that no foreigners are to enter the premises of the ambassador to the shah; nor shall any proscribed merchandise be brought in, such as birds, gerfalcons, falcons and white hawks; nor shall any Tatar captive women, maidens or children, whether Christian or not, be introduced; all Russian officials and ordinary civilians are forbidden to visit the shah's men, and the embassy staff shall not drink wine or smoke tobacco whether paid for or freely given. . . .*

"Do you know, Akim Mitrich . . ."

"Know what, Gavriushka?"

". . . that this is a secret order, addressed to the commander of musketeers. Yet you have read this secret document to the shah's people and have thus provoked dissension between the great shah and our great sovereign."

"You have an impious tongue, you son of a bitch."

"Well, now you'll be obliged to give me a maid, or I'll report you to the senior boyars and the sovereign tsar."

"I've felt all along that you were an informer."

"What if I am?"

"Pshaw, you Satan! What a fool I've been to introduce a wolf into the fold and stand him wine. . . . Well, what's done can't be undone! Let's strike a bargain. But I suspect you have a pretty vile conscience and will probably not keep your word."

"If you give me a wench I shall keep the truce by the Holy Trinity—I will!"

"Make your choice and be off with you, but bring her back to me tomorrow."

Gavriushka selected a fair-haired child, who prattled Russian.

"This is the one for me! And when I bring her back, mind you have wine and a smoke ready for me."

"I told you that you had an evil conscience, and now you have proved my words. You ought to pay me for the goods."

"And you ought to pay me for my silence and betrayal of my great sovereign tsar's trust."

Slowly and cautiously Gavriushka left the house. The erstwhile secretary muttered to himself:

"What the devil have I to be afraid of? What can the tsar or boyars do to me here?"

Burying his small nose in his moustache, he rushed to the open window and called out with a smirk:

"Listen, Gavriushka!"

"Well?" came from the darkness.

"You'd better know that according to the shah's laws, if the wench comes to any harm, and I choose to report this against you, the executioner will thrust his fingers into your nostrils. . . ."

"Devil take you!" said Gavriushka. "It's close on midnight, and still you detain me."

He returned to Akim's house and dumped the girl on the doorstep. She shook herself gleefully, like a bird released from captivity and placed in freedom on a window-sill. Moving away, Gavriushka muttered:

"I've not much interest in the likes of her; a mere child, not a woman."

The snub-nosed host lay on the sill and listened to the retreating footsteps. Two men in short black cloaks strolled past the house; the sharp-featured face of one of them was lit up by the glow from his pipe, and a white feather gleamed in his black hat.

"Maybe these Germans will call; I wonder if they are discussing trade."

During his stay at the Foreign Office Akim had picked up German. One of the men said as he slowed down his pace in order to rekindle his pipe:

"Are the Armenians wealthier than the Persians?"

"Yes, they are better business men."

"It is well known that an Armenian is more astute than a Persian. The Persians are too fond of dallying with their womenfolk."

Akim withdrew from the window. His property of small girls were cuddled up among the cushions. He lay down among them and began to smoke; then he rose to extinguish the lampions, and to close the windows, thinking the while:

"Must be on my guard against catching a fever."

He adjusted the little girls' shifts, covered them with a thin carpet, settled them more comfortably on the cushions and made the sign of the cross over them.

"Your boyars cannot harm me, rat. I shall have myself circumcized; I'll change my name; take wives; the shah does not extradite the faithful, however much a man may bash his head against the wall!"

## 5

The red-haired man climbed up to his stone hovel and sat down facing the windows. He struck no light, but groped about for paper, quill and inkwell. Then he began to smoke his pipe. His stone abode was perched above flat terraces. The house the clerk inhabited was built upon a high plateau, overlooking the town. When the clerk was walking homewards the moon had been

hidden behind the mountains, rising at one side of them; now it had risen high and lighted up the whole range. It seemed as though a veil of gossamer enveloped the shah's city. The red-haired man looked down from his height at the cuneiform town lying like a gigantic ornamented sword, studded with the jewels of glittering fountains in courtyards and cafés and occasional flames from lampions and torches.

The man was fond of gazing down upon the city. Its inner life, though inaccessible to such as he, evoked alluring dreams of Oriental women, whom he knew to be beyond his reach.

"Snub-nosed Akim Mitrich can change his religion as readily as his breeches. As for me, this alien world makes me sick."

The building nearest to the assistant clerk's dwelling was a tall and massive gateway with a clock, ornamented with gold. He knew that the clock was wound up regularly by a Russian master clockmaker, who also had to attend to the light in a closet behind the clock, kindling it by night and extinguishing it by day. Dimly outlined beyond the gate were rows of Armenian, Bokharan and Persian merchants' houses—each with its own particular type of architecture. Farther on, both to right and left, the dome-shaped roofs of coffee-houses appeared with their golden, snakelike arabesques. At the far end rose another gate. Save for an iron chain stretched across the entry, the gate stood wide open. The chain was at the bottom so as to prevent any casual horseman from entering the shah's square. This square was deserted for the moment, since the hour was late. The shah's private grounds and his palace were approached from this level place by golden gates, on either side of which stood the men who happened to be doing sentry duty. Their unsheathed scimitars shone like burnished glass. On the pedestals beside the guards large patches of ruddy flames were aglow. As the moon rose ever higher, the misty veil of silver was lifted from Isphagan. Moonlight filled the marble and granite basins of the fountains; its luminous reflection spread and wandered over gaily painted arches and elaborately designed doorways and outlined in indigo the shapes of plane trees and cypresses, moistened by the spray. Blunt, broken shadows lay across the narrow streets.

"That's enough of it, Gavriushka; you'll go as daft in this infidel country as Akim if you don't look out."

Redpoll squared his shoulders, knocked the dottle out of his pipe, struck a spark from his flint and lighted the candles. Even then he could not rid his mind of intruding thoughts. There, beside the candles and behind the inkwell, lay a book written on parchment, obviously a volume frequently read. A scholar of renown had translated it from an unknown tongue into Arabic; it gave instructions to Oriental women as to their behaviour: "She must always remain indispensable to her master and so dispose of her body that it should inflame the blood of a polygamist with constant desire." The work contained seductive illustrations, painted by a gifted artist. Rekindling his pipe and sucking away at it, Gavriushka recalled the contents of this book, and while gazing down on the town he pictured a little white house with sparkling fountains, a bevy of gossamer-clad wives, clinging round a grey-haired Persian in a silk kaftan. The happy polygamist was reading aloud to them a treatise on "the boundless joys of love", and was drawing his finger across the seductive illustrations. In a dream Gavriuska reached towards the Arabic book to feast his eyes once more on the entrancing illustrations. But one of the candles he had

set up on the table fell over with a splutter and burnt his fingers. The red-haired man hastily withdrew his hand, saying:

"Serves you right, Gavriushka, the devil is tempting you."

Then, calming down sufficiently, he started to write:

> "Most benevolent boyar Ivan Petrovich! The wives of these Persians go about wrapped in cotton veils and wear either silk or velvet hose. Married women as well as maids have long tresses, reaching to the waist and sometimes even as far as the heels. They gather them together into two, three or four plaits, occasionally adding false hair; they also have a gold ring, set with pearls and gems, through their nostrils; a narrow shift serves them as underwear; round neck and body they wind ropes of pearls."

"Oh dear, the devil is still prowling around! I've got women on the brain. Why be a coward? After all, Snubnose did offer me a wench. No, had I accepted, 'twould have been a sin, for the maid was but a child. The infidels don't seem to mind. I'd better write about beasts!"

> "Most gracious, the sovereign's senior boyar Ivan Petrovich! There is a town, named Farabat, which belongs to His Majesty the shah, and in this town, so I have heard, the shah keeps wild beasts in iron cages, beasts such as elephants and leopards. The leopard is longer in the body than the lion, and has dark silvery fur with black stripes and spots. The fur is short. This animal resembles a cat and springs like a cat; though the springs correspond to the size of the animal, I have been told, gracious boyar, that a leopard can clear thirty feet or so. It has a big belly, a loud and blood-curdling roar, and its claws are like those of a lion."

" . . . Ah, such a trashy letter! It would earn you a flogging, my poor Gavriushka, were you in Moscow."

He rose, filled his pipe again and paced the room as he smoked. He pushed away the Arab book, covering it with his cap so that it should be out of sight. To exclude the damp and cloying night air he drew the curtain across the window, saying:

"So much for you!"

Discarding the sheets he had already written upon, he chose a fresh one and, in a specially large and clear hand, wrote:

> "Gracious boyar Ivan Petrovich! I begin my report to you by telling you the news that His Majesty the shah has returned to Isphagan. The Persians, Armenians, Greeks, Hindus and Jews gave him a hearty welcome. I did so likewise, for it is impossible to act otherwise, since a man risks being executed without inquiry into his faith if he fails to pay due honour to the monarch. The city of Isphagan, gracious boyar, lies, as it were, in a stone trough among the mountains. . . ."

". . . Alas, that's not a very impressive beginning. Still, I'd better finish the thing off and then see how it reads. In any case I shall have to let him know about the bandits."

"Boyar Ivan Petrovich! The robber Stenka Razin and his men have completely destroyed the shah's town of Derbent. I gather from the fugitives who have arrived here that the bandits slew the shah's senior beg, Abdulla, together with his son and brother, and they have, moreover, taken his daughter Zeineb captive. I know not whether the shah has received these tidings yet. Before this particular raid, Stenka Razin and his gang, with One-Eyed Sergunka, gave battle to the flotilla of the Gilyan khan in the Hvalynsk Sea; they rammed the ships, killed the khan and took his son prisoner. All save three of the ships were sent to the bottom, and the three which escaped were manned by a very small crew. Furthermore, gracious boyar, I have tracked down here a secretary to the chamberlain prince Dashkov of Sinbirsk. At one time this man was employed at the Foreign Office in Moscow, but—by order of the sovereign tsar—he was transferred to Sinbirsk without having to undergo a flogging for having written a document falsely; that is to say he, the said Akim Mitrev, son of Razuvayev, in the year 1667 drew up a report for prince Dashkov on the subject of Stenka Razin, but failed to include therein the sovereign's full name and titles. For this crime he ought to have been seized and taken to Moscow. To escape the penalty of his misdemeanour he fled to the shah's domains and is now living in Isphagan, doing a trade in small maiden captives. My ears burn with shame when I hear the foul abuse he showers on the great sovereign and our most holy patriarch. Furthermore, boyar Ivan, this fugitive evil-doer Akim is rousing up a feeling of animosity between the sovereign tsar and grand prince of All Russia and His Majesty the shah. The above-mentioned Akim had copied the great sovereign tsar's order to his commander of musketeers, and I have seen this order with my own eyes nailed on the wall of Akim's dwelling in Isphagan. The miscreant Akim reads this secret order aloud to the Persians in their own language, and consequently the infidels insult and defile the name of the great sovereign of All Russia. Apart from other business, I pray you, gracious boyar, to send me instructions as to how I had best proceed in order to lay the evil-doer Akim low, and to bring to justice the man whom I have traced and whose misdeeds I have discovered."

## 6

The Gilyan khan's captive ship, her sides bedecked with carpets, rocked placidly on the gentle ripple of the green waters. A tang of salt spray was in the air, and the oppressive odour of oleanders was wafted from the coast by the shore breeze. Three alterations had been made since the ship was captured: the mizzenmast had been cut away, and the front wall and door of the khan's apartment had been pulled down, thereby opening a wide exit to the deck. The corners, which had been damaged, were draped with carpets. The nearer benches where the oarsmen had sat were now occupied by musicians with drums, domras and pipes.

Razin was dressed in a coat of cloth-of-gold and had wound a blue and gold turban round his Zaporozhian cap. The Persian women captives had attired the princess in a tightly fitting silk tunic with a floral design in gold on a blue background; her bosom was bare; she wore scarlet silk trousers, dark blue silk

hose, and sandals with elaborately designed straps. A delicate network of pearls and rubies shone against the finely grained skin of her chest as though they were droplets of blood. As they boarded the canoe Razin swept aside the transparent blue veil to reveal luxurious tresses, held in place by circlets, and a small cap of blue and gold, with agate pendants. The canoe was lined with rugs, and when it drew up alongside the khan's vessel the oarsmen lifted the carpets and carried Razin and the princess into the apartment prepared for their reception, and deposited them on the khan's dais. As the steps had been damaged, the unsightliness had been concealed by rugs.

A hookah had been placed in readiness beside the princess, who sat on the ataman's left; but she did not touch it; Razin did not smoke. On the rugs at Razin's feet were Lazunka, Serebriakov and Grigori Rudakov; the heads of the two latter were bare. Serezhka was assigned a place on the ataman's right. Cossack serving-men set down a large pitcher of wine in front of the ataman. Lazunka ladled out the beverage into a golden cup; Razin drank, shaking the drops off his curly beard. He offered wine to the princess, who was afraid to refuse, but sipped it sparingly as she sat with her dark eyes cast down, their expression of fear veiled by the sweeping lashes. At a sign from the ataman Lazunka filled cups of wine, taken from a cask, and gave them to the captains. The last to arrive was Piotr Mokeyev, who from sheer joy had been in his cups ever since morning; he was wearing Razin's gift of gilt plate armour. Mokeyev took his seat beside Rudakov, his coat of mail reflecting golden patches of light.

"One thing I do beg of you, Cossack, is that you do not embrace me," said Rudakov.

"And what if I do, grandad?"

"Death will be my portion instead of the feast. You are heavy enough as it is, and now, with all this armour on—well, 'twould be too much for me!"

"Ha, ha, ha," bellowed the captain.

Razin spoke:

"I am very fond of Piotr. You've already drunk deeply, but I invite you to come and drink more to cheer my princess, your captive. Here's to you!"

"Oh well, father, why shouldn't a man drink?" Mokeyev rose heavily, cup in hand, the clasps of his mail jingling; he spilled wine upon Rudakov's grey head and shouted:

"I drink to Stepan Timofeievich! To his radiant joy! He who refuses to drink goes overboard."

The drums thereupon beat a tattoo and the trumpets blared. The ataman cried:

"Well done, musicians! Lazunka, sing what your boyar brain has composed about my princess." He bowed to the princess, gave her a sip out of his own cup and then drank himself.

"It won't be pleasant, father, for I've a voice like a bleating goat."

"Sing, you scamp!"

Lazunka obeyed, singing softly:

"Weep not, weep not, little captive,
Love like mine will cheer your heart;
Velvet fine will deck your beauty,
Broided o'er in shining gold!

"Diamonds, bright as any rainbow,
Shall I place upon your head . . .
Pearls be plaited in your tresses,
Silken coif with precious gems."

Everyone applauded the song, and Razin said:

"Drink and sing some more, Lazunka. I like your singing."

Lazunka rose and bowed to the ataman, emptied a cup of wine and, with a toss of his raven locks and beard, beat the time with his foot as he sang:

"I, a housewife, young and orderly,
Met disaster unexpectedly!
Underneath the seat of honour
Came a speckled hen most wicked,
Hatched her brood of yellow chickies
Right inside my coif of velvet.
Gold and pearls adorned that headpiece;
Nought now have I left for maidhood
Going to the market place,
Nor to sit at boards so festive,
Nor to boast of sparkling gems."

The ataman wanted Lazunka to sing some more, but Mokeyev, regardless of his companions, trumpeted in stentorian tones:

"I drink to our father and to the Shemahan princess!"

Razin burst out laughing:

"Oh, Piotr, what fibs you are telling! You took the princess at Derbent, but you have mixed it up with Shemaha. That is high up in the mountains, captain!"

"So long as you are about, father, mountains are no mountains at all. We'll reach up to the very heavens if needs must."

"Be that as it may, let's have another drink, Piotr."

The cooking arrangements had been left in the hands of Fedko, the erstwhile tavern servant from Samara. Under his supervision all the guests were provided with dishes of roast mutton and gazelle and slabs of wild boar. The boar and the gazelle had been killed in the shah's reserve between Gilyan and Farabat. There, on a strip of land jutting far out into the sea, Razin had ordered the building of a settlement, consisting of tents and mud huts. It served as a harbour for his flotilla and a storage dump for all booty, seized from the Armenian and Bokhara merchants. The main body of Cossacks was encamped here to watch over the treasure; they were under the command of the Yaik captain Fedor Suknin.

Razin issued the order:

"Falcons! Bring forward the old minstrel. Let him sing us a ballad."

"Hi, grandad!"

"Where's the old man from the Volga?"

"Asleep in the hold."

"Children, do not make such a fuss. How do you expect me to sleep when you are merrymaking?"

A white-haired man in a long Cossack coat and sheepskin cap stepped from

the stern to the middle deck, carrying a domra under his arm. He bowed from the waist to the ataman and, doffing his cap, jabbered quickly:

"Hail, father ataman and honourable guests and the whole Christian world!"

Thereupon he sat down, facing the ataman, gazed on the strings of his domra with bleary eyes and, stringing his words together in quick succession, began his ditty:

"Ivan, the tsar, ran to the porchway,
While pulling up his golden trousers;
He gazed upon his own carousers
And called aloud in mighty accents:
'Hi, wrestlers, fighting men and champions!
With Kostriuk come and measure forces,
Against my brother match your resources!'
But since no fighting men were present,
And wrestlers did not heed the challenge,
There stepped forth one, a simple peasant,
'Twas Potaniushko, named by us 'The Lame';
Here, forsooth, he comes with hobbling gait,
Hopping about from one foot to t'other,
From 'neath his hand he peereth round:
'Ivan Vasilich, tsar, good day! . . .'"

The old singer broke off to ask for some wine. He was presented with a large cup and rose to drink it to the dregs; then he wiped his beard and bowed. Sitting down again, he turned his instrument and resumed his ballad:

"My sov'reign lord, let me be wrestler,
And 'gainst Kostriuk my strength to measure.
And if I overcome your brother,
Permit that he be stripped of clothing. . . ."

"Hi, Fedka!"

"Present!"

"Why are you keeping the men waiting for their drinks? The atamans have their liquor, so why should not all the other Cossacks?"

The barrels of wine and vodka, which had long been standing ready, were thereupon broached, and all the men advanced to ladle out their portion of the heady liquid.

Among them stalked the tall, bony giant of a musketeer called Chikmaz, who had acted as executioner when the Yaik musketeers had been sentenced. With him was his boon companion, Fedka Shpyn, a stocky, broad-shouldered, bronzed Cossack with a scar across his forehead. Both drank their fill, embraced and conversed with one another and no one else.

"Fine, falcons! That's the way to drink!"

Cautiously, as though she were a fragile and expensive toy, Razin slipped his arm round the Persian princess. But the contact stirred him deeply, and he drew her into closer embrace, kissing her frightened eyes. When he came to kiss her lips, a hot flush overspread his face; he kissed her again, dragging her dainty cap askew; his moustache became entangled in the gold nose-ring; he

unfastened the ring and snapped it between his strong fingers. As it fell, the gold tinkled against the edge of the loving-cup, full of wine, and dropped to the bottom.

"Master! Oh, Allah!" murmured the princess softly.

"Our women do not wear their jewels in such fashion. But where's that old minstrel? Hey, you, give us another ballad!"

The minstrel was given a second cup of wine; he bowed, tottering as he did so, and sat down again on the deck. Touching the strings of his domra with stiffening fingers, he took up his song:

"The first bout went in Kostriuk's favour,
Potaniushko, he won the second!
He sprang upon Kostriuk's broad body,
And rent his coat of cloth-of-gold,
And tore from him his patterned shirt. . . ."

"Eh, my falcons! Good for you, Piotr; it is good, drinking. You have all roused me from a deep sleep."

In the cool of the evening, the scent of oleanders and stock, wafted from the shore, more and more pervaded the air as a gentle breeze was carried over the water. The voice of the muezzin, calling the four-times-repeated summons, sounded dreamily from the coast.

"*Allah akbar*. . . ."

In the hazy distance blue turbans and sandy-coloured cloaks moved slowly and looked as if the foothills themselves were in motion; the Moslems were going to the mosque.

As the muezzin's call to prayer reached her ear the Persian captive shrank into herself and drooped as though she feared lest her compatriots should catch sight of her unveiled face.

The old man continued in a quivering voice, while he twanged on the domra:

" 'Twas not a man who rose up cringing,
But an Amazonian maiden,
A Cherkess maid of warrior training.
She comes along and, stooping low,
Her twin breasts swinging to and fro,
She walks and walks and then she's going
Into the tsar's courtyard tottering,
With her glove her face she's covering,
Ah, here she's coming, coming, coming. . . ."

Chikmaz, powerful, bony, his hair standing on end, and his long arms behind his back, strode amidships shouting:

"Let's see if anyone can overpower me and strip off my coat?"

Chikmaz' enormous strength was known to the Cossacks, who all kept silent at his challenge. Fedka Shpyn alone held out his hands:

"Why, you devil's son, I'll strip you naked!"

"Ha, ha," laughed Chikmaz, "I reckon you've got a trifle hilarious in your cups! Come on!"

They came to grips, and Chikmaz laid his friend tenderly on the deck.

"Had enough?"

"Ay, that'll do, Chikmaz."

A few of the Cossacks tried their luck, but were invariably laid out playfully by the challenger. Razin declared:

"There's a fine wrestler for you! Seems as if I myself must have a trial of strength. On your guard, Chikmaz!"

"Nay, father, I cannot. . . ."

"Why not?"

"'Tis a question of rank. I challenge Cossacks and captains only. Allow Sergei to act as proxy for you."

With a wave of his hand Serezhka ladled himself out some more wine and replied:

"In a straight fight I'm as good as anyone. But wrestling's not my line."

"Well, and what about you, Mokeyev? I know you're strong, but I wager I shall overcome you."

"Serezhka spoke nothing but the truth. One needs no cunning in a battle, but as for wrestling and fisticuffs, that I am not used to."

Hearing this, the Cossacks shouted:

"Hey, Piotr, don't allow Chikmaz to get off by his boasting."

"Well, if he's merely boasting . . ."

"Come on, ex-commander!" roared Chikmaz.

"What I was I've forgotten; now I'm something else. So what about beginning?"

Swaying heavily, his armour sparkling in the dusk, Mokeyev approached the wrestler. Chikmaz adjusted his strong arms for the approach; the two men gripped each other; Mokeyev clasped his opponent ever more tightly so that Chikmaz' bones began to crack.

"Aha, you great devil! Piotr's made of other stuff than we are," cried the Cossacks, while they crowded round.

Clumsily Mokeyev drew Chikmaz hither and thither; then he raised him aloft and deposited him on the deck flat on his back. In doing so, however, Mokeyev lost his balance and came hurtling down on top of Chikmaz. As the latter rose, he said:

"'Twas as if a house had descended upon me."

"Well done, Piotr! Ha, ha, learn not to boast, Chikmaz."

"You're strong, but not as strong as Piotr," yelled the Cossacks.

"I was strong, but just now I felt like a calf on a bull's horns."

"One more bout, commander."

"Cease calling me that! I've drunk too much; my belly is rumbling."

"Never mind that. You'd better take off your mail, for one simply can't move you while you are encased thus. You'll feel stronger without it."

The Cossacks divested Mokeyev of his coat of mail.

"He can do you no harm, Piotr. This will make it easier for you."

"You're right, lads; I do feel a bit lighter."

The fall came even sooner than expected, and as Chikmaz rose he muttered tipsily:

"Never thought this devil would overcome me. He's like a mountain!"

Since there were no more wrestlers, Mokeyev picked up his armour and rejoined the ataman. With a glint from his ear-ring, up sprang Serezhka. The

princess started with fright at the terrific whistle he gave and put her hands over her ears.

"Remember our pledge, lads?"

In response to Serezhka's shout and whistle the Cossacks started to dance; a shudder ran through the ship's timbers at the stamping of many feet, and wine splashed over from their containers. The echo of blaring trumpets spread across the water. Coast and sea appeared to be dancing in rhythm with the tapping boots. Everybody was dancing, except Razin and the captains. Even the old Volga bard swayed to and fro in one place, poking his domra to right and left. Caps were sent flying into the sea. Again Serezhka whistled, drowning the music and the stamping of feet. The torches, which had been stuck on the benches on board the vessel, flared up and illumined the craft's merry-makers. The shadows of the dancers, as their reflections were cast upon the sea, were broken and jagged. Long did the dancing last, without the ataman interfering. Then, when it came to an end, Razin raised a bowl of wine and proposed a toast:

"Falcons! Here's to Piotr Mokeyev and his strength."

"We drink, father."

"To Piotr!"

Razin called out:

"Chikmaz, the Astrakhanian!"

"Here, father!"

"Come and drink with us."

Chikmaz obeyed. Razin, clinking cups and embracing Mokeyev, said to Chikmaz:

"I know that you are supple and strong; there's no gainsaying that. But Piotr's strength is not such as ours, it is not human. Where it comes from I know not. His strength is not a normal man's."

Chikmaz gulped down a ladleful of wine and, wiping his tousled greying beard, replied:

"Well, father, I too possess strength like no other man."

"Help yourself to another ladle, and then tell us what sort of strength yours is."

Chikmaz tossed off another ladleful, again wiped his beard with his coat-sleeve and answered:

"The force of my blow differs from that of the man who is with you."

"I am none the wiser!"

"'Tis this way. Should anyone sit on a barrel and I strike him, even a champion fighter would be knocked out, ay, even if he wore a coat. . . ."

"Boasting again?" declared Mokeyev. "You wouldn't unseat me even were I naked. But, maybe, just now my belly is too full of drink. . . ."

"If you keep your seat, I'll stand you five casks of wine."

"Where'll you get them from?"

"I'll get 'em! Bet you my head, I'll get them out of the infidels."

"You're a regular fighting-cock, musketeer."

Mokeyev advanced across the deck. Many servants leapt forward with torches in their hands in order to illuminate the massive man as he stood, stripped naked, amid the evening shadows, his bronzed figure looking particularly heavy with the big paunch showing. Chikmaz, solemn as an executioner before the scaffold, called out:

"Cossacks, find me a quarterstaff for the fight. If I win the wine from Piotr we shall all share it together."

They brought him one, six feet in length; it was a well-turned bowsprit.

"How many blows, commander?"

"Curse you! Do not call me commander! I've told you I am one no longer. Good for five. I could outsit more, but I'm swollen up with the drink."

The former executioner adjusted his coat, but did not roll up his sleeves. With a gesture known to him alone he raised the quarterstaff above Mokeyev and brought it whistling down. Mokeyev groaned.

"A blow of the finest order; not like an ordinary man's. You've done grandly, you devil."

Mokeyev stood the whole five without flinching, five blows which would have killed an ordinary man.

"Piotr Mokeyev is the winner," shouted Chikmaz, grinning. "Now, lads, come and drink the wine," and he burst into a tipsy guffaw as he hurled the quarterstaff aside.

As Mokeyev rose from the barrel he groaned again and fumbled for his clothes; he dressed with difficulty, saying in his customary slow and gentle manner:

"I wonder, lads, if I've gone blind from that contest with Chikmaz?"

The drunken Cossacks triumphed over Mokeyev's victory and, while helping him to dress, kept up a running commentary of chaff.

"Piotr! The eye is not the place which produces infants; you'll soon blink it clear."

"It may be as you say, but my innards are all on fire. Never has such a thing happened to me before."

"You've beaten Chikmaz, and that's good enough for you. Let's drink!" said the ataman, who was by now far gone in liquor, and thus spoke in a loud voice.

"No, father, I've lost."

"What d'ye mean?"

"I can't see, not so much as a yard ahead!"

"Has Chikmaz played some evil trick on you?"

Razin sprang to his feet, and his terrible voice was heard even on the distant coast.

"Bring Chikmaz to me!"

"Here I am, father."

"Why have you crippled my champion? Speak the truth, devil."

"This is not the first time we've played the game. We agreed beforehand as to terms. I did not attack him stealthily. All was done in your presence.

"Have a care, you Satan."

Razin's eyes flashed a glance at Chikmaz, and his hand went to his sword. Chikmaz lowered his head and said, while keeping his eyes firmly fixed on the ataman's face:

"Let Piotr speak for himself, father. If his judgment goes against me, then I am in your hands to do with what you please."

"Come here, Piotr."

Supporting Mokeyev by the elbows, the Cossacks led him up to where Razin stood.

"Did Chikmaz intend to do you a hurt? If so—death to him!"

"Do the fellow no harm, father. 'Twas all in good faith. You remember it was I who sat down and challenged him. He struck in the usual way."

Razin ground his teeth.

"Chikmaz, you are free and need have no fear. Is there a leech on board?"

The black-moustached Cossack from Samara came forward:

"A learned Jew is howling in the hold, Stepan Timofeievich; he was captured and bound at Derbent; he speaks our tongue; he says he is a leech."

"Who is the fool who treats a learned man roughly? The tsar is consolidating Moscow's power with the aid of learned Germans and other foreigners, yet with me they are locked up in the hold. This won't do!"

"I cannot abide Jews, father. It was I who ordered the dog to be bound," put in Serezhka.

"Loosen his bonds and bring the Jew here. I persecute no one either on account of his race or his religion."

A Jew, wearing a long, black, bloodstained and dirty coat, his long hair rumpled, approached Razin, bowing low the while.

"What is the master's wish?"

Razin ordered his men to give the Jew some wine and food. He was offered a piece of meat, but he refused it.

"Now tell us what you can do."

"Master, I pray you not to have me bound. I shall not try to escape—I am an honest man. I can guard and count the master's treasures. A Jew has a better knowledge of the value of gold and precious stones than anyone else. . . ."

"I have both keepers and accountants; what I need is a leech."

The Jew nodded.

"Master, I am a leech."

"Well, examine the man," said Razin, pointing to Mokeyev, who sat with bowed head. "His innards have been hurt, and he has gone blind. Tell us what you know."

"The Cossack must be stripped, master."

Mokeyev was assisted to undress. From breast to navel a purple bruise spread over his front. The Jew palpated Mokeyev, placed his ear over his heart, and said:

"Put on your clothes."

"Well, leech, what have you to say? Has he lost his sight temporarily or for ever?"

"Master, Adonai, the God of our fathers, has bestowed wisdom upon me. In him I believe, Him I worship and obey. He led me into Mizraim, where I learned from the books of the sages to know the art of healing. Master, the Hellenes taught that the centre of human life lies near the navel, and they call that spot the solar plexus, from the similarity existing between the words sun and life. . . ."

"You are somewhat garrulous, but I am listening. Speak as it seems best to you."

"The ancient sages of Mizraim also taught that the seat of man's life or death was near the navel. They called this same spot by another name: the plexus. Here there is a network of nerves and veins, the centre of the abdominal viscera. Should any of the veins connected therewith be severed, life becomes extinct."

"What a lot of words! I know, without your having to tell me, that once the innards are severed a man is doomed to die."

"Be not angry, master. To wound or merely to beat these centres is very dangerous. Some of these nerves affect the hearing, others the sight. . . . The Cossack's sight nerve has been severed."

"Will you undertake to treat the captain?"

"Yes, master. Whether my treatment will prove successful I cannot say. May the God of my fathers come to my aid, but I will do what I can, ataman."

"Go with him into the hold. Demand all you need. If you do the captain any good, I shall reward you and take you wherever you would like to be taken, a free man. I always keep my word."

"I obey the master and thank him."

"And you, there, obey the Jew. Give him all he asks for. Where's Fedor?"

"Here, father."

"You are in charge of all the domestic arrangements, and keep a tally of the stores and accounts. Lodge Mokeyev and the Jew in some clean place; let the Jew wash and issue him a set of white clothing."

The Jew bowed to the ataman.

"Again I offer the ataman my thanks."

7

Razin, together with the princess, captains and Cossacks, left the khan's ship and went aboard the ataman's barge. Five Cossacks, Chikmaz among them, remained behind to keep the watch. In the hold were Piotr Mokeyev, the Jewish leech and two servants. The ship lay shrouded in the indigo gloom, warm and soft as velvet; no lights on deck. Armed with an arquebus, Chikmaz took up his post in the stern aloof from the others; the rest of the watch occupied the prow. The Cossacks, their weapons leaning against the bulwarks, sat on the rowing benches smoking and talking in low tones about life on the Don and the Volga. Chikmaz alone, as was his custom, kept the regulation watch, his tall figure towering like a black statue above the taffrail. The vessel swayed gently on the swell. A dark shadow glided across the water below the stern. Chikmaz challenged sternly:

"Who goes there? The password!"

"Nechai," came from below.

A harpoon struck the ship and buried itself in the wooden hulk. With his customary agility, a squat figure, pipe in mouth, climbed up the hawser and swung itself on board.

"Why, I didn't recognize you! I've been wondering where my Fedka could have got to."

"I'm not afraid of bullets even if you had fired." Puffing at his pipe, the squat figure halted at a distance with its head turned towards the prow.

"Come up nearer. I cannot hear what you say," declared Chikmaz.

The stocky man drew quite close and whispered:

"Now let's have the end of your tale. I told you all about myself during the revel."

"I have no objection at all to tell you everything. Are you aware, Fedka, that I served the boyars in Moscow as a musketeer? And the Tsar himself rewarded me for my services with a coat and some cloth!"

"No, I knew nothing of this."

"Yet so it was. Then they appointed me executioner—and that's a lucrative job in Moscow. A man could earn many rubles a day from the convicted if he mitigated the floggings."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, but on one occasion my soul revolted, and with one stroke of the lash I dispatched a nobleman to his death. For this I was exiled to Astrakhan and again enrolled among the musketeers. In our company there was a man against whom I had an outstanding grudge. He was the assistant commander, a spy, and kin to that Sakmyshev whom we recently threw into the Yaik. Well, I struck him with an axe, dragged his body into the water, threw his skull to the dogs; and the voivode threatened me with the noose. So I hied to the ataman. But it seems to me that here, too, a man gets scant honour paid to him. You know as well as I do that we fought together against the Gilyan khan, sacked Derbent, killed no fewer Armenians and Persians than the others did, yet never a kind word have we received. My nature is such that if I see there's no chance of promotion I keep my axe well sharpened. Piotr Mokeyev stands between the ataman and all the rest of us. He's strong, there's no gainsaying that. I sampled his strength in Astrakhan; but are we inferior to him?"

"We'll soon show what we are made of."

"That we shall! None can do what you and I can. I was drunk, and when in my cups I seem to get specially maddened. I am not boasting when I say that none can survive once I take him in hand. I have struck people dead with a half-stroke from the lash. Mokeyev is strong and stalwart, yet even he cannot survive after my five strokes. The ataman is as infatuated with him as with a girl. You saw how he was on the point of slaying me, and were Piotr to die he'd be angrier still. So I must flee! But I cannot go without you. I'd be as lost in the mountains as a louse in the sea. But I know the mountain tribesmen are friendly to you."

"Yes, I sold captives for them and shared in the profits."

"Neither are you greatly honoured by the ataman in spite of your prowess."

"Have you forgotten how he nearly killed me at Yaik?"

"How should I have forgotten? We have drunk together, have made a pledge to one another, have planned to escape. Are you coming?"

"How could I do otherwise? I've just caught sight of two fine steeds on the shore; I have halters; once up in the mountains we shall be given saddles; I've put aside some lead, gunpowder, two pistols and a sword. . . ."

"I also have a pistol and sword. Let's be going, friend. I'm all gooseflesh down my back at the thought that the ataman may return, and if he finds that Mokeyev is not recovering, then I am done for."

"Where do you propose to go?"

"To Astrakhan. There is a new voivode installed now; it's Prozorovski. The murdered assistant commander has never been found."

"I shall make for the Don to join up with Vassia Lavreich."

"Who's he?"

"Did I never tell you about Vaska Uss?"

"You can't do better than cling to that man, Fedor. Meanwhile, if you get into any trouble, come to Astrakhan; I shall give you shelter and stand you drink if all goes well with me."

Chikmaz took the arquebus from his shoulder and leaned it against the taffrail.

"Farewell, my iron wife; I shall take another one when I get to Astrakhan."

The stocky figure slipped over the side of the vessel and dropped with a thud into the waiting canoe. The tall one followed. As the dark silhouette glided into the open water the watch challenged:

"Who goes there?"

"Friends! Speak softly. . . ."

"Why are you abandoning your watch?"

"To get the wine forfeited to Mokeyev!"

"They'll catch it from Serezhka if he comes to check up on the watch," said a Cossack.

"One is Chikmaz. Who is the other?"

"He's easy to recognize by his build. Did you not recognize him?"

"Nay, it's that dark."

"He's a Cossack, Fedka Shpyn by name."

"Well, friends, they are smart fellows. We'll soon have wine. . . ."

## 8

A tattoo on the drums and a blare of trumpets summoned the Cossacks to assemble on the khan's ship. Razin, Serezhka and Lazunka sat on the divan drinking. They were joined by Serebriakov and Rudakov and a new captain, named Mishka Chernousenko, a handsome, ruddy-faced Cossack with fair eyebrows. His naive eyes had a twinkle in them, and his girlish face and curly locks bore a resemblance to Chernoyarets. Razin spoke:

"Now, Lazunka, offer wine to our guests, the captains."

The captains, standing on the carpet at the foot of the dais, received the wine. Fedka, the Cossack from Samara, who acted as supervisor of the ataman's property and attended to the general ordering of the domestic side, approached the couch.

"Father, Piotr Mokeyev is getting up."

"That's good news! I reckon he must be better."

"I don't know about such things; the leech is in the other boat."

Slowly supporting himself on a stout stick, Mokeyev made his way towards the ataman.

"Fine, Piotr! Come along, my sick man."

"Coming, Stepan Timofeivich; only you see my feet don't move properly yet."

"Still feeling bad?"

"My sight is better, but my inside is burning with fever."

Mokeyev drew nearer and slumped down.

"Why are you wearing mail? It is far too heavy for an invalid."

"The metal gives me a little more ease, it seems to cool my innards a bit."

"Lazunka, give him some wine."

"I'll follow your example, father, only I can keep nothing down."

Crossing himself, Mokeyev took a gulp, but immediately his stomach rejected the fluid, which spurted on to the carpet.

"See that? It looks as if I'll have to die of hunger."

"What does the leech say?"

"Oh, he did his best. He was up all night, placing frogs on my belly to cool

it. Where he managed to procure a bucketful of them is more than I can tell. He rubbed my belly with ointment, and the purple patch has disappeared; then my eyes got better, but he says: 'The intestines are damaged, and that is not good.'"

Razin bawled out to the Cossacks in the stern:

"Falcons! Arrest Chikmaz of Astrakhan!"

A Cossack from among the guard stepped up and, bowing, reported:

"Father, this very night Chikmaz and the Cossack Fedka Shpyn fled. They forsook their post at the watch and went off in the dark. As they were escaping, they cried out that they were going to fetch wine from the infidels. We had no means of stopping them. Their canoe was found in the morning, drawn halfway up the beach."

"Another mistake! First I allowed them to play this game when I disliked it even in Astrakhan; secondly I omitted to have the executioner seized immediately. I was mistaken in my surmise that he would be afraid to desert while in an unknown and perilous spot, and forgot about Shpyn, who is an experienced dog. He is familiar with the mountains and is probably well known among the mountaineers. Ah, Stenka, you have made a fool of yourself. The robbers will get away without a scratch. You have my permission to depart, falcon."

The Cossack went.

"Come, come, you must not grieve, Stepan Timofeievich. Such is fate! Many a time have I played the barrel game, and nothing happened to me, but this time I sat there gaping like a fish out of water; I forgot to shut my mouth—the game comes off all right if a man puffs out his chest; then the belly becomes taut, and you can strike it as hard as you like. Unfortunately, I overdrank, so my belly was hanging down and was flabby. But I must say that the blows Chikmaz dealt were nothing but ordinary ones."

"Oh, Piotr, it does not make things any easier for me to know that your belly was flabby. The dogs have made good their escape, and this is no time for repining. I have summoned you, gallant captains, for the following purpose: some of you are grumbling because I have so far not kept my word and sent envoys to the shah. I ask you, would this be expedient? I wish the Assembly to decide. If we want to settle on the Kura river, the way thither is by Shemaha. We shall have to go by way of the mountains and cross the steppe—that steppe takes a two days' march to cover. There flows the Kura river, which is as wide as the Moskva; on its banks there are villages, bazaars, a ferry-bridge runs across it. Merchants pay toll for the privilege of using it for the passage of their wares. Now, if we place ourselves under the shah's rule we shall be deprived of our roving trade. Furthermore, I have it on good authority that the shah is angry with us on account of the sack of Derbent. The Gilyan khan was the first to attack us; he did so without awaiting the shah's permission. But the Derbent affair was entirely of our own doing. I am not angry with Piotr Mokeyev and my Serezhka; Derbent was their affair, but since it has happened, a mission to the shah may be necessary. I have been thinking of raiding the coast, and, consolidating ourselves in the forest, to winter in Persia and then set sail for the Kura river and later for the Don."

"I don't see any reason for sending a mission to the shah either way, father."

"That is also my decision, Piotr."

"The shah has a firm understanding with Moscow. When I was in Astrakhan I found out that a constant traffic was carried on between the shah and Moscow;

from the shah went forth merchants with their goods; from Moscow came wine merchants and clerks with merchandise. Suppose the shah were to accept us as his subjects, what would he do about Moscow? He knows what hotheads the Cossacks are; the tsar's spies are for ever circling round the shah and dinning into his ears all the evil they can rake up about the Cossacks. No, we cannot break bread with the shah!"

"You are right, Piotr. My idea is that we do not send envoys to the shah. Besides, how can I find it in my heart to abandon the Russian people to the mercies of the boyars? The blood of my father and brother has not been avenged; the foul death they met with sears my very soul. We must provide the wolves with as much boyar flesh as possible. So go to Moscow I must, whether to act as executioner or to be executed. Yes, go there I must!"

Serezhka rose.

"Father, we cannot live in Russia. Even the veteran Cossacks on the Don are suppressing free men and driving them into the tsar's hands. With every passing year the tsar's fist presses heavier on the Don. The way to the Turks, to whom we go for cloths, is barred by towers and by chains, strung across the water; we risk losing many a life were we to try and get through; the passage to Azov is impassable; the outlet from the Volga is narrow; voivodes and commanders are ever on the watch at Yaik and Astrakhan. Here, on the other hand, life is pleasant; Persia is a wealthy country, the climate is mild, some of us can get wives, others can bring theirs over from the Don with their families. Should the sea route be debarred us—well, Fedka Shpyn is not the only one to whom the mountains are familiar. I, too, know the mountain tribesmen, and through the mountains the way to Moscow is not barred to us."

Serebriakov also rose, and said:

"Stepan Timofeievich, I am of Sergei's opinion."

"Falcons! What if the shah refuses conciliation?"

"He'll become reconciled to us, never fear, father. The sack of his towns will have revealed to him how strong we are and will intimidate him. He will ponder: 'If I refuse to welcome the Cossacks, they will ravage Persia.' So he will receive us! In years gone by I took part in Ivan Kondyr's raids on Persia; yet the shah invited Ivan to enter his service," added old Grigori Rudakov.

"Well, falcons, I ought in reality to oppose you, but Sergei, Ivan and Grigori will contradict me; Piotr and I alone are right. Who, then, is to be sent as envoy to the shah?"

"Let us cast lots," shouted Serezhka.

"Wait! How many are to be sent? And is the mission to be chosen from among the Cossacks in general or from among the captains?"

"Ordinary Cossacks will be of no use. Let us send captains."

"Then cast lots for two, I refuse to send more; a third, acting as interpreter, be chosen from among our Persians, who were not taken prisoner, but came to me of their own free will. They know our language and will tell us what the shah says. That will have to suffice. You, Piotr, are a sick man, so I refuse to allow you to take part in the casting of lots."

"Put my name down, too, father. It will be long ere I shall be able to fight again—if ever, and to die sitting at home is a harder fate than to find one's death in your cause."

"Look you, friends, Piotr is of opinion that death awaits you from the shah. I have to send weaker men, for if you, my gallant advisers, perish, the cause to

which I have devoted my life will perish too. Moreover, I have had a bad dream. Not that I am an old woman who believes in dreams, but this particular dream seemed very real."

"Tell us, father, what was your dream?"

"Yes, tell us, Stepan Timofeievich!"

"Well, here it is. As I lay with open eyes I saw the candles in my candelabra light up, and then those which were on either side of the central candle went out one by one. Some relit themselves, but gutted out again. This went on for a long time. At last the thick central candle alone remained alight, and its flame was blood-red."

Lazunka observed:

"The old man from the Volga is here listening to you, father. He is a wonderful man at interpreting dreams. Hey, come along, grandad!"

The ancient in the grey sheepskin cap with his domra under his arm came forward from a corner of the apartment.

"Did you hear the ataman's dream, grandad? Interpret it!" commanded Serezhka, while Razin ordered that the old man should be served with wine.

"Drink, and do not tell us a pack of lies. You have no reason to fear the truth, no matter how cruel it may be."

"I have never been afraid of the truth, young ataman. I know you are a just man. As it is given me to understand, thus shall I explain." So saying, the old man handed the emptied ladle to Lazunka and, wiping the moisture from his beard, commented: "The blood-red candle represents the ataman himself; the side candles are his intimates among the warriors; when one falls, another flame is lit, and takes its place."

"If this be true, falcons, how can I have it in my heart to send any of my captains to the shah? What signifies my blood-red flame, grandfather?"

"A child could understand that, ataman. You will kindle a blood-fire in Russia. Your blood-red light will shine through the long years to come. You did not see it extinguished?"

"No, old man."

"So it is. Should it go out within yourself its light will be rekindled in someone else."

"You speak comfort, ancient; drink again; you have spoken the very words I wished you would speak. I know a fighting man's life is short, and that the road leading towards truth is everlasting. Many years hence, maybe centuries hence, the blood-red flame of our truth will light up that road."

Serebriakov, who had held out his ladle to be replensished, now rose and, bowing to Razin, said:

"Father, do not trouble to cast lots. Allow me to go to the shah. I shall tell him of your cause in such a way that he will abandon Moscow and permit us to settle on the Kura."

"Ah, Ivan, but suppose the shah puts you in fetters? I would rather have my hand cut off, though not my sword-hand."

Serebriakov bowed again and replied:

"Nevertheless, I beseech you to let me go."

"Not unless the die is cast in your favour, Ivan."

"Sergei, get some slips of paper."

"Lazunka, take down the names. Ivan and Grigori are to go. Shall he write down Piotr's name, too, father?"

"Yes, please do, Sergei," put in Mokeyev, "to plead your cause before the shah, that's my road."

"Piotr to go, Mihail, Sergei, Lazunka."

Gulping down his wine, Razin said:

"I'd as lief hang on the rack as listen to you, brothers, for I know you are heading straight into the flames."

Serezhka replied:

"Let not your heart be troubled, father. The shah will bestow lands upon us. We'll have a feast and then start on a raiding expedition against the voivodes, and the shah will be unable to oppress us once we are over the mountains."

Lazunka wrote down the names of the men who had volunteered, wrapped some coins into pieces of tissue and threw the whole into the old ballad-singer's cap.

"Shake it well, grandfather! Draw, Rudakov! Let our two oldest captains try their fate!"

"Blank! Blank! Another blank! Here's Serebriakov's name. He's to go. Blank! Blank! Now what? Another blank. Piotr Mokeyev, here's your name, so you are to go."

"Those who asked have been granted their wish," remarked the ancient, shaking the lots out of his cap.

"You see, father, I am still fit enough to stand up for your cause, and I shall proclaim it to the best of my ability. There is but one thing which troubles me: I do not trust the shah. Moscow's tsar is a Herod, but Persia's ruler is Satan personified. The two of them prop one another up with their horns. I am going, Stepan Timofeievich."

"Ah, Piotr," said Razin, with bowed head. His face was overcast with sadness as he added with unwonted gentleness: "I shall not oppose your will, falcons."

Then, raising his head, he gave his envoys to Persia some instructions.

"Listen! The Persians, like ourselves, do not bother much about women. You had better not mention the princess; leave her behind to remind me of Piotr Mokeyev. But we detain one important prisoner: the khan's son Shebyn. Should the shah keep one of you hostage, tell him about Shebyn and pass on the news to him that I shall exchange him with interest."

"We understand your wishes, father. Now give us an interpreter."

"Choose him yourselves. Let him be someone you all like and who knows our language."

## 9

Gavriushka reached the old market square, but did not go any farther, for crowds of people were pressing towards the shah's square exclaiming:

"The shah is coming!"

"The ruler of Persia is coming to the square!"

As Gavriushka passed by the fruit stalls laden with dried apricots, raisins, figs and sticky pink sweetmeats, he mused:

"No need to go to the shah except on business. He walks about unceremoniously, not like our own sovereign. Ours drives forth in a coach. The shah resembles an executioner; he is restless and temperamental: will shed his favours on the unworthy and throw others to the dogs."

A naked man was dragged into the middle of the square.

"A thief! An execution!"

Gavriushka liked to watch executions, so he hastened forward. In the centre of the square stood two stone pillars twice a man's height, furnished with iron rings through which ran leather straps.

The bearded executioner was stripped to the waist and was wearing baggy red trousers, stained with blackened blood. His large nose protruded from his square face above a bristling moustache. Baring his teeth in a grin, he thrust a curved knife into the lean stomach of the criminal.

"Oh! Oh!"

"You cur, so you've found the proper word at last," growled the executioner as he drew out his victim's entrails and threw them to the expectant dogs.

The sallow body, which had become as lean as a strip of birch bark, lay huddled at his feet. The executioner put his knife into his sash and, with his fist, so as not to smear his headgear, pushed back his turban. Then with a broad grin he flung the body, as if it were the carcase of a calf, on to some spikes set upright in a thick log.

The body still jerked convulsively on the terrible, comblike spikes. The heart, which had slipped down through the slit diaphragm, still contracted and expanded; the eyes gleamed white and blinked as though exposed to sunlight; the protruding tongue still moved. Without another glance at his victim the executioner turned his back on the corpse and proclaimed in a loud voice with a Tabriz accent:

"Persians! Our great shah asked this cur whom I have just dispatched: 'Who are you?' And the man replied to our gracious sovereign, father Abbas: 'A man like yourself, shah.' The invincible shah said: 'You are a dog, since you know not how to address me.' Thereupon our gracious sovereign ordered that this man be seized. The great and mighty one will deliver to me all those who dare respond in anger to the Sun of Persia."

"Glory to shah Abbas!" cried the red-haired clerk. The crowd kept silent.

"No one shall utter insolent words concerning his majesty. Glory to the invincible shah!"

The crowd dispersed in silence.

"Aha, you painted devils! It goes against your stomachs that the shah should feed human flesh to the dogs? That's the reason why I avoid him." And with these reflections the red-haired clerk walked towards the square. "I wonder what sort of lies their damned dervish is telling them now?"

He drew nearer to the dervish, who was sitting on the sand, in a corner of the square, leaning his back against a pillar, with an ancient book open before him. From head to foot he was smeared over with black naphtha; the smell of stale sweat he exuded spread far and wide. Except for his private parts, which were swathed in sheepskin, the man was naked. He was bearded, wore a tattered turban and copper ear-rings, from which dangled large blue crystals. A somewhat subdued throng surrounded him. A little in the forefront stood a Persian with a sickly sallow face; his chest heaved and creaked beneath the sleeveless, sandy-coloured cloak; a thick vein throbbed in his neck; from beneath his blue turban the sweat poured down his face and beard.

"Father, can you foretell how much longer I have to live?"

"According to the holy book, your life will last another thirty-three years."

Gavriushka moved away with a snort.

"The cursed devil is lying," he thought. "The body of that poor wretch is diseased; how can it last another thirty-odd years? It would have been a different matter had he predicted such a thing for me."

In the midst of another crowd, which kept at a respectful distance, stood a man hung all over with spotted, blue snakes.

The man wore no turban; his hair and beard were a fiery red; his lean, bronzed body was naked to the waist, showing his magnificent muscles; a blue sash held up his trousers, which were of the same colour.

A large snake with a motley head crawled on the sand in the middle of the circle. The snake-charmer struck his fist on a tambourine hanging from his waist. All the other snakes raised their heads and hissed. The one on the ground within the ring also raised its head, halted and then wriggled away to the side, while the crowd calmly drew back to allow it to pass. Gavriushka sprang aside, thinking:

"What if the reptile were to make a spring? Though I've seen the beasts so often, I cannot get used to their company."

The tamer struck the tambourine twice; the snake reared itself on its tail till it was about six feet high, darted through the air and dropped on the charmer's shoulders. A man from among the throng stepped forward to ask:

"What is my fate to be?"

"The snake crawled eastwards; it behoves you to make a pilgrimage to Mecca; such is your destiny."

The red-haired clerk, afraid to approach nearer to the snake-charmer, shouted in Russian:

"Hi, tamer, tread on the reptile's tail; it will crawl northward. That way leads not to Mecca, but to the women for reproduction and to the taverns for drink."

Since the tamer did not understand Russian, he merely shook his head and smacked his lips.

Copper gongs sounded in the shah's square, and a blare of trumpets smote the ears. The shah had sallied forth for a stroll. At this very moment three men entered the market square; two of them wore long, loose, dark blue Cossack coats, while the other was clad in plate armour.

"By the Holy Trinity, Gavriushka, whether you want to or not, your way lies in the direction of the shah. 'Tis they!"

The red-haired informer approached the trio and bowed, saying:

"Hello, friends! Here's an unexpected pleasure for me. Are you come from the ataman Razin? And are you on your way to see the shah?"

"Yes, from Stepan Razin, fellow. What do you want?" asked Serebriakov.

"What do I want, indeed! Brothers, whom have you got as interpreter? Some Persian or other, who speaks broken Russian? He will entangle your words like yarn on a distaff. Instead of rendering a service to the ataman, you'll lose your petition—and your heads into the bargain. The shah is a temperamental man."

"But do you understand Persian?" asked Mokeyev, breathing with difficulty and swaying from side to side. "My belly is burning, and it's damnably hot here. What do you say to a drink of water?"

"I speak Arabic as well as Persian. I know their language thoroughly. You had better rest for a while. The shah has only now come out for his walk, so sit down, and the interpreter will bring you some water. It is pleasantly cool here."

"Where are you off to?"

"To my place so that I may change into something presentable. We are going to see the shah, and he detests shabbily dressed people."

"Well, go along. We shall wait here."

The Cossack sat down on a stone; the interpreter went away to fetch water; the red-haired clerk slipped into the crowd and disappeared.

"We've made a good start. One of our own folk has turned up, who knows the language. That's a fine piece of luck. He'll be able to explain everything properly."

"On the surface it seems all right, Piotr, but how are we to know what kind of a man he really is?"

"The right sort. That's obvious. He's lived here and knows the customs of the place. Did you not hear him say the shah detests shabby clothes? If he did not wish to help us he would not have cared whether his dress was shabby or not."

"You may be right."

Gavriushka soon returned, wearing a yellow satin kaftan of Turkish cut and a blue sash with silk tassels. He had also exchanged his pointed cap for a little flat summer cap made of blue patterned silk.

"You've been quick, brother," said Mokeyev, "that's good!"

"Do I look smart?"

"Ay, that you do."

"You might just as well lead us straight to the shah."

"I am an old inhabitant of these parts and have made some money—I trade in captives. Not only do I know all the streets, but every alleyway is familiar to me. It is lucky we met. Trust me to advance your case."

The Persian interpreter said nothing.

Gavriushka addressed him in Persian.

Serebriakov asked the Persian interpreter:

"Does our Muscovite know Persian well?"

"Yes, captain, very well."

"Then we'll allow him to address the shah, while you stand by and correct him if he tells any lies about us. You see, your tongue takes a peculiar twist when you speak Russian, and what we want is straight talk."

"Me understand," replied the interpreter.

## 10

The shah, dressed in a white satin cloak, was seated with his back to the fountain. His blue turban was entwined with strings of large pearls, the scarlet aigrette was adorned with diamonds; his face, with a big mole on the right cheek, looked paler than ever under this finery. His eyes were sunk deep in their sockets and expressed cruelty. On either side of the shah stood a giant bodyguard holding truncheons. Slightly to one side, but within the group of elegantly attired begs, a servant held two leopards on silver leashes. The animals had smooth, tawny coats with black spots, smallish muzzles set with sharp, prominent teeth, and long, straight paws—the sign of a fleetfooted creature.

Gavriushka, realizing that Serebriakov distrusted him, whispered:

"Look the shah straight in the face. He likes to be considered a god."

"We are listening, fellow."

An intense silence reigned over the gathering. The shah was about to speak, when he turned round and said:

"Why has that fountain been left flowing to create a noise?"

The splashing instantly ceased.

Addressing the assembly, the shah spoke in quiet tones:

"In the name of Allah the All-Merciful! My people, do I not grant you freedom in matters of religion and trade? To all the peoples of my realm I have given liberty to worship as they please. Near my mosques hang the idols of the giaours, Armenians, Russians and Georgians. Have I ever broken the objects which they call ikons? No! I extend to the Orthodox Christians the same rights as to the Shiites and the Sunnites. Polytheists, monotheists may squabble among themselves, but I am not concerned in their disputes. I do not ask you whether you worship in the mosque or say the evening prayer. I know that for your divorces you pay the fee, which goes to the adornment of my family mausoleum, and that suffices me. Are you not free to trade as you like? I do not interfere if you sell your wives into slavery, for you are entitled to do so. Yet when I summon you to play the game of mud and water—a game of long standing with my ancestors and played by my grandfather Abbas the First, victor over the Turks and conqueror of many Indian cities, and by myself, shah Abbas the Second—you come in shabby clothes, as though you were afraid your better clothes would be soiled. Do you grudge the shah your jiveries? Take note of this, that in future he who attends the game in old clothes shall be delivered to the executioner or flung to the dogs. I will have you further remember that the shah tolerates nakedness and destitution only in dervishes, but not in you. I have noticed, moreover, that there are some among you who fail to address me in proper fashion by bending the knee; such among you who disregard this will be punished without mercy."

The interpreter translated the shah's speech in low tones to Serebriakov. Mokeyev, who was listening, remarked:

"See, Ivan, our Muscovite told us the truth about the shah. It's a pity we are so dusty from our travels."

"Let our own interpreter speak first, Piotr." And turning to Gavriushka, Serebriakov added: "Now, my lad, our interpreter is to speak first and then you."

To this Gavriushka responded aggressively: "Order your interpreter as you like, but I can now do as I choose, either to wring your neck or push you out of my way."

"We are happier with our own interpreter."

"You have sharp swords, I have a sharp tongue."

Redpoll darted a glance at the crowd and added:

"Why is secretary Akim here?"

"Who is he?"

"I need him, not you! The place feels empty without the presence of Satan! Here comes Snubnose!"

The former secretary stood among the concourse, but did not come forward.

"Draw nearer or I'll denounce you to the shah."

"Do you intend to denounce us too?" asked Serebriakov.

"Why should I? I shall judge what is best."

Serebriakov, leading his own interpreter forward, commanded:

"Present us to the shah in these words: 'Here are the envoys of the ataman.'"

The interpreter bent his knee and pressed his hand to his right eye.

"Great shah! The ataman, Stepan Razin, salutes you! To you, the Sun of Persia, he wishes good health, and he has sent his Cossacks to beseech you to accept him and them as your subjects."

"What? The man who pillages my cities? Confiscate their arms!"

Two begs quitted the group of courtiers and addressed the interpreter:

"Tell them to surrender their swords, and, if they have pistols, to hand them over likewise."

Serebriakov and Mokeyev gave up their swords.

"That man, too, must hand up his quarterstaff. He is a mere envoy, and only the great shah's servants need such weapons."

"I cannot, for without it I would fall; tell them this, interpreter."

The interpreter conveyed the words to the shah, who asked:

"What is the one in armour shouting?"

"He is a sick man and says that he will fall if he is deprived of his stick."

"Very well, he may approach with his staff."

Mokeyev, Serebriakov, and the interpreter came forward.

Imitating the interpreter, Serebriakov bent the left knee:

"We greet you, shah!"

The interpreter translated, but added the word "great".

"Have you destroyed many of my towns and villages?"

"Some we have destroyed, but others were the first to attack," replied Serebriakov.

The shah shot an angry glance in Mokeyev's direction and shouted:

"Why has he not bowed properly with knee and head? He must know my will in these matters."

"Shah, if he knelt, he would be unable to rise from the ground. He is a sick man."

"Then let him say what he has to say lying down. What does he want? What ails him?" remarked the shah with a nod, which set the diamonds in his aigrette scintillating and quivering.

"Force the Cossack to his knees; if he cannot rise, break his legs; he must be at a lower level than the shah."

The giant bodyguards approached Mokeyev.

"What is it you want?"

The interpreter explained the shah's order to the captain.

"I am ill; but even were I sound in health I should refuse to kneel. It is precisely on this account that I could not bear to look at the tsar in Moscow. I am not in the habit of——"

Seeing that Mokeyev remained obdurate, the shah's henchmen seized him by the shoulders. The Cossack struck out with his free hand, and both the Persians fell to the ground, one of them even at the shah's feet.

The courtiers stood petrified, expecting an outburst of fury on the part of the shah. But he laughed and said:

"So this is what he is like when he is a sick man? What must he have been when he was hale? Has Razin many such as he?"

The interpreter made a quick translation. Mokeyev shouted:

"We are all of the same kidney! Now, if you refuse to allow us to settle on

the Kura and will not accept our services, then we shall destroy Persia by fire and sell its people as slaves to the Turks."

Serebriakov said in an aside to his comrade:

"Piotr, you are ruining our cause. The words you utter are the wrong sort."

"He is too high-handed; it does not matter what one says."

Serebriakov warned the interpreter:

"Do not translate his words to the shah, but say: 'We have many men such as I. We shall serve him loyally and honestly if he grants our petition.' "

When the interpreter had done as he was instructed to do the shah replied:

"I should wish to see more of your men and pass them under review. If I am satisfied, I may forgive you the sack of Derbent and other places. I believe—nay, I feel sure—that you are brave, and Persia is in need of good warriors such as you."

From out the crowd there stepped the grey-haired commander-in-chief of the Gilyan khan. He bowed his knee, pressed his right hand to his eye and spoke in some agitation:

"Great shah Abbas! These bandits burnt and sank in the Kilzium Sea the ships of the ruler of Gilyan. They killed the khan and captured his son, whom they are still detaining. The noble Persian is yearning for his motherland; but he is the captive of these robbers."

The shah frowned and said sternly:

"Rise, Ali Hassan!"

"Sun of Persia!" replied the old man as he rose to his feet and stood before his sovereign with bowed head.

"Tell me, vizier of my viceroy, how many rulers have we in Persia?"

"You alone, great shah," answered the old man.

"Yes, I alone, shah Abbas the Second, am the ruler. The viceroy, who was slain by the Cossacks, usurped the title of ruler; so woe to him! He made everyone use this title; he set up a court of his own and lived on the proceeds of plunder. So full was he of his own importance that he became an autocrat. Without awaiting my commands, he put to sea and launched an attack on the Cossacks," said the shah, pointing to Serebriakov. "I expect he did not make your task any too easy, old man. You led the flotilla and then fled ignominiously from the battle."

"Great shah Abbas, the khan had already deprived me of my authority. He himself assumed command. Seeing that all was lost, I managed to extricate three vessels and thus save the men."

"Ali Hassan, what further is there to be said for the khan? He took my power upon him by calling himself a ruler; he dismissed you, a veteran commander, from your post. He has been duly punished for his pride. Furthermore, he entered into communications with the mountain tribesmen without my knowledge. He showed himself to be a dangerous man."

Serebriakov, vaguely aware that the conversation concerned the Gilyan khan, bowed his head and bent his left knee.

"Shah, the Gilyan khan attacked our barges first . . ."

The interpreter, again inserting the word "great", translated this speech.

"Cossacks, I bear you no grudge as to your behaviour to the Gilyan khan."

At this moment Gavriushka stepped forward and, kneeling on both knees before the shah, cap in hand, babbled in Persian:

"The great sovereign of All Great, Little and White Russia, Alexei Mihailovich, sent me, his humble servant, to Your Majesty, shah Abbas the Second, to inquire about Your Majesty's health, and to deliver a note from our sovereign."

"Rise and give it to me. What does the tsar of the Muscovites write to me, the ruler of Iran?"

"This fellow is going to bring ruin on our cause," murmured the interpreter to Serebriakov.

Mokeyev overheard the whispered words.

"You seem to be jealous of your fellow interpreter."

"Our interpreter is right, Piotr. I feel that what he says is true."

The clerk read aloud in Persian a document, which began with the exaltation of the tsar's person and titles:

". . . and so as to avoid any differences between our states and prevent every impediment to trade, I am writing to you, brother, Your Majesty shah Abbas the Second, thus: expel from your domains the bandit ataman Stenka Razin, who is pillaging your towns; and I beg you to have him conveyed to Moscow, where I shall deal with him. . . . Stepan Razin is as dangerous to our Russian state as he is to the subjects under Your Majesty . . ."

The shah covered up the scroll and interrupted the reading:

"I can judge for myself who is dangerous to me. As for any decline in trade, that is not my concern. My subjects pay their taxes, and all the rest is a matter for the merchants to arrange. I am inclined to accept the Cossacks as my subjects and shall select a suitable spot for them to settle in. You may tell your tsar what I have said, and you may add that no one has any right to dictate to me."

The red-haired clerk communed with himself as he rolled up the paper:

"I shall send in a report today, saying 'the secretaries at the Foreign Office write carelessly; the shah has been sore vexed with the letter . . .'"

He bowed without replacing his cap, but did not move away. The shah appeared greatly incensed.

"Have you anything else to impart? If so, be quick about it and then begone!"

Gavriushka pointed the scroll at Mokeyev and spoke:

"Your Majesty, shah Abbas, that robber, to my certain knowledge, assassinated your vizier Abdullah, his brothers and his sons at Derbent; he captured Abdullah's daughter Zeineb and handed her over as wife to the uncircumcized giaour and bandit ataman——"

"What! Is it true that Abdullah has been killed?" cried the shah, turning to his begs. They bowed their heads in silence. "And you failed to inform me of his death? Now I realize how greatly you hated him; he was too proud for your liking. Is this man here responsible for the murder?"

The shah jerked his hand towards Serebriakov and the interpreter, ordering:

"You two may depart, but there will be no peace with the ataman. To the leopards with this one!"—and the shah shook his fist at Mokeyev. Then he made a sign to one of his retainers and called out: "Unleash them!"

The retainer slipped the leashes and, with a yell, threw a dagger at Mokeyev's feet to show the beasts whom they were to attack. They sprang forward with a roar; one drove its claws into Mokeyev's throat, while the other sprang on his back. Mokeyev thrust his cudgel at the one in front, and the beast slunk away, whining and dripping blood from its nose. The other clung to the coat of mail.

"Are these Satan's gifts?"

Casting aside his quarterstaff, Mokeyev stooped; the blood which was pouring from his neck choked him; he reached backwards and wrenched the leopard from his neck, together with pieces of his own flesh; he tossed the animal over his head, slammed it to the ground, trampled it underfoot, and then, picking it up, he flung it at the shah's feet, saying:

"There, you devil, that'll make a fine collar for you!"

"Bring more leopards!" shouted the shah, springing to his feet. His pale face turned a sickly grey, the wart on his cheek swelled and grew livid, the scarlet aigrette on his turban quivered.

Serebriakov took a step forward and bowed the knee.

"Shah, my comrade is sick. He has been vilified; he was not responsible for the sack of Derbent; many of us Cossacks took part in that affray."

The interpreter made a hurried translation, while the shah's favourite leopards expired on the sand. The shah was beside himself with wrath. Having believed what one had told him, and thinking he had been deceived, he now believed nobody. Shaking his fists, he squealed:

"That man sick? Nonsense! Unleash the leopards. There is not a man in my realm capable of strangling such beasts as though they were puppies. Lies! Beware of lying to me!"

The armed begs gathered round in defence of the shah, while the crowd of courtiers drew back at the sound of growling leopards which were being brought on the scene. Four of these beasts sprang upon Mokeyev and began tearing him to pieces. He was unable to keep his footing any longer, but as he fell he gripped one of the leopards and throttled it to death. The shah urged on the rest with whoops and yells and stamped his feet. In a few moments it was all over for Mokeyev. Then a horn was sounded, and the leopards slunk away.

"Have you seen enough? Tell your ataman what sort of reception I have given you. If he refuses to return Abdullah's daughter I shall have him put in an iron cage and delivered to the Muscovite tsar. Beware lest you harm anyone on your way—otherwise the same fate awaits you."

The Gilyan khan's commander-in-chief bent his head low:

"Invincible father of Persia, may I have your permission to speak?"

"Speak!"

"Do not release this envoy alive! I recognize him by his eyes. He is the ancient leader of the bandits; his name is Nechai, and his name is their battle-cry!"

"I am not aware of this, Ali. He has behaved with decorum. I always keep my promises. Let him depart. Now if it be your wish to act as my viceroy in Gilyan and see to the reconstruction of my fleet and recruit an army there, I grant you leave to annihilate the Cossacks or drive them out of my realm."

Whispering under his breath and cautiously, the interpreter translated what the shah had said to Serebriakov.

"Sun of Persia!" exclaimed the interpreter.

"We can do nothing more, so we had better make good our departure, fellow."

The crowd was slowly dispersing; it moved away from the fountain and made for the shah's square; in its midst walked the red-haired clerk in his gleaming yellow satin kaftan; he held his little cap inside the coat so as to prevent it from fading; a merry expression was upon his face; the traitor's eyes

darted furtive glances around. Bobbing up under Serebriakov's left arm, he shouted:

"Good luck, bandits! I thought His Majesty was going to finish all of you off."

"You foul-tongued cur!" answered the captain in a loud voice. "If I had a pistol I'd make you a fine present. But they haven't even returned my sword."

"Teach this devil some Persian, interpreter. Let him understand the shah's instructions: 'for an insult—death!' "

Gavriushka joked and sneered as he moved away.

"Ah, Gavriushka, you spoke better than a diplomatic missive!"

It was difficult to make one's way through the throng. Though Gavriushka was now at some distance, he remained within sight of the Cossacks. A bearded snub-nosed Persian threaded his way towards Serebriakov and whispered:

"You've let the informer go free. For shame, Cossacks!"

"Yes, the Satan! He slipped away. I have no pistol."

"Well, here is one from the secretary Akim Mitrev, and good luck to you. It's loaded." And from under his cloak the snub-nosed Persian took a richly ornamented Turkish pistol and pushed it into Serebriakov's hand.

"Thanks, friend. Are you one of us?"

"From the Volga. I was at one time a government secretary. Hide the weapon inside your coat."

"Of course!"

The ex-secretary was swallowed up in the crowd. Serebriakov held the pistol in the pocket of his dark blue coat, and, by shouldering his way through the crowd, gradually got nearer to the red-haired clerk. His target was not far off. Without taking aim, the captain fired the pistol, and the crowd recoiled in every direction.

"Take that for Piotr!"

Gavriushka gasped, crumpled up, drooped his head, choked with blood, and gurgled:

"Secre . . . secre . . ."—and, collapsing, he wound up with "tary . . ."

There was a rush of people to the spot where the shot man lay. Serebriakov gave the corpse a glance.

"It's been an unlucky day! However, I've given that mean cur his deserts."

"Alas, Ivan! We'll be thrown to the leopards, I'm afraid. . . ."

"Our cause is lost, and Piotr has been killed; as for myself, fellow, I have no fear of death."

Serebriakov and the interpreter were brought before the shah. The dead body, too, had been dragged along. It lay on the bloodstained sand, from which Mokeyev's remains had just been removed. Serebriakov flung down his pistol.

"It's a fine piece of workmanship, but I do not need it any longer."

Excited voices. "This man with the grey moustache is the murderer!"

The shah sat calm, but on the alert. The Gilyan khan's one-time commander-in-chief exclaimed:

"Sun of Persia! Now the Cherkas will disappear like smoke from the Kilzium Sea!"

"Ali Hassan, this old Cossack is a warrior to his bones; with such as he one can look forward to winning glory in the field." Then, pointing to the corpse, the shah asked Serebriakov: "Was he a traitor? I believe that you will tell me the truth."

"Shah, this was one of the tsar's dogs. We have none such among ourselves."

When the interpreter had translated, the shah ordered that the body be searched. But nothing other than the document was found on it.

"May it not be that the murdered man was a merchant?"

A grey-haired Persian in a russet cloak, striped kaftan and green turban, advanced from the crowd and, bending his knee, replied:

"Great shah, the dead man before you was not a merchant; I know all the Muscovite merchants here."

The shah, unrolling the document, scanned the signatures.

"The Muscovite tsar's signature is not on the scroll. Now I know that this man approached me with a forged document. Let his premises be searched. No doubt he was a spy." Glancing at Serebriakov, the shah added: "Interpreter, tell him he has committed three crimes; he disobeyed my orders not to kill, and, while coming to me as envoy, he failed to surrender up his arms and killed a man who would have revealed his identity to the executioner."

To which Serebriakov succinctly remarked after translation:

"Shah, I see that I must die, but I am not afraid of you."

"Ay, die you will! Hand the Cossack over to the executioner; but he is not to be tortured; I know who he is; execute him!"

Serebriakov was led away to the old square. There, he said to the interpreter:

"Tell the ataman that Piotr and I died on the same day. The ataman must not mourn our loss; such was our fate. Go to him without delay and inform him that the Persian ruler is raising a fleet and enlisting men to fight against us. There is no advantage to be gained by staying where he is; he had better head our barges for the Kura river or for Astrakhan."

"I shall do all you say, Ivan!"

## 11

Razin sat scowling for days on end. He was reluctant to go on deck, and when he did go up he stared moodily at the distant coast. The princess dwelt on board the Gilyan khan's vessel. The ataman seldom visited her, but each time he did he forced her to accept his caresses. She lived surrounded by Persian women captives. Razin noted that she was pining away in captivity and ordered that she be kept amused; but it never entered his mind to set her free. The Gilyan khan's son was detained in the hold under close supervision, yet was allowed to take a walk on deck at night. He would at such times sit in the prow of the ship on the very spot where his father had met death, and would croon a mournful ditty, which was everlastingly the same. No one dared approach the ataman; Lazunka alone saw to his needs and brought him wine. Recently Razin had been drinking heavily; he slept little and ate little; absorbed in his thoughts, he seemed at times to be delirious. One morning, just after sunrise, Lazunka said to him:

"Father, I have brought along the old story-teller; let him sing you a ballad or amuse you with a tale."

"I am in no mood to be amused, Lazunka; still, let him come."

The half-blind ancient in his sheepskin cap and carrying his domra under his arm appeared before the ataman and bowed low. Lifting his head, Razin fixed his sullen eyes on the old man:

"You cringe like a clerk; I hold all servile persons to be cunning."

"I was taught as a child to behave thus, father ataman."

"The boyars themselves bow to the ground in the presence of the tsar, and they have forced the people to grovel in the dust. Oh, will it ever be granted me to raise them up again?"

"I will tell you a story. . . ."

"It is not for that my heart is craving, grandfather; my own intimates have left me for fear of catching my eye; Lazunka alone is with me, but I am tired of his chatter. Tell me something about God, something blasphemous."

"There are many such tales about God, but I am afraid of getting them tangled. Still, I will try to remember one . . . what about this: Once upon a time there lived a ne'er-do-well peasant; he was too lazy to work, but placed all his hopes in God. Whatever his business might be, he always turned into St. Nicholas' chapel. He spent his last penny on a candle and prayed thus: 'Good St. Nicholas, light of my eyes, send me wealth.' Saint Nicholas thereupon started to beseech God: 'Do give the man what he is asking for so that I may be rid of him.' It happened, as it may happen without special prayers, that the peasant found a lost bundle containing quite a lot of money . . . thereafter the chapel ceased to stink of the peasant's candle. One day God said to Nicholas: 'Let us have a peep at the peasant and see how he is getting on.' So, disguised as pilgrims, they went to the village. The autumn night was muddy and dark. God knocked at the peasant's door. The man had built himself a two-roomed house with painted carvings and ornaments. He had married a woman of the merchant class, had made her purchase all kinds of goods and had learnt to get a hundred per cent interest on every kopeck he invested. 'Let us in, kind peasant!' The peasant peered through the window and growled: 'I'll let you in, you cursed beggars, but you must bring your own bread, and the water is mine; I'll lend you a bucket, and you can haul some up out of the river; and you must pay for the heating by threshing corn in the shed.'—'We'll do the threshing if only you will let us in.' They entered the hut; the peasant sat in the ikon corner and called out: 'Hi, you beggars, why have you not bowed to the ikons? You must be heathens.'—'We ourselves are ikons, but you are not even a candle in the corner. You are dead.' The old men had brought some bread with them, and, after eating it, they lay down in their disguise. The cock had barely crowed at midnight when the peasant shouted: 'Now then, damned beggars, it is time you were threshing.' Nicholas was a lean old fellow and handy with the flail, so he was soon ready; but God had mislaid his bast shoe and was a long time finding it. When at last He did, the laces got tangled. The peasant's patience came to an end, and, he went and gave God a box on the ears. 'Blast you, I reckon you're a merchant, grown fat at the people's expense.'—'It is true that we feed on the people, but so far we have not had a taste of your bread——' "

"Stop, grandad! Isn't that the splash of oars I hear? Let's have a sup of wine. I reckon it must be the captains returning from their embassy to the shah. Or someone else. In any case I shall be informed in due time."

"I never refuse bread and wine."

The Cossacks brought the interpreter alone to the barge; Lazunka met him.

"Are you in good health, Lazunka? Where is the ataman? Shah gave Piotr to the dogs; Ivan executed."

"Wait a while before taking your news to the ataman. He is not in a merry mood. I am sorry for you."

The interpreter shook his head in its Zaporozhian cap. "No, cannot wait, Lazun! Ivan, going to square to be executed, ordered me: give message to ataman without delay!"

"But I tell you to beware! You'd better hide. If he asks I shall say that the Cossacks were fetching water. When he calms down you may tell him everything."

"No, cannot wait, must say Ivan warns him: 'Beware, ruler of Cossacks, shah's troops take field against ataman.' Urgent message, Ivan said."

"Wait on deck. When the ataman is dressed, you may report."

Lazunka did not rejoin the ataman, presuming him to be under the impression that others had boarded the barge. He went to Rudakov instead. Serezhka came, too, and the three sat down in the stern.

"Light my pipe, grandad, please."

Rudakov sprinkled some glowing ashes in the bowl of Serezhka's pipe, who then puffed away at the chopped tobacco, sniffed and spat.

"We shall have to give up waiting the return of Mokeyev and Ivan. . . . It's a mistake to leave the ataman to languish alone. May it not be that the shah has sent them to explore the Kura so as to select a suitable site for our settlement? What do you say, Lazunka—am I right in my surmise?"

"Ay, grandad, they are looking for a spot."

"There now, what have I been telling you all along? Did you question the interpreter about the captains?"

Lazunka answered evasively:

"The ataman gets angry when he is not the first to be informed."

The interpreter was silent.

"That is right; there is no need to worry him," added Serezhka. Rudakov, staring at the coast, thought his own thoughts.

"It is enough to break a man's heart to waste precious time by dawdling about Kilzium. Persia has become high-handed and persists in assailing us first."

"You were asleep last night, grandfather, so you heard nothing. But I saw two craft approach and fire some shots. The ataman came up on deck when I called him, and he raised his voice—and nought but splinters of wood were left tossing on the Hvalynsk Sea."

"When all was over I heard about it and suggested to the ataman that we should raid Farabat."

"Well, and what did he say?"

"Took no notice! He was stern and intractable. This is what he said: 'We must not harm the Persians unless we receive bad news about our envoys.' Yet I cannot see what harm we are doing when they persist in attacking us."

"Oh, grandad! I, too, am spoiling for a fight. The only difference between us is that you want to raid Farabat, whereas I prefer the town of Resht. Silks are to be had there, and carpets. Armenians have taken up their abode in Resht. Also there is wine."

"Listen, Sergei. I am attracted to Farabat by the beasts that are to be seen there. The shah's pleasance and courts are in Farabat. I know there are strongrooms in those courts, where the shah keeps his gold. Everything is made of gold, and what could be more beautiful? His bathing-pool is built of precious stones. I know Farabat of old. We raided it together with Ivan Kondyr in days gone by. Now I hear that it has grown to twice the size it was then. I myself shall slay a leopard in one of the shah's courts. Then I shall have a

leopard-skin coat made for me, and when I retire to Yaik with Suknin, this great-coat will remind me of the day when, an old man, I took part in a venturesome raid. I shall be content to die then. Of all beasts, Sergei, there is none to vie with the leopard."

"Grandad, why do you not confide these thoughts of yours to the ataman?"

"A man must bide his time. I know men, Serezhka, whether they be superiors or inferiors in rank to me. Since the ataman is in an ugly mood, I'll bide my time."

Pushing aside the ladle of wine, Razin said to the story-teller.

"Well, granfer, it seems that you will have to drink by yourself. I cannot stomach any more. I intend going to have a look at my men. Even Lazunka leaves me alone."

The old man assisted him to dress.

"A coloured coat would suit you best, ataman, but you've donned a black one."

"Black, black, black! You sit quietly there while I go on deck. . . ."

He found the interpreter at the entrance to the hold.

"You?"

"Ay, ataman!"

"Where is Piotr? Where's Ivan?"

"Ataman! The shah gave Piotr to the dogs and executed Ivan. Shah threatens you, orders you release Abdullah's daughter. Shah threatens you very much!"

"Why is your face so pale? Why do you tremble like a guilty man? You must have spoken the wrong words to the shah and thus brought about the death of my captains."

"Ataman! I spoke good words, but spy of tsar spoke bad words."

The interpreter's face blanched more and more as he sought for the words he wished to say and failed to find them.

Razin strode past him, turning half round as he passed; with a flash from the ataman's sword, the interpreter's head dropped into the hold whilst the body remained for a moment upright with blood gushing from the neck. Then the body followed the head. . . . With never a look round, Razin stalked up the deck, shouting:

"Head the barges towards Farabat!"

There was no response to the summons. Only old Rudakov doffed his cap and crossed himself.

"God be praised, he's come to his senses at last!"

"To Farabat!" repeated the ataman, jumping into his canoe.

"We hear, father!"

Two Cossacks, not venturing to look at Razin's face, took to the oars.

"To the khan's ships, falcons!"

## 12

"Brothers, cast anchor!"

The order came from Serezhka, and the Cossacks willingly obeyed. There was a mighty clang and splash as the anchors dropped into the sea. The barges

swung motionless; before them lay a large coastal town; narrow streets twisted upwards from the square in the direction of the mountains. A blue mosque visible from the distance rose on a stone terrace at the base of the sandy foothills. To the right, as looked at landward from the sea, a covered bazaar could be seen teeming with a noisy crowd; in the centre stood a low tower with a faceted, leaden-tinted roof. Nearer the coast were low-lying warehouses.

"Father, here's Resht for you!"

"Coming, Sergei!"

Razin emerged on the deck of his barge. He wore a coat embroidered with gold, which glittered in the sunshine; under the coat was a short, red satin jacket.

"In this place we shall hold a memorial feast to the memory of Serebriakov and Piotr."

"To grandfather Rudakov also. Then we must be off to the shah's preserve and rejoin Suknin."

"That can be decided later."

"There's wine in the warehouses; I can smell it."

"What is a wake without wine? My heart aches for those two brave men. Oh, damn!"

No sooner had the Cossack flotilla been sighted than commotion and alarm spread through the town. A cry rose on the air:

"Close the bazaar!"

Some of the merchants drove away in their laden carts whilst others piled bales of goods on camels.

"On guard!"

"We have given the dyed devils a fine scare!"

Lazunka was watching the hubbub in the market place.

"Hey, Lazunka, can you hear what the Persians are saying?"

"So far I have made out but a few words, father: 'Close the bazaar' and 'On guard.' Why did you kill my Persian? I'd have learned their language if you had spared him."

"The devil take them! I have no intention of trading with them. Cossacks, stack the arms in the canoes!"

"Father, the princess begs that you allow her ashore."

"Ah, the Shemaha princess? Put her in a canoe, Lazunka; give her a breath of her native land, 'twill do her good."

As the Cossack canoes touched land, groups of bearded Persians in blue or green turbans assembled on the beach. They bowed to Razin and made way for the passage of a mountain tribesman with a long grey forelock on his parchment-like skull. He came forward to parley. Lowering his wicked eyes to the ground, the mountaineer spoke:

"Cossacks and mountaineers have long been brothers."

"And foes," added Razin.

"Those who are bold in warfare and plundering cannot always be friends, ataman. But there will be no bloodshed here. Without further arguments we shall bring you, whom we look upon as guests, wine, bales of silk and everything for which Resht has become wealthy and famous. Moreover, we shall be friends, God grant!"

"Good! We shall feast without bloodshed. Those who do not attack us are spared. Order wine to be brought, but it must not be poisoned."

"Guests are never poisoned! They are entertained with every honour."

"Tell me, where have I seen you before?"

A sardonic smile crossed the mountaineer's face.

"Ataman, it was when you so soundly beat the flotilla of the Gilyan khan. I fled from your onslaught so as to save my men."

"That is true."

Serezhka issued an order, and the men started to smash in the doors of the warehouses. The noise and din grew louder.

"Cossacks, your labour is in vain. There is no wine in the cellars. It will be delivered to you. Follow me!" shouted the mountaineer. With a bow to Razin, he waved to the Cossacks and walked towards the town. Twenty-odd Cossacks followed him. The mountaineer called out in Persian:

"Persians take the wine from the Armenians; tell them to deliver the best they have." Then he added in Russian: "Let the ataman feast and enjoy himself with his Cossacks; he will not molest the town. Hand over good silk material, too, without demanding payment."

Assisted by Persians and Armenians, the Cossacks rolled casks of wine to the beach and dragged bales of silk from the warehouses. The mountaineer stalked along in the rear. With a smart stroke of his sword he knocked off the top hoop of the cask.

"Broach it and let the Cossacks drink their fill to the glory of Resht and let us prove to the ataman that it contains neither poison nor any other noxious substance. I wish to show the ataman how we entertain those who spare us."

The casks were opened; everyone drank; they praised the wine; not a soul was ill after testing the beverage.

"Let us be friends, ataman! If wine runs short, we shall serve out more. It'll be found, never fear, Allah be praised!"

Razin did not offer to shake hands, but answered:

"It looks as if we were going to be friends, old man. I keep my pledged word. So if you do not molest us neither shall we touch the town."

"'Agreed!" The mountaineer took his departure.

The Cossacks spread rugs on the beach and scattered cushions about the sand. The ataman sat down. Near him, also on a rug, reclined the princess. Razin waved his hand. The cords were torn from one of the bales, and ripples of blue silk shimmered like waves over the sand round the Persian captive.

"Inhale the warmth, princess, then your voice will be less husky. You will have to bid farewell to Persia, and it will not be long before you see the Volga."

The ataman tossed off a ladleful of wine.

"It's good! Drink, Serezhka!"

"I am drinking."

"Drink, Cossacks! Drink your fill! They'll bring us more."

The Armenians had brought gifts of ladles so that the Cossacks could serve themselves freely; the Persians had presented them with many silver pitchers. The musketeers were more rowdy than the Cossacks. Some of them bawled:

"There are places in these parts like hell . . ."

"Yes, you have to fight for bread, fight for water . . ."

"All this salt makes the eyes water and burns the innards. Far too little fresh water about for my taste."

"And what there is of it is tainted."

"Still, you must admit that this town is a fine one. No scarcity of wine!"

"Just you draw the wine and hold your tongue."

"I'm doing my best, brother. It's good to be resting one's hands from rowing."

"Father, we ought not to be drinking without posting sentries."

Razin issued the order:

"Hi, falcons, place sentries from the square to the warehouses and bring me any who ventures across the line. Lazunka, the Persians are great cowards. I suppose you noticed that at Farabat. I know some of them would like to attack us, but the majority are frightened of us and fear lest we set their town on fire."

"A mongrel's thoughts are devilish thoughts, and the Zaporozhians are right in saying that the devil understands even Persian. That mountaineer with his squint and his forelock has a cunning and evil face."

"Tell me, Lazunka, have I drunk much yet? It does not seem to have any effect on me, for I cannot rid myself of the sight of Piotr Mokeyev lying in the sand by the shah's dogs. Drink!"

Abandoning the barges, except for a few men to act as sentries, the Cossacks and musketeers came ashore to drink. The beach was dotted with dark and light blue coats with a spattering of white from the long-sleeved uniforms of the musketeers from Poltev's command. The men on sentry duty behaved well; the guard was frequently changed.

An old Jew with bowed head beneath his tall black cap came along the beach towards the Cossacks. He was mumbling something unintelligible when he was seized and brought before Razin.

"Father, the Jew said, 'Take me to your master.'"

The old man in his voluminous cherry-coloured cloak was thrust forward by rude hands.

"Don't hurt him, brothers. Now then, old man, say 'Christ'."

The Jew stood trembling, but his face was calm. His eyes gazed sullenly from beneath his shaggy grey eyebrows. He continued to mutter with increasing vehemence:

"*Adonai! Adonai!*"

"Listen, father! It would seem the old dog hails from our parts. He is muttering something about the Danube."

"Nay, my falcons, you have misunderstood; he is uttering another word. Well now, what have you to say, old man?"

"Master ataman, it is not for me to pronounce the name of the outcast, to pollute my tongue therewith."

"Very good! But were I merely to wave my hand you'd be flayed alive."

The Jew was jostled as the Cossacks drew closer and awaited the moment when the ataman would push back his cap. Razin had discarded the ladle and was now drinking from the pitcher, so he felt no hurry about dealing with the Jew.

"I command you to pronounce that name precisely because I never utter it myself. Come now!"

"Master ataman, I have come to lodge a complaint. In Derbent your retainers raped my only daughter and killed my two sons. What can an old man do in so evil a world. Kill me also."

"Wait! Why had you not given your daughter in marriage!? A husband defends his wife. As for your sons, they fought against the Cossacks and helped the Persians. When we are not spared, we show no mercy. We are racked or

hung on the city gates—in our turn, we string up our foes head downwards from the ship's mast."

"Master ataman, I have merely come to tell you what has happened to me, not with any intent to fight you."

"Since you came with no evil intent as you say, I shall do you no mischief. Tell the Persians: Today the ataman has arrived not to sack the city, but to hold a feast. You are to release your Russian prisoners and I will exchange them for the Persians I hold in captivity."

"Master ataman, the Persians are children of Abraham by way of Agar. You must have seen the inscription on the gates of Derbent—'Bab-ul-abab', which is the Arabic name for Derbent. It was there that my sons were slain."

"Satan, I did not sail hither to sack the Persian city. They are a timid people, and the cowardly man is always the fiercest. All I ask of them is that they should show themselves to be of a kindlier disposition and send us more wine."

"I understand! He bids me sing his praises to the Persians, but the children of the bondwomen know about Derbent and Farabat. When they have heard the falsehoods you wish me to convey to them they will stone the old Hebrew."

"Ha, ha! Have you not told us that you were not afraid of death!"

Serezhka kicked the sand with his boots and rose:

"He lies, the cur! Father, allow me to finish off the Jew."

"Sit down! When my soul aspires to peace, I like discussing matters with the downtrodden and resentful. I have spared the town, so what advantage would it be to kill an old man? There is nothing to be got out of him, and he has precious little blood in his veins."

"Master ataman, your reasoning is at fault, for you are sending a message to the Persians by the mouth of one whom they hate. The master's message would be better transmitted by that which hangs at his side."

"Tempter! I keep my word. They have delivered me wine, and I shall not slay them."

"One thing more, master ataman. A certain man came to the house of his bitterest foe, saying, 'I have come not to kill you, but to love you.' The evil man thought, 'Then I shall kill you.' And he dispatched the man, who had not understood him correctly, through the gates of the resurrection."

"Father, you may strike me, but I must finish off the Jew. The cur is making a mock of us." And Sergei tugged at his sword.

Razin seized him by the skirt of his coat and forced him to sit down.

"The Jews are very subtle people, and it is on this account that the tsar and priests persecute them. It is they who have taught the Turk how to make cannon."

The Jew continued:

"Your fellow countrymen, master ataman, have flooded the homes of my people in Ukraine with blood; they have raped our wives and daughters before the very eyes of husbands and brothers. Jews have been compelled to eat food forbidden by Jewish religion. They were mocked at and derided, and then hanged wearing their phylacteries. Jewish women never seek divorce, but it was given them by the sword. Jews were seized while at morning prayers and were drowned in their talliths. . . ."

"Father, you have only to listen to him to know he's wandering in his mind."

"Let him be, Sergei. This is a very convenient time for an argument. Jew,

I am unaware of all that the Zaporozhians did to your folk, but I have heard it said that in Father Bogdan's day they mingled dung with Jewish blood."

"Please understand me, master ataman. Here, when you slay the Persians, whom I hate, you fail to discriminate between a Hebrew and a Persian; thus you do not spare us."

"The Cossack warriors burnt and slew your people for renting the churches for profit. The Polish gentry are astute; they lured you into mocking at an alien faith and, in your lust after gold, you fell into the snare, never realizing that the gold you acquired reeked of blood. Take me, for instance. I have seized much gold in these parts, but the earth does not vomit back to me again the men I lost; yet I'd give all the gold I have for them to be at my side today. That is impossible. It is a matter of indifference to me whether you turn a place of worship into a stable, though not everyone thinks as I do. Do not anger them, for they suffer from such desecrations. And now go hence. I wish to drink. Your children have been killed; those I love have also been killed, and my soul is on fire to avenge them."

The Jew was hustled away, but not allowed to depart.

"Where is my princess?"

"Here, father!"

"That is well! Let her dance and enjoy herself to her heart's content upon this, her native soil. Do not hinder her in any way."

"Your wishes will be carried out."

Two feverish spots burnt in the Persian captive's cheeks, an avid fire smouldered in her eyes, making them even more strikingly beautiful. She was resting upon cushions amid billows of blue silk. At times she raised her eyes under their veil of lashes to scan the faces of the revellers. She feared to look at the ataman and was frightened when he inquired after her.

"Better to die than submit to his caresses in full view of the town," she thought. Curving her body like a striped blue snake, she looked around. Her head was entwined with numerous plaits, which were gathered together over her forehead by a golden circlet. It did not take her long to realize that the ataman was drunk. She half closed her eyes when he pushed aside the pitcher of wine and flashed his sword.

"Here, you Jew!"

The old man, stooping, thrust his head forward as he approached, in the semblance of a bow.

"Master, the Jew is ready to die."

"Do you fancy I want to kill you? Pshah! Go and tell the Persians that they need expect no harm from me, but they must hand over the Russian prisoners they hold. I know there are some in Resht. Once I have them safely by me, I shall release the Persian captives and leave the town by nightfall."

The Jew tottered back and paused.

Razin said:

"Does he doubt me? Falcons, take the old man to the square without molesting him and there let him go free."

Two Cossacks led the Jew to a place behind the warehouses.

"What about finishing him off?"

"You'd best be careful. If the ataman learns of your pigheadedness you'll be put to death as sure as sure."

Releasing the Jew, the Cossack gave him a kick in the backside; the impact

of the heavy boot sent the old man flying; his feet became entangled in his long mantle, and he fell.

The old man rose, shook out his mantle, stooped to pick up his cap and went off limping. The Cossacks returned to their wine. The Jew, while on his way past some Persians, a crowd of whom had assembled in the square, called aloud:

"Persians, beware the robber!"

Somebody in the throng shouted back:

"Yid!"

Again the old man cried from a distance:

"The robber! Raise the alarm!"

The crowd grew denser. Clad in a striped blue garment, the princess rose out of the billows of blue, threw her braceleted arms above her head and shook a tambourine she held in her dark hands. Swaying slowly as though she were learning to dance, she moved forward, her eyes, fixed on the summits of the mountains. Using the dialect of Isphagan, she crooned:

"I am the daughter of Abdullah the slain;
Oh, save me!
Father was taking me and my brothers to Shemaha in the mountains,
To the land of flowers and softest silk,
To the land where the rumour of bazaars reaches the azure heavens,
Oft have I been there with my father.
Ah, the roses there exhale the scent of dew and honey!
Pray do not laugh at me, for I am wretched.
My face was veiled.
The bandit, despising the law of the Prophet, tore off my veil;
My soul has become as a bird which is slain. . . ."

Her dance was hardly a dance; she seemed to run lightly through the air, her feet barely touching the ground. The guard was frequently changed, and the men were drunk. A couple of Cossacks nearest the square were sitting on large stones and clapping their hands as they listened to this alien chant; they watched the supple, silken-clad body and the girl's dance, which was like none they had ever seen before.

"The daughter of Abdullah-beg!"

"Is this Zeineb?"

"Yes. The shah himself commanded that she be released."

Other comments were bandied to and fro among the crowd.

In the meanwhile the captive princess had passed the cordon of guards, but it was still a long way to the square. The Persians were afraid to start a conflict with the armed guards. Their commander-in-chief, the mountaineer with the grey forelock, had forbidden the throng to tease Razin's men. Pretending to dance, the princess gradually moved forward on the tips of her green satin shoes. Her gold circlet had fallen to the sand; she flung away her tambourine and cried:

"Brigands! Brigands!"

With a flash from his ear-ring, up sprang Serezhka. . . . Came a loud whistle. Razin, who was dozing, started to his feet and drew his sword. That whistle had broken a spell. The Cossacks, swaying as they ran, seized the captive princess in their arms and bore her off to the place where the revellers were feasting.

She writhed like a snake in their strong embrace; she screamed, but her voice was hoarse and failed to reach the Persians.

"Cowards, strike at them, they are tipsy!" she cried.

Razin flung away his sword and sat down; and his head drooped. Serezhka shouted:

"Cossacks! It is time the princess returned to the barge."

The captive struggled, beat upon the Cossacks' caps and faces and broke her bracelets. The Cossacks joked and presented their faces to her small fists; they swaddled her up in the roll of silk like a baby. Rough hands fondled the fragile body as it writhed and rebelled; the men grinned as they passed her on from hand to hand, and finally she was deposited in a canoe, where she collapsed, weeping and trembling.

"What a little vixen!"

White and emerald sparklets dripped from the oars; the rowlocks creaked. A snub-nosed, bearded Persian was brought before Lazunka and Serezhka.

"Here's one of Satan's offspring! He came straight up to the sentry and said: 'Take me to the ataman.'"

"What's your business?"

The Persian held his hand out, first to Serezhka and then to Lazunka.

"How do you do, countrymen? I come from the Volga. My name is Akim Mitrev, who used to act as secretary in Sinbirsk. I am homesick from having lived so long in Persia and yearn to see my own folk. Besides, I want to warn you."

"Speak your mind."

"I fled from the tsar and the boyars, and the fact that you, too, are in conflict against them pleases me. I am wroth against Moscow and the tsar; in addition, I am sorry for my countrymen. One thing more: do not sacrifice lives for nothing."

"No proper Cossack trembles for his life."

"What I came to tell you is this: I have lived here a long time and have a thorough knowledge of the Persian language. Listening to their talk as I have, here is what I have learned. The dyed-heads intend to attack you. You had better leave at once or make preparations. The wine they delivered to you was specially potent, for they intended to knock you off your feet. What do you say to putting an end to this carouse, my countrymen?"

"Ay, you scribbler! I reckon you are envious of our revels."

"Nay, Cossack, there you are wrong. I myself would entertain you willingly, but this is neither the time nor the place. Be on your guard! I warn you in all friendliness."

"The man speaks the truth," remarked Lazunka. "I noticed that they wore arms and I understand a little of their speech. They are a menace to us, I feel it."

"We'll make manure of them!"

"You must act as you think best. Tell the Cossacks to take me back; when we reach the cordon, they'd better hustle me along and swear at me, otherwise the Persians will torture me."

Serezhka shouted:

"Cossacks! Take the Persian back to the square and do not molest him; once there, you must give him a push and speed him on his way with oaths."

The former secretary was led away and pushed with oaths towards the square as ordered. Once in the square, the secretary covered his ears with his hands and started to scream in Persian. The crowd had dwindled, people dispersing into the alleyways. The braver among them stayed on in the square and drew closer to the Cossacks, shouting:

"The soldiers are refusing to fight unless they are paid."

"Don't blame them. They've not received a penny piece for a year."

Lazunka, having piled up cushions and rugs, stretched himself beside the ataman. His blue Turkish kaftan was too tight for him, the collar was buttoned, but the kaftan itself would not meet across the chest; the ball-shaped buttons on the left side had slipped from their loops; the curved scimitar, which never left his side, made the skirt of his coat stick out. He struck a spark and lit his pipe. Serezhka took a seat beside him on a heap of cushions. From time to time Lazunka would get up, remove the pistol from a tipsy Cossack, and, after examining the flint, would throw it down at his own feet on the rug. He had long since ceased drinking; he listened intently. The crowd of Persians in the square was again growing.

"Why don't you drink, you blue-blooded boyar?"

"I'm waiting for what is to come, Sergei. I feel in my bones that what the secretary said is true."

"So do I, my lad."

"Better return to the barge. Has father come round?"

"It won't take him long. You know him as well as I do. He'll doze a while and then be ready for the job."

"Our Cossacks are drunk, and the Persians are legion. The place might become too hot for us."

Serezhka grinned and, holding forth a lean and sinewy hand as strong as iron, said:

"Give us a pipe, shock-head!" He puffed and spat. Then: "Are you afraid of spinners and silk-weavers?"

"Not I! I'm never afraid, therefore I always know how to behave in a battle."

Not far from them a Cossack sat astride a barrel as if he were on horseback; he swayed from side to side; then he pitched forward and fell face downward on the sand. The man was fast asleep, and as he breathed stertorously the dust flew from his beard. Lazunka rose, stepped up to him and, shoving his hand under the prostrate form, drew out a pistol and threw it on his rug.

"That was a smart piece of work."

"But I am no good at swordplay, Sergei."

Motley shadows of indigo and yellow spread from the mountains over the town. The sea was turning blue along the line of the coast; only the crests of waves near the barges and beyond retained their green tint. The sun was being rapidly blotted out by the mountains. As the cool evening drew on, the Cossacks crooned their songs and good-naturedly swore at one another, embraced and fell to earth, where they dropped to sleep at once upon the warm sands. Those who could still stand were drinking and shaking menacing fists in the direction of the square.

"We may be tipsy, but just you try any of your tricks on us, you devils!"

"We'll smoke you out!"

"Father will wake up, push back his cap, and nought will remain of your Resht but sand and stones—just the same as at Farabat."

People were still streaming down the streets and alleyways. Rumour waxed louder and then died away, leaving a dead silence behind. The Persians seemed on the tiptoe of expectation. A coffin, dark blue in the twilight, was borne by naked men from the mosque on the terrace; long narrow strips of banners fastened to vines floated through the air. A mournful dirge, sung by many voices, quivered upon the air. Those who were not singing, clamoured:

"A soldier! May his father burn! The dervishes will lead the people."

"See, the Prophet's sisters are carrying the coffin."

"It is the coffin of the prince of martyrs."

"Look!"

"Those who march shed their blood on the feast day of the Prophet's death."

The chanting throng followed the coffin as far as the square, where the procession turned. The dervishes carried the coffin back to the mosque. Two dervishes, the guardians of the Moslem relics, emerged from the mosque, each holding a heavy and well-sharpened axe in hand. Both of them had long beards and shaggy locks; they wore black caps, and black sheepskins with the fleece outside were wrapped about their legs for trousers. They were followed by boys who had participated in the gory procession of Bairam Omar. Chanting, the two dervishes placed themselves at the head of the crowd and led it down to the beach. The procession took up the chant the dervishes had intoned, while others added threatening cries.

"Brigands! Beware!"

"Well, captain, you'd better open wide the gates. Here comes the wedding!"

"We'll make a stand against these weavers! A spinning-wheel is no match for a sword." In a rasping voice, which carried as far as the mountains, Serezhka issued the summons to arms.

Cossacks sprawled between the warehouses or sat among barrels; drunken musketeers endeavoured to pick up their arquebuses, which slipped from their hands. More than half a mile beyond, the beach was bestrewn with men in scarlet coats or dark blue cloaks. Serezhka jumped on a barrel and sent forth his terrible whistle. The whistle proved more effective than his stentorian voice, for it brought the drunkards to their feet.

"To arms, falcons!"

The ataman rose, but lay down again, spreading his huge arms wide on the gold brocade overcoat, against which his underjacket of scarlet made a vivid splash of colour. Serezhka said with a glance at him:

"Father, should you but sound the call, Resht would be no more."

"His soul seeks forgetfulness, Sergei. He is heartsick for his dead captains."

"Ay, they were warriors indeed, were Serebriakov and Piotr! Hi, hi, Cossacks!"

The musketeers were the first to take up their arms, firing a volley into the crowd. Blue and green turbans ducked; there was a commotion; a cloud of sandy dust flew skyward. The procession broke up and surged back to the square. The mountaineer with the parchment-like skull reappeared among them and, regrouping them into a wedge formation, he placed the dervishes at the head and brandished his scimitar over the retreating Persians. Then he disappeared again. In a cloud of yellow sand, their shoes creaking and shuffling,

the crowd began an outflanking movement round the warehouses. The shots and yells of the foe forced the musketeers to fall back towards the sea, while they fired their arquebuses at random. The Cossacks meanwhile were casually collecting their swords and carbines. Some, even at this crisis, were loth to leave the casks of wine.

"It's a shame to waste good drink, brothers!"

"Sergei, the Cossacks are not making a good stand; we must retreat and bring away father."

"Pull yourselves together, Cossacks! If we abandon them, Lazunka, many will be killed."

"They will perish in any case. There is a mere handful in a fit state, all the others are too drunk."

"Attack!" Serezhka's voice drowned the growing uproar from the crowd. Shoulder to shoulder, Cossacks and musketeers slashed with their swords, while others fired. Eyes smarted from the smoke; dust and the reek of burning gripped the throat. Behind the fighters, many musketeers were preparing the canoes in case retreat became necessary. Naked urchins, smeared all over with black naphtha so that they looked for all the world like devils incarnate, darted about among the throng of Persians armed with Khorozan daggers. Skipping nimbly about among the sleeping Cossacks sprawling on the ground, they knifed as many as they were able. Dogs wandered after them tearing at the corpses, grey vultures had flown down from the mountains and had come to a momentary rest on the roofs of the warehouses. One particularly daring young devil had crept up to a warehouse. His eyes, gleaming white in his blackened face, had been attracted by the captain's large gold ear-ring. The small black figure, flattened against the grey stone, stood immovable. Razin still slept; no power on earth seemed able to rouse him. A giant dervish brandished his axe, smashing swords and cleaving Cossack skulls as he howled and capered at the head of the crowd. The air was saturated with the smell of sweat and blood, and at times the sea seemed to exhale a breath of hot pitch. The dervish had spied the sleeping ruler of the giaours from afar, he saw that two stood on guard beside him and chose Serezhka as his objective. Holding his sword in readiness to parry any blow which might come his way, the captain screwed up his blind eye and watched the advancing foe.

With a yell the dervish bared his teeth and sprang forward like a leopard; but a shot rang out from the flank; fragments of blue crystal from the pendant in the giant's ear flew asunder; Lazunka's blade came down so smartly on the dervish's skull that it was cleft in twain; the man dropped his axe over his own shoulder and reeled back; he fell to the ground spattering the rug with his brain.

"And now comes my turn," said Serezhka. He darted aside and traced a gleaming white circle with his sword; the head of the Persian nearest him was severed and caught up by skilful swordplay; trailing a green turban in its wake, it danced over the roof of the warehouse. The body of the decapitated Persian, with its wide red sash and its stockinged legs, fell to its knees and bowed headless to the ground.

"Beware!" The crowd reeled back.

Now the second dervish intoned the chant; he was broad-shouldered and of smaller stature than his predecessor. He led the crowd with the cry:

"In the name of Allah the All-Merciful!"

The crowd recoiled from the shots; the braver ones strode forward and were shot in the face by Lazunka.

"Cur!"

"Blue devil!"

"Son of a bitch!"

But Lazunka's eye was so true that many of the Persians took refuge behind the warehouses or ran away. The captain perceived that the throng was being held back by the dervish.

"Now then, Satan, come on!"

The dervish boomed out a sacred chant and then leapt forward, while, with a yell, the crowd surged in his wake brandishing swords.

"Stop a moment!"

Lazunka fired; the face of the dervish vanished as the bullet knocked out his teeth and smashed his cheeks and jaw. Raising a cloud of sandy dust, the dervish fell to the ground.

"Save yourselves!"

"Blue devil!"

The retreat was all confusion. Serezhka dashed after the crowd. His sword traced two flashing arcs and two more headless corpses reddened the sand.

"Better keep together, Sergei. Do not run too far ahead!"

"Ah, Lazunka, I feel such strength within me that I am ready to tackle the whole lot of them single-handed. When an infidel chants a sacred song, it means that he places no value on his life."

"But you have failed to notice the main thing; they are trying to capture our father. You and Lavrei had better carry him to one of the canoes. You'll see that then the fighting will cease at once."

"Have you really in mind to beat the Persians in single combat? Have a care! They'll make things hot for you. The Cossacks are not fighting with their old fire, and the musketeers, though they are somewhat better, are afraid."

"The ataman's life is of greater value than mine. I command you to take him away. Then return and we'll chase them into the mountains. . . ."

"Take care, Sergei, I am fearful for you."

"Off with you and your charge. I'll hold the fort with the Cossacks till you return."

Lazunka gripped his sword between his teeth and, with the help of another man, wrapped the ataman in overcoats and carried him away; only Razin's cap and sword remained on the sand. No sooner had Lazunka left, and the splash of oars had reached his ears, than Serezhka realized that he had made a mistake in sending away his comrade. Though he did not understand the actual words, he didn't doubt that the cries of the Persians were joyful.

"The blue devil has fled!"

"Ay, he's fled!"

"That's good!"

The Persians were determined to annihilate the Cossacks who were slashing to right and left of the captain. Though never looking round, Serezhka knew when one or other of his men was killed or wounded. The musketeers refrained as much as possible from swordplay, but fired their arquebuses as they backed towards the canoes. Some of them jumped into Lazunka's canoe and, without asking permission, took to the oars. Serezhka could easily have made a way

for himself to escape, but he felt he could not forsake his hopelessly drunken men. He called loudly:

"Lazunka, hurry!"

"Coming!"

"You devils, this is not the first time that I face death. Here I make my stand."

The Persians' main objective seemed to be the Cossacks. Serezhka inspired them with fear; corpses piled up in front of him; wherever he went his sword made child's-play with men's heads. He was shot at, but each bullet missed its mark. Ignoring all danger, the captain stubbornly postponed the rout of Razin's followers. Considering the captain to be the main obstacle to success, a tall Persian, with a face the colour of tanned hide, shouted something; waving aside the mass of Armenians and Persians, he seized the killed dervish's axe and advanced upon Serezhka. This Persian had obviously taken part in the affray before, for his beard was dripping blood. Serezhka took a step backward. The Persian quickly moved on and raised the axe; but, with a whizzing sound, a sword flashed . . . and the Persian staggered. The blade of the captain's sword was sent flying.

"Satan!" The captain sprang forward; there was a splitting of bones, and, with a howl, the Persian crumpled up. Serezhka had smashed the man's skull in with the hilt of his sword.

"Mean cur!"

Seeing that the captain was unarmed, the crowd pressed forward with savage howls. The captain scanned the ground rapidly and saw the ataman's sword. He dropped to one knee to catch it up, but in his haste the hilt slipped through his fingers. He bent yet lower to retrieve it. Like ablack cat, the urchin darted from his vantage point behind the warehouse and plunged his sharp knife between the captain's shoulder-blades; then, with the agility of a monkey, he slid the shining steel behind the ear and cut it off, ring and all. He disappeared with his trophy clenched in his small fist. Serezhka tried to rise, but he could not, for blood was pouring from his mouth. His powerful hands dug deeper and deeper into the sand; his heavy body sagged more and more; finally he collapsed. A bearded Armenian, in a black hat resembling a cowl, stepped up to Serezhka and, fiercely triumphant, exclaimed:

"So much for you, you son of a bitch!"

He gripped the Cossack's head by the hair and swung his heavy curved knife. Then he flung the severed head at the feet of the advancing Persians.

"Well done!"

"Sergei is dead, brothers!"

"Run for your lives!"

Cossacks and musketeers, parrying the enemy's blows, jumped into the canoes and continued firing so that those who could still make a safe retreat might have a clear passage. The indigo expanse of waters was rapidly turning to black. Black shadows, doffing their turbans, lined up on the beach.

"Allah the All-Merciful!"

The Persians rubbed their chests, heads and hands with dust as they said their evening prayers.

13

In the ataman's tent the noise was at times like the raving of maniacs; then a deep calm reigned; groans mingled with tipsy roistering.

Razin sat by the camp fire, which Lazunka replenished with grass and twigs. The smoke dispersed the swarms of mosquitoes, which rose like a cloud from the marshes dividing the shah's preserve on the peninsula of Miyan-Kala into two parts. The Jewish leech, who had attended Mokeyev, had been permitted to depart. He had taken with him a note from the ataman, which ran:

> When you no longer need the Jew's services, take him to the mainland. Give him Persian money for the journey and a day's ration of bread with some rusks. The bearer has discharged his duties honestly and is to be treated with all courtesy.
>
> RAZIN STEPAN.

The Jew, before going away, apostrophized Suknin:

"Ataman, there is no one to treat for sickness here. But I recommend you to order the Cossacks not to drink salt water; further, you must keep fires alight constantly in order to clear the air of noxious flies. The flies infect the air, and noxious vapours rise from the marshes, engendering fever, or what you call the ague."

"There are no flies. What you are referring to are mosquitoes of different sizes."

"But I call them flies. Fogs are frequent here. Still, there does not seem to be any person whom I could treat. You should leave this place and go elsewhere. Men get scabs because the food is poor. The sun is fierce, and flies irritate the sores, and men develop leprosy, which is indigenous to these parts. Those who have many of these sores should be isolated."

Others, besides Razin, squatted or moved round the fire; Fedor Suknin huddled in a fur coat, his face yellow with fever; Lazunka tirelessly putting more fuel on the fire; the newly appointed captains Chernousenko and Stepan Naumov —the latter a solid, broad-shouldered Cossack bearing some resemblance to Razin.

Razin sighed deeply, raised his head, let his eyes wander over his companions and allowed his head to droop again.

"Speak your mind freely, Fedor. Do not mince your words. Tell me everything about yourself. Conceal nothing. I, too, will tell you all about myself."

"Stepan Timofeievich, you have known me always to be a straightforward and outspoken man. First of all let me tell you that one can live in these parts in winter; it is like our summer here in the winter. The summer may suit the devil, but it would be the death of our men. An evil mist rises from the marshes, and all the Jew said is true. The mosquitoes poison the air, and the fogs bring fever in their train. See, I am worn to the bone, yet you must remember what a strong man I used to be. Another thing: the Persians seem to have gone mad; they make a sortie every night; we've had to discard our dugouts and sail beyond the marshes to the beaches. Furthermore, four or five days before your arrival here we had a visit from a mountain tribesman; it was as if the earth had vomited Satan himself. His skull was bald save for a forelock like those worn by

the Zaporozhians, moustache neither grey nor brown, walks about in the flaming sunshine with neither cap nor turban. No sooner do the Cossacks set out to fetch fresh water than he appears at the head of a troop. Then there's a fight—and death."

"I know the man. He duped us at Resht; he is avenging the Gilyan khan, whose vizier he used to be."

"Well, no sooner did you arrive in Miyan-Kala than he disappeared into the mountains with his troops. Meat is plentiful; we slay wild boar; but there is no bread to be had, nor salt, nor water. The prisoners died off wholesale. I took all the captive women and children across to the mainland, for they were spreading the plague among the Cossacks. The Cossacks and musketeers have become restive; they want to go home and are disobedient to commands. They have started to seize the barges, and—as they did on the Don—they have chosen an ataman, who will lead them in a campaign, and they are off to the mainland in search of wine. There is no water, so they drink wine; others, disregarding my express orders, drink sea-water. They complain that their insides ache, and later on the disease becomes widespread."

"What about the leech?"

"You wrote in your letter that I was to give him money and bread and to let him go."

"Quite right! One must keep one's word."

"He did not treat anybody, but told us to make a change of place."

"There is nothing for us to do here except, maybe, to await death. This accursed land is full of bald heads. It was not wise of me to go forward once I had beaten the Gilyan khan."

"You are not entirely to blame, father Stepan. We all wanted to advance."

"That is just the trouble. I scatter my forces to the winds."

"And so, Stepan Timofeievich, day by day the men sail away in search of wine or bread or fresh water, and the mountaineer sets ambushes or traps or puts poison into their wine. Then, at roll-call, and out of three hundred, only a hundred or fewer are left. We have suffered great losses among the men. As for me, I am worn out, body and soul; my heart aches for my wife and little daughters; in my dreams I see them on the Yaik, and my body is worn out by the ague."

"Since there are so few of us, Fedor, I shall let you go. Collect the weaker ones and set sail for Yaik. And now harken to what I am about to tell you. Maybe we shall never meet again, so farewell!"

"Why should we not meet again? I am listening, father Stepan."

"You were present when I lost two gallant men in the battle with the Gilyan khan. They were my captains Chernoyarets and Volotski."

"Yes, I remember that."

"Listen further. I grieved over their death, and when I mourn someone I take to drink from sheer heartache. At that time Sergei and Mokeyev ravaged the town of Derbent, and brought me a captive, a Shemahan princess. Piotr told me she was the daughter of the shah's commander-in-chief. I keep her as a memento of what Piotr Mokeyev did for me. I shall take his memory with me to the grave, so dearly did I love him. After Derbent I felt that the men were murmuring against me because I failed to send a mission to the shah. I assembled the warriors and questioned them as to the truth of my surmise. It turned out that things were as I had sensed. They wanted to petition the shah

to permit them to settle on the Kura river. I refused them, because I knew beforehand that it was useless to expect any good to come of the mission, since we had been the first to attack the shah's realm. However, I did not deprive them of their liberty of action. Oh, how I repent it now! The shah threw Mokeyev to the dogs; Serebriakov was at first released, but in the end was executed. In the frenzy of my grief I slew the innocent interpreter. I sent scouts to find out what precisely had happened, and I was told that the shah was assembling a fleet to attack us. Ah, the devil! So I determined to strike a blow at Farabat, the shah's golden city, his joy and his pride. There we seized much gold and killed thousands of Persians. Only the houses whose inmates made the sign of the cross and called upon Christ were spared. It was in this action that my old Captain Rudakov perished. He was very drunk at the time and crawled into a leopard's iron cage; he started to tackle the beast. But the dying leopard bit his head and cracked poor old Grigori's skull. Then we set sail for Resht. To this day I curse myself for the enterprise. When Serezhkha was killed I felt like hurling myself into the sea, and had it not been for Lazunka, who locked me up in the hold, I should have done so. I used threats against him, but afterwards I recalled him, and the boyar's son soothed my anguished soul. He used to say: 'You cannot bring him back to life, so what's the good of fretting?' Sergei was a brave man and served me well and, moreover, saved my life; but he died . . . Oh, damn them! How the Persians deceived us! They gave us wine and bale upon bale of silk and rugs. The wine was drugged so that for two days I was unable to move hand or foot. I was so besotted that I yielded to the wiles of that mountaineer who has been harrying you here. It was foolish of me to allow my men to drink on land; and even more ill-advised was it to spare that town. It has now come to my knowledge that the shah has granted permission to that mountaineer to annihilate us. On the voyage here my heart raged within me, and I determined to gather your men together and raze Resht to the ground. Few of us remained alive after feasting at Resht; four hundred men were struck down in that accurst city. Serezhka was worth a thousand Cossack heads. You may imagine how my spirits sank and my heart grew cold when I set my eyes on this encampment of half-dead men. I see and hear: some of them are delirious, while others wander aimlessly about as though stricken with the plague and seeking a spot where to drop to earth. Fedor, I shall be firm and hide my resentment; this is not the time to settle accounts with the Persians. I shall fling all the gold, tissues and jewels among my men and say: 'Brothers, divide this damned booty among yourselves; it has been won with the blood of the brave.' With all my gold, I am a beggar! I received many warriors into my ranks as a gift from the Don, and I have wasted them like a foolish criminal. Yet there remains so much to be done—so much, Fedor!"

"Father Stepan, you must not give yourself up to despair. On a day to come you will return to Russia, and sound the rallying-cry, and the falcons will wing their way to you!"

"Ah, but they'll never be the same."

The sentries challenged one another in the darkness:

"*Ne-cha-i!*"

"*Ne-e-cha-i!*"

Razin's black, broad-shouldered form stood upon the tip of the Miyan-Kala peninsula, which stretched far out into the sea. His eyes reflected a green light thrown up from the alien waves around him. Behind the ataman the earth

seemed to be snoring, raving, singing wildly; huts stood forth from the indigo darkness of the night; tents gleamed a ghostly white. To right and left of the headland the sea bristled with the greyish shapes of barges. Here the rallying-cry sounded louder than on the mainland:

"*Ne-cha-i !*"

"*Ne-e-cha-i !*"

The black figure raised a long arm; the very waves seemed to recoil at the sound of that terrible voice:

"Ah, me, Stenka! What's broken cannot be made whole again, so let's go on breaking!"

Razin turned towards the tents again with a blank expression on his countenance. He continued:

"Well, falcons! Light fires, repair the barges! We're off to Astrakhan at break of day!"

"Hurrah! We're to leave this accursed land."

"All those who are well enough must get up and kindle the fires and get the axes together."

No power on earth had seemed able to rouse the encampment from its death-like torpor; but in response to the magic of their ataman's voice the Cossacks crawled to their feet and began moving about. Fires flared and crackled; faces, hands, dark blue coats, red kaftans came and went in the fitful light of the flames; axes and swords gleamed white. . . .

Before retiring to his tent, Razin addressed the men, who had risen to their feet. His voice was no longer the stentorian one it had been only a few minutes ago, but he spoke loud enough for all to hear:

"Sentries, get the canoes ready to haul in the barges for repairs."

"Right, Stepan Timofeievich!"

As the canoes were launched into the water, the sparkling spray took on a greenish hue. Sonorous voices pierced the calm, dark gloom.

"Hasten!"

"To Astrakhan!"

"And thence to the Don!"

On board the barges, torches flitted to and fro, picking out in the darkness here a face, there a beard, or moustache or a Zaporozhian cap.

# PART THREE

# CHAPTER ONE

## AGAINST VOIVODES AND TSAR

### 1

To the right of the tsar's throne was a table at which three clerks were poring over some papers.

Boyar Pushkin, the sovereign's favourite adviser, entered the room, bowed and stood in the doorway. He waited in silence while the Siberian voivode's report, which was being read aloud to the tsar, came to an end. The clerk was a dignified, fair-haired man with a silky beard, and he pronounced each word separately and slowly.

". . . and it has been ordered that the old prisons shall be reinforced, and the wives and children of the one hundred and eleven incarcerated men, who have been dispatched to Siberia according to your ukase, great tsar, shall take their places in the old jails. . . ."

The tsar slowly placed his elaborate staff of office at the side of the throne and, rubbing his low, white forehead with his right hand, said:

"That will teach them a lesson! Their husbands and fathers went to join the thief Stenka Razin beyond the seas, and they enticed others to act likewise. You may be seated, clerk." He beckoned to Pushkin: "Come here, Ivan Petrovich! I have some business to transact with you."

The bearded boyar, stooping at the shoulders, cast a glance at the tsar from his narrow, sunken eyes. He stepped forward and bowed to the ground.

"As I was on my way here, great tsar, I was handed an order by the patriarch. It contains a complaint from the metropolitan that the bandit Stepan Razin has put in appearance near our towns."

"I have heard about this, boyar, and I have it in mind to write to the voivodes of the Astrakhan district, Ivan Prozorovski and Semen Lvov, instructing them to lay hands on Stenka Razin's Cossacks, and to enrol them in the musketeers until such time as we have come to a decision." The tsar thought a while and then added: "They are on no account to be permitted to go to the Don until I myself issue the order."

"But those Cossacks ought never to be allowed to return to the Don, great tsar. Many serfs from Moscow fled to the Guliai Plain, and that is why there is famine and shortage there. They streamed to join Razin in Persia, and now that he has returned to the Don the whole poverty-stricken crowd of them are going after him. According to the clerks and informers, he is fabulously wealthy. My secret agent, Kuretnikov, told me of this some time ago. Kuretnikov is a man worthy of special praise, great tsar. He has studied Persian to some purpose during his stay in that country and knows the habits and customs of the natives. He has informed us of everything, so that we know to the minutest detail all that

occurs in the shah's circle. He is being kept there now, but reports from him have ceased to come through. He is an astute lad! Ay, very astute."

"If he should reach Moscow I shall see to it that he is given a good post, thus rewarding him for his pains."

"He has undoubtedly well earned any recompense you deem fit to bestow on him, great tsar. Rumour has it that Stenka Razin has burnt down many of the shah's cities."

"Yes, that he has, a great many, boyar. The shah's displeasure is to be expected. Our voivode Piotr Prozorovski has written to say that the shah is so incensed at the destruction of his cities by Stepan Razin and his bands of robbers that he is assembling a huge army with a view to attacking the people on the Terek. We shall have to review our own forces, boyar, first and foremost, for there is likely to be much trouble from all sides."

"Great tsar, in my opinion our army must be built up without delay."

"I am pleased that you agree. Now then, clerk, tell me how many mercenaries are in the services, what their pay amounts to, and how much it costs to keep them in food. Read!"

The clerk from the Secret Office, a skinny little man in a red kaftan, rose and bowed to the tsar. He read swiftly while his faded eyes closely followed the lines, and his straggling beard swept over the parchment. His voice droned out;

"To general Nicholas Bowman, his regimental colonels and his men of other ranks. Pay allotted during the month of September:

"To the general—100 rubles; to the colonel and musketry instructor Samuel Baum—50 rubles; to lieutenant-colonel Theodor Meer—18 rubles; to Karl Jäger Faliasmant, Vasili Schwarz—15 rubles each; to the major Johann Sams, Anton Regel, Peter Betz, Hans and Julius Bau—14 roubles each; to the captains Hans Tomson and his brother Frederick—15 rubles for the two of them, and Paul Rudolf—20 rubles; to the artillery quartermaster Yust Fanderkiven—15 rubles."

The tsar waved a hand to silence the reader.

"This question of raising the pay of mercenaries will have to be discussed with the boyars."

"It would be a good thing to do so, great tsar. When the wars come to an end many of the boyars and their children will slip away to serve in foreign parts."

"During the Polish campaign half the boyars and noblemen failed to respond to the voivode's summons to arms."

"Great tsar, the boyars take good care of their heads; their only desire is a place at the table and a reduction of their account at the Assessment Office."

"We must not reproach them, boyar. Read on, clerk. Are there any more foreigners? I do not want to know their pay, but only their names and surnames."

The clerk bowed, and his beard swept over the parchment again.

"Johann Linzius, Johann Vit, Jakob Guiter, Hans Klausen, Christian Berkmann, Albert Brunitz, Anton Rebkin . . ."

"Is this Rebkin a Jew?"

"He is a German, great tsar, brave and learned; his only fault is that he drinks."

"That does no harm to a young man; he can sleep it off."

The clerk continued:

"Heindrich Petelmann, the Englishman Christopher Fry, Dietrich Kinred, Johann Fasswein, Johann Stolpner . . ."

"Are there many more?"

"About a thousand, great tsar."

"Sit down, clerk. Are they all important men, as is stated at the head of the list?"

"All the chiefs and likewise the master-craftsmen, who make the cannon and other arms."

"Now, boyar, I should like to know what the Astrakhan metropolitan has to complain of."

The boyar handed a paper, sealed with a black monastic seal, to the fair-haired secretary. Efim bowed to the tsar and started to read aloud:

"To the Tsar, Emperor and Grand Prince Alexei Mihailovich, Autocrat of All Great, Little and White Russia . . ."

As he pronounced the tsar's many titles, Efim bowed low again.

"Thy priest, Jozef, metropolitan of Astrakhan and Terek, humbly greets his sovereign. On the seventh day of August in this year 1667, there arrived from the sea to my domestic fishery at Basarga the robber Stepan Razin and his band; they looted all the salted fish, caviare and glue. In addition they ransacked the auxiliary workshops, in both brass and iron, and took away the boilers, axes, chisels, boat-hooks, gimlets, augers, fishing-nets, fishing-boats and barges, as well as all the stores of bread. Having thus ruined me, the said Razin and his companions left behind them a bundle of rubbishy Church plate and some sick and hungry captives. There was no list of the rubbish he left behind. . . ."

"He can get his clerks to make a list. The question is not of a list."

"Let me go to my spiritual son, you curs," cried a tipsy bass voice.

The tsar frowned. A priest, dressed in velvet robes with a gold cross on his breast, walked quickly and boldly up to the throne. As he reached it he fell on his face, his gold chain jingling, and exclaimed:

"My sun which never sets, my tsar of light, do not be wrathful with thy foolish priest Andrei. Help me out of my troubles. I have sinned in that I drank too much, but I have done that before. Now the patriarch Akimko threatens to have me chained up. . . ."

The tsar descended from his throne and, taking up his staff, said to Pushkin:

"Let us finish our business for today, Ivan Petrovich. We cannot come to a decision on major issues just now. As for you, Savinovich, get up at once. It is not fitting for a spiritual father to trail the holy cross about the floor. You should be punished; I realize that I have spoilt you, archpriest Andrei, and I feel guilty. But get up."

The priest rose.

"Why do you enter the tsar's presence the worse for drink? And why do you accuse the patriarch Akimko? That I cannot forgive you."

"Have me executed, fool that I am, my sunshine, my light. My heart is bitter within me."

"Yes, you must feel bitter, but it is your own fault."

"Ah, no, great sovereign, the patriarch's threat is not an empty one! He will chain up poor Andrei."

"Even if he does, he will have to let you free again if I put in a word for you. I know he will carry out the punishment, for he is weary of drunken priests."

"Great tsar, he goes to visit the nuns by night——"

"Silence!" cried the tsar. Then turning to Pushkin, he said: "I have issued orders that the tables be laid in the great hall, and the boyars are to be invited, together with the palace clerks and secretaries. You are to come, too, Ivan Petrovich. The German will play the organ to us, and I have commanded that the lute-players shall be present. During the banquet we can talk over our business."

To the priest he said:

"I invite you, too, Andrei Savinovich. But you had better go first to your wife so that she can knock some of the intoxication out of you."

The tsar laughed and clapped the priest on the shoulder.

"Great sovereign, I heard about the banquet, and also that you desired a fluent reader to be there and read aloud St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans."

"Such things make me fond of you, Andrei Savinovich; no matter how drunk you are, you never fail to remember the godly rites. You know that I need to hear the Holy Word."

The tsar was gay. He walked along, tapping the ground with his staff. There was still plenty of time before the banquet began.

As the tsar passed them the boyars bowed low.

## 2

Mihail Prozorovski entered one of the rooms in the Government office. He had come to see the voivode. His elder brother, Ivan Semeonovich, was at his devotions before the ikon of Our Saviour. The younger man, not wishing to disturb his senior while at prayer—though he was not fond of praying himself—sat down on the bench near the door. The voivode beat his chest, bent his forehead to the floor and sighed wearily. A small oil-lamp in front of the ikon shed a bright and steady light. The August air came through the open window hot and sultry; not a breath of wind stirred. The room was so stuffy that the younger Prozorovski had unbuttoned his velvet kaftan, and as he did so his sword clattered to the ground.

The voivode rose to his feet, bowed, waved his hand towards the corner, turned to the large table covered with a dark blue cloth and sat down on the bench, which was well upholstered.

His dark, lined face looked worried. He glanced at the yellow parchment and silently moved his lips behind their screen of thick black moustache and beard, slightly tinged with grey.

He endeavoured to read, but his dull, steel-grey eyes wandered over the walls of the room.

His brother found the silence so irksome that he got up, walked over to the table and bowed, saying:

"Is all well with you, brother voivode?"

"You came in and sat down as if you were some sort of Mohammedan without ever a thought of praying to our Lord God. All you know is how to clatter your sword. You'll get your fill of fighting, never fear!" The voivode spoke in nasal accents.

"I don't forget God! But I have something urgent to tell you. Does the

voivode know that the bandit Stenka Razin and his comrades have looted the metropolitan's property at Basarga?"

"You are too lazy! Praying gives you a pain in your side and breaks your back so that you can't bend it! Your news comes a trifle late. A message was sent to the tsar some time ago, telling him about the looting of Basarga. You've been caught napping, my dear fellow. Take example from me; I say my prayers, and it would be a good thing were you to follow suit. A certain guest has come to Astrakhan, and the Kalmuk princes are restless. You have no need to bother; there'll be plenty of fighting."

"Astrakhan has strong walls, brother. Ivan the Terrible knew how to build. We have from nine to ten divisions of musketeers, five hundred men in each. That is no mean force."

"Musketeers are always unreliable, Mihail; when anything untoward takes place one can never be certain which side they will fight on; this would not be the first time they let us down. You listen to me." The voivode shouted to his serving-men: "Hi, you, send Alexeiev to me!"

Benches creaked and voices buzzed in the adjoining room.

"Alexeiev, to the voivode!"

"The voivode is calling you!"

"Quick, you'd better make haste, clerk."

A scraggy, red-haired man in a long blue kaftan entered and bowed.

"Is the prince wishing to see me?"

"Yes. I cannot decipher the manuscript. What is written on it? Sit on the bench and read. I know this is not your own special work. You have to keep account of government monies. Still, never mind, read!"

"You should have called in the secretary Efim. Everyone is vexed that you always single me out to do things."

"Sit down and read, I say! Let them dislike me instead of you."

"They are afraid of you, prince."

"Read so that prince Mihail can hear you."

The clerk went to the bench, but he did not sit down. He stood there smoothing out the paper in his hand.

"Sit down! I order you to be seated."

"I feel shy when I sit, prince."

"If you do not take a seat immediately I shall make you lie down and read."

The clerk resigned himself, sighed instead of clearing his throat and started reading in a thin little voice:

> "The interpreter Grishka has reported, verbally and in writing, that many Kalmuks and the old bandits Dauzan and Munchak, who used to go on foraging expeditions thirty years ago, intend to attack the tsar's cities in the Kazan district and then go on to Tsaritzyn. One of the Kalmuk elders has gone to the Volga, the Crimean district and to Astrakhan with intent to rob the tsar's peaceful Tatar murzas. With the coming autumn they plan to invade the Samara district. Some good folk have been saying that the workers at Morozov's potash mines—which now belong to the Miloslavskis—have broken into revolt. Leaflets have been found where one reads: 'Stenka Razin has come to Astrakhan and is going to fight the boyars and all the quality.' In the Kazan and Tsaritzyn districts the peasants

have ceased to pay the voivodes their taxes in money and grain and are escaping to Astrakhan as the leaflets tell them to do. They beat up the landowners, burn the estates, set fire to everything. Those who have not made good their escape are hiding in the forests and have left their ploughing. It is mostly those with no families who have escaped. Gentlemen voivodes, take this to heart."

"Go, scribe! Prince Mihail knows now why I am praying to God and am in doubt at the same time."

The clerk bowed and left the room, only to return again at once.

"Prince, I nearly met my end; people were so angered because I told you what the wretched clerks were saying."

"Go! I shall think the matter over and speak to you about it later."

Again the scribe bowed and returned after leaving the room.

"What now?"

"Stenka Razin has sent three Cossacks as envoys to you. Are we to allow them to pass?"

"Send them in! Who are they?"

Three Cossacks entered the hall. Their kaftans were of gold brocade, and their heads were covered with red velvet caps, embroidered with pearls and diamonds.

"Our humble greetings to the voivode."

"I hope you are in good health."

"We are come from father Stepan Timofeievich."

"I cannot understand you, Cossacks, when you all speak at once. What does your ataman want of me? Semeon Lvov is in charge of your district; why do you come to me?"

"Prince Semeon is one man and you are another. It was at his bidding and our sovereign's summons that we came to him from the sea."

One of the Cossacks, whose name was Stepan, approached the table. He resembled Razin, but was narrower in the shoulders, and—though his chest was broad—he stooped. He took a carved ivory box and placed it on the table in front of the voivode. It was full of large pearls.

The voivode's eyes shone with joy and opened wide.

"Thank your ataman in remembering me like this. Tell him he must return the ataman mace, the standards, cannons, sea barges and the Persian princess, too."

"The captives which the ataman ordered to be returned to you are all here; there are ten begs, taken in battle, and Shebyn, the son of the Gilyan khan. The remainder have been divided among the comrades. The ataman cannot restore those prisoners because there was only one of them to every ten Cossacks. We took the captives at the risk of our lives and with our own swords in honest combat. The ataman further told us to convey to you his wish that you should meet him with all due honours."

"I, a voivode, am not given any honours, and I am not in a position to give them except at our sovereign's express orders. Furthermore, it is my duty to tell you that the Persian merchant who escaped from you over the sea came to plead with us on his son's account. That merchant had a drove of Caucasian saddle horses, which His Majesty, the shah, had sent as a gift to the tsar. Those horses must be returned. We shall discuss the matter with the ataman."

"The shah did not send those horses as a gift to the tsar, and we know this. The merchant wished to present them in the shah's name so as to improve his own trade with Moscow. The people in Resht have been bribed. We never touched them. The Persians practised deceit upon us and killed four hundred of our men. What we did near Terek was an act of revenge for our dead comrades."

"I know nothing about that. You have heard what I said."

"We believe you, and you must believe us."

"You have plundered and destroyed the metropolitan's fishing property at Basarga, sparing neither the fish, the grain, nor the factories."

"The metropolitan is wealthy, but old. What need has he of so many worldly goods? We were hungry and poor——"

"His riches do not belong to him personally; they belong to the whole monastery."

"For the bread we left the monastery some church vessels; about three trunk-loads of them. That is what our ataman ordered as compensation for the damage we had caused."

"We shall discuss this, too, when the ataman comes to Astrakhan. Now it must be arranged where you intend to settle; in the village near Astrakhan town or beyond."

The Cossack who resembled Razin answered:

"I am one of Stepan Razin's captains. The ataman ordered me to seek quarters beyond the suburb, on the Zhareni hills. We like it there because of the greater space it affords. Settlers from the Don, who are going hungry in that region, are flocking to us, and, since we cannot conceal this state of things, you may as well know."

"Put up your tents and live there if you please How many are you?"

"About fifteen hundred."

"Tell the ataman he is not to collect too many people round him. It would cause danger to the town, and the villagers fear the fires. They are beginning to murmur against me."

"We are peaceable folk, and there are many sick men among us."

The Cossacks left.

The younger Prozorovski rose and paced the room restlessly. He took his cap from the bench and, slapping the hem of his kaftan with it, said:

"You have not acted wisely, brother Ivan Semeonovich."

"What have you found amiss?"

"These Cossacks are bandits and should be arrested and be made to reveal their secrets under torture. We should find out their plans and how many guns and men their thief of an ataman has at his disposal. They are a crafty lot, and you'll never get anything out of them by kindness."

"We shall see with our own eyes how many guns and men they have. You are young, Mihail. You would like to do the work with your hands, whereas it is with our heads we shall have to work. By using our brains we get nearer to the truth. Semeon Lvov came and took the tsar's letter and tamed them with it—see what handsome presents they have made him as a result! I ruined my eyesight reading the old documents about the lives of the tsars. You mentioned Ivan the Terrible—I am referring to his grandfather, who was even more terrible; it was he who conquered Novgorod. Yet he was not a violent man; on the contrary, he was of a quiet disposition. He avoided war, and if he

was obliged to go into battle, he never fought. Yet he invariably won! He subjugated the Tatars so that they have never risen again, and all this in such a quiet way, without attacking or shouting. That is precisely what I am aiming to do. Where do you fancy these bandits can go? Why, Stenka Razin will be in the palm of our hand! But one has to go about his capture stealthily. What would happen were we to attack them? You say there are nine regiments of musketeers—well, if you wish to know, these musketeers have put to sea in fifty barges. At present there are only about a hundred and fifty of them in Astrakhan. You saw the fine falcons with their gilded wings here today. Do you imagine the musketeers will be content to serve the tsar for ever? When they see the Cossacks don't you think they are tempted? If any trouble were to occur, half of them would go over to the bandits. Then Astrakhan would perish, and our heads would pay the penalty. No, we have to act cautiously, holding out promises and making suggestions and using persuasion; thus shall we hold them back until we can by stealth catch the ataman, put him in fetters and send him off to Moscow. Without him the rascals will find nothing to do in Astrakhan. There you have the situation in a nutshell. Yet you want to be using your hands and feet and swing your sword about! Oh, Mihail, you are mistaken if you think I am like you. Well, let's go home and have a meal. His Holiness the metropolitan is coming to join us at the board. There's a head for you! Although he is so old that his head shakes on his shoulders, yet when he utters a word a man feels that he has to pray. No one can talk as he does."

The voivode and his brother left the building and mounted the horses which were waiting for them. On the way back to their house the voivode ordered that the merchants, Razin's prisoners and the khan's son be allotted separate quarters.

## 3

The weather was hot and sultry. From early dawn, townsfolk and foreigners living in the neighbourhood flocked to the Cossack camp to catch a glimpse of the terrible ataman. Razin's fame had spread beyond the sea. It was the Turks who had made him so famous, for, hearing of the sack of Persian cities, they strengthened their outposts and built fortresses. All who visited the camp were anxious to see the Persian princess, whose ravishing beauty had been extolled, and who was said to be the daughter of the shah Abbas the Second himself. Razin occupied a large tent, partitioned in two by a Faragan carpet. The foreigners, who had been informed of Razin's fondness for food and liquor, had brought gifts of wine. The ataman returned the compliment by giving them silks, pearls and brocade. The people gasped when they saw the presents. Stories of Razin's fabulous wealth spread far and wide.

Crowds pressed along the banks of the Volga as far as the Tatar encampments beyond Astrakhan, where upon a broad expanse of the river the ataman's barges rocked lazily with their panoply of gaily coloured rugs and silks. One of the barges was entirely draped in green cloth; its masts were set up, and the unfurled sails were of ochre-tinted silk, and two were of gold tissue. The inquisitive asked the Cossacks:

"Who lives on that wonderful barge?"

"A tsarevich," the Cossacks would answer briefly.

"A foreign tsarevich?"

Others, who did not know but wished to boast, said:

"Well, you see, it's the tsarevich Alexei, who fled to the ataman from the tsar and the boyars."

"There now! The ataman fights for justice against the voivodes."

"'Tis time the big paunches were taught their lesson. They've oppressed the people long enough with their tributes and taxes."

"We'll see more by and by.

The day was specially hot, and a sea breeze brought a smell of fish and seaweed, for here the Volga smells of the sea. Three Germans entered the ataman's tent. One introduced himself as the skipper of the tsar's barge; the second as an envoy; the third, his hair more than usually long and clad in a short velvet coat and soft hat without a feather, proclaimed himself an artist. The two former wore swords, the third brought in a black easel, a flat box and a thin board. As he entered the ataman's tent he flung down his hat, fixed his easel near the entrance and addressed Razin in German:

"I am a painter. I want to make a picture of you quickly."

He placed the board on the easel.

"What does this devil want?"

Lazunka smiled at the ataman.

"He wishes to paint your portrait, father. I've seen many of his confraternity in Moscow. They go about sketching people or painting ancient walls and bridges. One of them even painted a dog. It looked almost as if it were alive, only, of course it could not bark."

"That's curious! Well, let him daub, I don't mind."

"Big Cossack must stand."

The German stepped back, stuck out his left arm, stretched forth his right, puffed out his cheeks and put his right foot forward in a determined attitude.

"So!"

"Must I stand in front of that devil? Well, all right, Lazunka. Hand me the mace." Lazunka did so, and Razin stood up.

"Be quick about it, you shaggy pate."

"What's that you say?"

The ataman pulled back the flap of the tent, and sunshine flooded into it.

"Ah, that's good! Splendid light!" commented the German as he screwed up his eyes the better to scrutinize his model, who leaned lightly against the Faragan carpet, which formed a red background flecked with gold. The artist's hand moved with a swift and sure touch as he outlined the figure on the drawing-board. Razin was dressed in a blue velvet coat with diamond buttons. The scarlet velvet cap was pushed far back to show the silvering locks which fell over the frowning brow. The crown of the cap was composed of pieces of gold tissue, embroidered with pearls. Over the cap a narrow turban of green silk had been twisted; it bore a floral design of gold and was further adorned with tassels, one of which hung over the shoulder while the other lay along his back. The long, black moustache mingled with the thick, greying beard. Looking at the sunken cheeks, tanned by sea breezes, reproducing the keen, superhuman eyes beneath their heavy brows, the German worked hastily and muttered to himself:

"His eagle glance is terrifying."

A gold chain hung from the ataman's shoulder, and on it was suspended a sword. His sash was of scarlet silk, interwoven with silver threads; loops and tassels descended to his knees.

"How's the devil's daub getting on?" Razin moved.

The artist tossed back his hair and shook the paint-smeared brush at the ataman.

"You must stand still!"

"I suppose the devil can understand you, eh? He seems to be threatening me with his brush, when he must see that I am armed with a mace. Get on with the work!"

"I can finish today."

"I am tired! It is far harder to stand like a blockhead than to fight."

He handed back the mace to Lazunka, and he had no time to look at the portrait, for the tent flaps were suddenly thrown wide. Pushing aside the astonished faces of the Cossacks, who were gaping at the painting and smacking their lips, a huge figure in the uniform of a musketeer forced its way into the tent.

"My bright moon! How are you, Stepan Timofeievich?"

Razin frowned and seated himself silently on the rugs. He filled his glass with wine and said at last, without looking at the musketeer:

"Have you come of your own free will, executioner of Piotr Mokeyev?"

"Mokeyev, so I've heard, father, was killed at the shah's bidding, and not by me."

"The shah? You are right, but why did you have a hand in it?"

"I did not strike him from round the corner. It was a game we played when we were both the worse for drink. You witnessed it yourself."

"Chikmaz, were Piotr alive, he and I would clutch the voivode by the throat and say: 'Surrender Astrakhan!'"

"If such is your will, father, Astrakhan is yours for the taking. I've brought several comrades here on this special business. You need but give the word, and Astrakhan is yours tomorrow."

"Do not shout, fellow; there are Germans near by. One of them is actually in the tent, and they are the voivode's guests."

"As if these cuckoos understand! Hi, you hen's tail, be off with you, quick!"

Waving his long arm, Chikmaz nearly upset the easel.

"Halt! My God, what a ruffian!" said the German, clutching his canvas with one hand while gesticulating with the other.

"We do things quickly here. Begone!"

"Wait, Chikmaz. I'll have a look at the shaggy cur's daub."

Razin rose to his feet. The German displayed his work.

"How great is man's power of learning, and what can he not achieve! It is truly I; only I am silent, and instead of a mace he's made me hold a stick."

"But it is a marshal's baton—a marshal's, don't you see?"

"Lazunka, give that shaggy fellow a handful of pearls, he deserves them."

Lazunka took them from a sack in the corner and poured them into the German's pocket; the artist bowed, but still gazed intently at the ataman as though anxious to engrave that powerful visage upon his memory.

"I shall make other likenesses and give them to you."

He placed the portrait carefully against the side of the tent and then hurriedly assembled his easel and other impedimenta, forgetting in his haste to pick up his

hat, which lay on the floor. Lazunka overtook him and placed it securely on the artist's head. Razin resumed his seat and said:

"Sit down, Chikmaz! There's no need for us to argue; let's drink. We are no longer in Persia, but in Astrakhan, and once in one's own nest even a raven can peck at a falcon. So long as you've escaped, that is very satisfactory. You did not make a supper for worms."

"Father, I fled from death."

Razin poured his guest some wine and asked:

"Tell me all about your town and people."

Chikmaz tossed down the wine, wiped his grizzling beard with his customary nonchalant gesture, and replied:

"Father Stepan, let me first of all open my heart to you. There is no deceit or treason in my mind in coming thus to you. I should not have left in the midst of a campaign had I not felt that there were some who stood between you and my love for you—men such as Piotr, Sergei, Ivan Serebriakov. Now that you have none such men left you will need intrepid persons. I belong to your past and intend to serve you. Should this bring me to the rack, I shall go without complaint."

"I believe what you say. And we certainly do need brave men."

"Ivashka Krasulin, Mitka Yaranets and others have come with me. Further, there is Fedka Sheludiak, who is waiting for you here in Astrakhan. Those I have named are yours to a man. They will suffice you for the present. When we kindle the blaze . . . And Krasulin is an officer of the musketeers. . . ."

"Good!"

"Permit me, father, to tender you yet further advice."

"Have your say!"

"You need have no fear of the voivode Semeon Lvov; drink and make merry with him, for he is an honest man. But beware of the Prozorovskis!"

"I know!"

"Come here Krasulin, Yaranets, the ataman summons you."

Chikmaz' call was answered by those two men: Yaranets, broad-shouldered and stocky, and Krasulin, tall and slim, with a head crowned with auburn hair.

"Lazunka, hand round the cups."

"Here is a toast to father Stepan Timofeievich!"

"Gather your forces together, father; then off to Astrakhan we'll go to have a trial of strength with the voivodes."

"They have lorded it over us long enough, what with their beatings, their bullying behaviour, and foreigners aiding and abetting them."

"They are persecuting the musketeers."

"To a man, the musketeers are for you and unfaithful to the tsar."

"Father Stepan will soon rally his forces, my lads. Many join him when they've read his leaflets, others come on hearsay. I have learnt, Stepan Timofeievich, that Vasili Uss is bringing Cossacks; they've been seen not so very far away." Chikmaz continued: "Many of the Kalmuk settlements have risen and are following Vasili Uss. All are on their way to join you. The voivodes will not be able to hold sway much longer over Astrakhan province. One good heave and the thing will be done."

"Here are my ideas, falcons. I have ceded to the voivodes the ataman mace, the banner and the cannons—which I do not need—as well as the Persian captives. Today, according to the agreement, I am sending envoys to the tsar to

pay him my respects and to sue for an amnesty. I do not need to be told that the tsar is in the boyars' hands, and these boyars will never agree to granting our petition. But every means must be put to the test. If the tsār arrests or ill-treats my men I shall attack the town. You, meanwhile, will remain true to me and entice such of the musketeers as will prove of use to me in the seizure of Astrakhan. I shall be busy distributing leaflets and training the newcomers in the use of the arquebus."

"So be it, Stepan Timofeievich," said Chikmaz.

"On our oath, so be it, father," added Krasulin.

Yaranets shook his fist.

"Ah, won't we make those voivodes and their clerks pay for all they have done!"

"Know this, Stepan Timofeievich, we are yours to the death."

"That's fine, falcons!"

The musketeers left, and were engulfed in the darkness of the distant suburb. The sky was cloudless and of a deep blue. From the far side of the Volga, golden shafts from a rising moon pencilled a brighter and ever brighter light across the bare and limitless plain.

## 4

That same night Razin invited five Cossacks to his tent.

"I promised the voivode to send him six, but I cannot think of anyone suitable to make the sixth."

"Why not send me, father?" suggested Lazunka.

"It pleases me, Lazunka, when you come forward and offer your services unasked. Also I heed your advice."

"I shall soon be back, father."

"Give me time to think. Be seated, falcons." The Cossacks sat down. Razin then turned to an elderly Cossack, lean and with shrewd eyes. "Lazar Timofeiev, you know the ins and outs, so I'm sending you to keep a keen eye on everything and to listen to what the commanders of musketeers will be talking about on the journey. If you feel there is any danger afoot, make a bolt for it to Astrakhan, or, nearer still, to the Don. Fugitives are not delivered over to the authorities by the Don people."

"I shall be on my guard, father."

"You must all of you be on your guard; at the slightest possibility of imprisonment you will have to decamp as best you may. I know the boyars and the way they have of enticing a man by flattery while all the time they are acting dishonourably. Whether a man be a Cossack or a peasant, he is never looked upon as a human being, but as so much cattle, working for them and feeding them. Now let us drink to a satisfactory issue to your expedition. Here's to speed you on your way! Lazunka, wine for the envoys to the tsar."

All drank the toast. Razin continued:

"Make ready, Lazunka. I shall while away the time here with the old minstrel Vologzhenin."

The Cossack emissaries withdrew. Razin questioned Lazunka:

"Why do you wish to go to Moscow, you boyar's son?"

"To see my sweetheart, father. Perhaps she is betrothed to someone else by now. My mother is there, too. I'd like to see her; I love her."

"What man does not love his mother!? I do not even remember mine. Let me tell you this: veteran Cossacks on their arrival in Moscow from the settlements are treated to food, wine, beer and mead at the tsar's expense; they are lodged in hostelries and are not permitted to circulate without a pass. Old atamans are provided with a sledge and horse if they are there in winter. But I never partook of the tsar's bounty when it was offered me by the musketeers who guarded us. I climbed over the pallisade and sought my food and drink elsewhere. Here are my orders to you: do not place yourself under guard at the hostelry, for if they are planning evil against you they will lay their hands on you as they would on a broody hen. A woman named Irenetsa lives there in a little house resembling a dug-out; it is on a waste plot of scorched land in the musketeers' suburb, about a quarter of a mile away to the right of the bridge. Seek her out. If you find your own home too dangerous, she will hide you. But I warn you against informers. Give her all my news and tell her about the princess—she'll understand. She loves me deeply, and you will be dearer to her than kith and kin. I do not know whether her grandad, the fool, is still alive. He was so old when last I saw him that he may be dead by now. He was a wise man, a great reader, a seeker after God. Take all you need and be quick about it. The Cossacks are already in the saddle. If any should try to capture you, make your way straight back here."

"Keep in good health, father. Farewell, Stepan Timofeievich!"

"Don't allow yourself to be inveigled to enlist in the service of the tsar."

Razin embraced Lazunka at their parting and accompanied him to the flap of the tent. In the direction of Yaik a black mass loomed; it was on the farther side of the Volga and moved with squeaking wheels; the nomad huts of the Kirghiz placed on carts were slowly moving in the hazy moonlight; shouts came across the water:

"Good!"

"Here!"

"Yes?"

"Yes!"

By listening attentively Razin could understand the cries of these dwellers of the steppe. In his youth he had been sent on a mission to them from the Cossack Force. His distant past rose up before him, and for the first time in his life he experienced a slight feeling of regret at never having had a moment's rest since early childhood; he had been always on horseback, or in a boat, or fighting. . . .

He mused as he returned to the tent:

"How hard is human destiny! Whether a man enjoys freedom, whether he be a slave, or is wealthy and covered with honours—all has its climax in the shedding of blood. You may be feasting and listening to flattering speeches, while behind the door someone is grinding the axe which will chop off your head."

## 5

In the city of Astrakhan many languages are spoken, and a variety of voices may be heard. The sun scorches all the year round as though it were summer.

People jostle one another and bargain noisily in the stone shops of Armenians, Bokharians and Persians. From the market-place the crowds stream into the streets with their stone towers, churches and wooden houses with covered porches supported on pillars.

Beggars, a mass of sores and dressed in such scanty rags that they appeared almost naked, had adopted the Moscow custom and continually droned:

"Ye Orthodox Christians, give of your charity for the sake of God and the great tsar. In Christ's name!"

There were but few Orthodox Christians among the crowd.

In a corner of the market-place stood the grey torture tower, and from its slits of windows one could hear cries, wails and prayers.

Conspicuous among the crowd were the Cossacks, with their sumptuous clothes and their gold-tasselled caps, As they talked, they said:

"Our brothers are still singing the same tune in the devil's tower!"

Musketeers, walking alongside them, looked furtively at their attire and answered:

"All over Russia such things are taking place, brothers. No matter which town you enter, you'll hear this everywhere. If there is no torture chamber, the judges in the lower tribunals mete out much the same sort of sentences, so you hear the same kind of cries."

"Yes, the voivodes' justice is nothing better than club law."

Razin walked at the head of his captains in a blue coat with diamond buttons and a strip of gold cloth wound round his cap, the tassels of which were tipped with precious stones. At each movement of his back or shoulders the gold chain of his sword sparkled. No one was allowed to approach the ataman unless he himself wished to speak to a person. His captains distributed largesse among those who looked needy.

"Radiant ataman! Give of thy bounty to us who dwell in the almshouse; for God's sake!"

More and more beggars swarmed round the ataman and his men, until it seemed that this wealthy city, crammed with wares and built on an elaborate scale, consisted of no other population than beggars. A ragged stripling stretched forth his hand.

"My mother's been sent to the torture chamber and I'm hungry."

"What's she supposed to have done, my lad?"

"Spoken ill of the tsar."

"Give the boy something and let him abuse the tsar, too."

With a wave of his hand Razin swiftly passed on.

The Cossacks in the rear were trafficking with the people in the market-place, selling booty and clothing. Oriental attire, pieces of gold cloth, silks, gold chains, jewels changed hands between Cossacks and merchants. Armenians in their tall, black headgear and velvet gowns snapped up Persian goods. One of them, a sallow-faced and frightened-looking individual, shook his head in the direction of his fellow countrymen and cried hoarsely:

"First they'll sell us their wares and then they'll rob us."

His compatriots laughed at him and spat in his direction, while they clapped their hands on the pockets of their gowns.

"What are you afraid of? These folk will enrich us."

Many of Razin's followers, having spent all the money they had got from the sale of booty in the state taverns, now publicly divested themselves of the

sumptuous clothes and put them up for auction. Amid the jeers of the crowd they donned tattered garments, bought for a few kopecks from the beggars or picked up by the wayside. Their sweating bodies were covered by a variety of flies; some of the men were bronzed and muscular, while others were swollen by sea-water, or as thin as laths from malaria.

A row of slit-eyed, dark-skinned men had lined up; their faces had high cheekbones, and their heads were crowned with faded but many-hued caps. The men stared at the Cossacks' dark eyes and dazzling white teeth.

"Are we going to Edil river?"

"Volga! Why Edil river?"

"We call it Edil river."

"Where are you going to, Cossack? Why did you call the Bulgar Tatars to Astrakhan?"

"You lie, you eater of raw flesh. Those are Kalmuks."

"The Bulgars are bad, fierce, not of our faith, not Mohammedan; they worship idols."

"All sorts and conditions of men come to join father. All religions are alike to him."

"Have you got money, Cossack?"

"Yes, both Persian and German."

"Will you buy? Cheap. Our faith does not permit us to eat boar, we eat water-melon."

"Take the money; we like boar."

Without waiting to ask the price, the Cossacks for a mere song carried off wild boar carcases to their encampment.

## 6

The voivode, Semeon Lvov, stroked his ruddy beard as he stood in the porch of his roomy wooden house with its carved decorations and brightly coloured shutters. He wore a high-collared kaftan, which was unbuttoned, thus showing his yellow silk shirt, embroidered with pearls, which glinted in the sunlight.

"Come in! Come in, dear guest. I have been waiting to break bread with you."

"I am coming, prince Semeon, and to you alone. But I am troubled by certain thoughts."

"And what is troubling your mind, Stepan Timofeievich?"

"Well, you see, I am not accustomed to visiting voivodes. Suppose that after being invited to a feast I were refused entry to the vestibule? Were I turned away it would be humiliating to go home with an empty stomach."

"I invited you and shall receive you myself. Come straight into the chamber; don't kick your heels in the vestibule."

"Thank you for this. Here are gifts for you." Razin turned to the Cossack behind him, saying: "Hand over the things, Vasili."

Razin took an overcoat from the Cossack's hands; it was of cloth-of-gold lined with sable. Then the ataman stepped over the threshold and threw it round the voivode's shoulders.

"Wear this and do not ask for more. I keep my word."

"Oh, this will never do, Stepan Timofeievich."

"Well, if such an old garment is not to your taste, prince Semeon, I am sorry, but there is nothing better to offer you."

"Indeed, the coat is a perfect beauty : it's a magnificent one ! Only you know there are many people hanging about, and Prozorovski's domestics are among them. What if they should report against me ? Were they to do so, you may be sure that accusations will be sent post-haste to Moscow."

"What has Prozorovski to report, prince Semeon ? He has likewise accepted gifts from me. You are not by any means the only one !"

"Have you no inkling of how greedy the boyars are, Stepan Timofeievich ?"

"I'll think the matter over . . . he may not have time to report."

"Pray do not speak thus, bold ataman. Let us enter the house and enjoy some good cheer. The people cannot stare at us once we are indoors."

## 7

There was a blaze of lights in the Prozorovskis' big mansion. The host himself had taken his stand in the centre of the banqueting hall. He was wearing a kaftan with a high collar and made of gold brocade. Domestics filled the silver cups and bowls with wine, mead and vodka. Every time the door leading downstairs to the servants' quarters opened one could catch a glimpse of the staff bringing up silver and tin dishes. The voivode then approached the table, groaning under its weight of food ; according to their rank, he offered each guest in turn one of the intoxicating drinks. The man thus honoured accepted the cup and bowed low to his host. Mihail Semeonovich Prozorovski, the voivode's brother, sat at board with the other guests, shouting tipsy compliments to the voivode. A grey-haired steward in black velvet and two serving-men in tightly fitting dark blue coats stood beside the cabinets containing silver utensils, standing between two windows. He dealt out the silverware to the guests and kept a careful count of them. In one of the corners near the door another servant was turning the handle of a large musical-box on legs ; it jangled and brayed forth slow melodies. Out of harmony with its strains, voices of German, English and Dutch guests were arguing loudly and praising the host. Each ate with the fingers out of small dishes. The cup-bearer, accompanied by two servants, circulated continuously round the tables, ladling out with silver utensils food and wine among the guests.

"Here's to you, gallant prince !"

"Long life to the voivode ; may he acquire wealth and strength !"

"My Russian thanks to you, dear guests. May the food strengthen you so that you serve the tsar, our great sovereign, faithfully. He will not fail to shower his favours upon you."

"We are pleased to serve him."

The voivode contemplated his guests with his dim eyes, which in the firelight took on a greenish tint ; his face was drawn ; his hair was freely sprinkled with white ; he seemed to be thoughtful and preoccupied.

"Pray be seated, brother Ivan Semeonovich. You are all the time on the go and have eaten nothing yourself so far."

"Yes, yes, captain ; make room for the prince voivode."

"If he would only sit down with us, how our eyes would rejoice at the sight of him!"

Trumpets came to assist in the organ music, and the guests' voices were almost drowned in the roar of brass instruments. The glass windows rattled in their frames; prince Ivan had long since substituted these for the old-fashioned mica ones. The benches for the guests had been covered with rugs. Captain Wieders sprang onto one of them; he was a scraggy German in a tightly fitting uniform of dark blue. The voivode had just filled his cup with heavy mead.

Captain Wieders started to shout, while the cup trembled in his long, thin hand and his equally thin arm in its tight sleeve; as he wobbled on his feet, drops of thick, sticky mead fell to the floor and on top of the tipsy guests' heads. The uproar of trumpets was answered by pipes. With a wave of his free arm the captain bellowed, while his face became purple:

"Hi, musicians, not so much noise! I have a word to say. Captains, listen!"

The music ceased.

The German captain mopped his brow with a handkerchief; his fair hair stuck up on his narrow head; he spoke in a squeaky voice:

"Foreigners! My words are addressed to you, Germans, Dutch and English. I am sorry to have to speak in a foreign tongue. But I must talk to you in Russian, so that our worthy host, Ivan Semeonovich, may understand. I know full well that there are among you older men than I, but they do not need to listen if they do not want to. Well, I, Wieders, together with Widros, serve Russia, and we would give our lives for its people. The tsar loves foreigners. Often have I witnessed this, and I ask you, Germans, to serve the Russian tsar to the last drop of your blood. I realize why our dear host, voivode Ivan Semeonovich, is none too cheerful. This is why he is so thoughtful: the bandit Cossack Stepan Razin is in the vicinity of Astrakhan, O God in heaven! This is a great misfortune, and I, as a soldier and strategist, know that since he is such a dangerous individual the town of Astrakhan will have to be fortified. Another thing: many savage folk are gathering round Astrakhan. Razin musters them secretly, these slaves and barbarians from the steppes beyond the Volga; he has promised them the boyars' estates. Cossack and bandit mean the same thing; today or tomorrow these Cossacks will set about robbing the merchants plying the waters of the Volga. The Russian peasant has been nothing better than a slave for centuries; he dare not be anything else, nor can he live without a master; he is dirty and ignorant. Like a worm, the peasant burrows in the ground, eating dung as food and handing over gold to his master. We, noble Germans, and other foreigners cannot demean ourselves by upholding slaves. I know that you, gallant captains, will not join this rabble; none of us can make common cause with bandits. Those of us who join forces with robbers are doomed, gallant captains. Our honour enjoins on us to uphold the tsar and the boyars. Long live our foreigners' union! In unity is strength. May our brave soldiers encourage our host and voivode; let him see that we are filled with hope and strength. I toast prince Ivan Semeonovich!"

"Vivat the voivode!"

"Well spoken, Wieders!"

The captain, with a toss of his shock-head, climbed off the bench, bowed to Prozorovski and sat down.

The voivode, whose place was at the head of the table on a dais, rose and, approaching Wieders, embraced him.

"Gallant captain Wieders has noted my preoccupation of mind. While we are feasting here, my colleague prince Semeon Lvov is entertaining Razin." His nasal accents more pronounced than usual, the voivode added: "I have no authority to dismiss Lvov; such an order can only come from our great tsar himself; yet I know full well that there is treachery afoot in his household. I am not aware of what kind of discourse Razin and Lvov are holding together. The bandit has lavished many gifts upon the assistant voivode; and who can tell whether, on account of these presents, the voivode may not be selling Astrakhan to our foe? Vast numbers of people have rallied to Razin; there is an urgent need to fortify Astrakhan, as the gallant captain has just told you. Similar advice has been proffered me by His Grace the metropolitan of Astrakhan, who said: 'It is necessary to close the gates of the town and fortify the city before it is too late.' Those were his very words."

"Brother Ivan Semeonovich, have you forgotten the words you uttered in the audience chamber when you received the robber emissaries?"

"What were they? They have escaped my memory."

"You said: 'Should the ataman be seized and dispatched to Moscow, then the bandits would have nothing to do round Astrakhan.' "

"Yes, it is true, Mihail, I did say so."

"Whatever you decide to do, my dear brother, I intend to take the matter in hand, for Razin is today in Astrakhan. I may be acting arbitrarily, but there is nothing else to do. Apart from the musketeers, there are at present in the city some reliable men under Colonel Ruzhinski's command. I have no doubt in my mind that these gallant foreigners will give a helping hand for the sake of Astrakhan. As for myself, I shall be happy to fulfil your long-standing desire: seize the ataman and deliver him in chains and place him under a strong guard. We have no need to trouble ourselves about his rabble horde of peasants and Kalmuks. Once their brigand father is out of the way they will disperse of their own accord."

"But, brother Mihail, you have not taken into consideration that without an agreement with Senka we are not in a position to seize anyone who happens to be in his house."

"If Senka opposes us, we shall take him, too."

"Brother Mihail, you must bear in mind that Senka is a military voivode; the musketeers obey his orders, and the people in the suburbs are on his side; he holds the reins of power. At present I am thinking of how to fortify the town; the manner of dealing with the ataman is not a fit subject for conversation at a banquet."

"Suppose we should fail? It does not much matter, for you can send a conciliatory letter saying: 'My brother acted as he did while in his cups.' "

"Let us take our chance, assemble the soldiers and make a start, captain Mihail Prozorovski!"

Mihail Prozorovski rose from the table, bowed to his brother, walked up to captain Wieders, shook him by the hand, and they both departed. Gradually all the foreign guests followed suit, bowing to their host as they went. The boyars and the townsfolk carried on with the festivity, while their host paced the room, going frequently to peer through the windows into the dark night and looking anxious and preoccupied. Behind the stronghold in the ever increasing

darkness the torches flared as the troops mustered. Then came the clear sound of the tocsin.

"O Lord, preserve us! He is on the way."

The voivode ordered an oil-lamp to be kindled in front of the ikon and knelt down to pray. The guests silently withdrew without bidding their host farewell.

Prince Semeon Lvov, surrounded by his retainers, who were holding lighted torches in hand, stood in the carved porch of his house. A breastplate shone from beneath his dark coat; on his head he wore a spiked helmet; his hand gripped the hilt of his sword. The porch was surrounded by flaring torches, and armed men were on the alert. Foremost among them was Mihail Prozorovski, an unsheathed sword in hand. The wind tossed his black beard; his eyes blazed; he shouted:

"Prince Semeon, deliver up to us the brigand ataman Stenka Razin!"

"There are no brigands in my house," the voivode Lvov answered calmly and without changing his posture; then he added: "Prince Mihail Semeonovich! The great sovereign has pardoned the misdeeds of Stepan Razin and his Cossacks, and until our great sovereign has ordered what is to be done with the Cossacks it is an outrage to break into my house with armed men, drunk as you are, and a violation of the sovereign's ukase. I am entertaining the man pardoned as a guest in my house, and I permit no one to take a guest from my house by force. I haven't been in the service since yesterday. I am not afraid to lose my life. I know how to put down sedition. And you, prince Mihail, in your lawlessness and drunkenness, will involve the town in war. If you attack us, Mihail, we shall fight and measure steel against steel. When the fight is over you will be specially tried by our sovereign."

"Give up the brigand, or we shall attack you, prince Semeon, as a supporter of the brigand's cause. I see that you've donned armour. You have become mighty fond of robber gifts. Forward, soldiers!"

"Captains, accept the challenge. My servants are armed and are eager for a fight."

A wounded soldier rushed into Lvov's courtyard, shouting:

"Turn back, prince Mihail! The suburbs have risen against us, and some of the musketeers are looking to their arquebuses."

Outside the gate a skirmish was in full swing; challenging cries were muted by the firing. Voivode Lvov disappeared from the porch.

Inside the chamber, servants were hastily removing the silver from the tables. Razin had risen instantly when the men had pressed forward to the porch, and the jumble of loud voices had reached him. He stayed awhile at the window, watching the soldiers' faces in the light of the flaring torches. Impulsively, he pushed back the turban swathed round his cap, drew his sword and met his host on the threshold of the banqueting hall.

"Go back into the house, guest."

"I wish to help you, prince Semeon. It goes against the grain to see my host attacked while I merely look on."

"In such an affray as we have before us your captains will suffice. If you yourself should get mixed up in it, all the blame will fall upon me. Come!"

The voivode lighted a candle and led his guest up and down stairs along passages till he reached the garden. The wind blew out the candle-flame, so

they had to walk in the darkness. With a kick at the wicket gate the voivode set it open.

"Go, ataman! Shake hands and do not forget that it was not I who attacked you. The Prozorovskis wanted to lay you by the heels while we were feasting."

Razin groped for the voivode's hand and shook it warmly.

"No need for words, I know all, prince. Will you also show the way to my captains?"

"I shall see to their safety. Farewell!"

Beyond the wall, beyond the wide space in the foreground, beyond the ridge of hills stretched a dark-grey expanse spangled as it were with diamonds.

"The Volga?"

Razin found himself unexpectedly gripped by a firm hand.

"Take care, father, there's a ditch here."

"Hello, Chikmaz!"

"Yes, 'tis me, sure enough! No sooner did we hear the tocsin than Fedka Sheludiak and I began to rouse the suburbs, but first we learned that Mihail Prozorovski with the foreigners had collected some soldiers with the idea of capturing you. So we tackled them, one, two, with our arquebuses and then went at them with our axes. The darkness concealed our men, while the others were lit up by torches. Here is a bridge, father. Crawl over this and you'll be free of the town."

"Right, Chikmaz! It seems to me that I shall have to attack Astrakhan without delay. Then I shall need your help."

"We are all waiting for that moment, father."

Groping his way through the damp intersections of the bridge, Razin warned:

"Tread in my footsteps. Don't let yourself be caught by Prozorovski's spies. I can reach the bank now, for I see it plainly."

"Fare you well, Stepan Timofeievich!"

## 8

For many a mile the stars, like scattered luminous grains, were reflected in the Volga. The ground underfoot was a dingy grey. In the gloom could be seen the nomad huts, perched on their wagons, and the silhouettes of tethered horses at pasture. Cautiously, and with ears pricked, a horse drew nearer to the human habitations. The tents where the Cossacks were housed loomed dimly in the darkness. A patrol passed, and a low challenge was uttered:

"Who goes there?"

"*Nechai!*"

The canvas of the ataman's large tent was aglow from the liquid lights within.

"Is the Shemahan princess waiting for me?"

The ataman stepped softly to have a look at his Persian captive. He was wondering how she spent her time alone in the tent. A Cossack sentry passed by and recognized Razin. Listening to the sounds which issued from his dwelling, the ataman mused:

"Is she singing or talking?"

He approached her tent and, scarcely raising the flap, peeped in. Candles were burning on the coffers, and on the ataman's place reclined a man with a

black moustache, slanting Kalmuk eyes and straight dark hair, falling low on brow and neck. With her head resting against his shoulder sat the princess, clad in a shift. The Persian maid listened greedily to the Cossack; he was speaking Persian. Razin raised his foot to go in, but on second thoughts slowly put it down again.

"Wait, Stenka!"

The Cossack puffed at his pipe while he spoke. Then he drew the pipe from his mouth and thrust it away in his dark blue coat. He turned to the princess and asked her something, but she did not answer. The Cossack gripped her by the head with its mass of flowing hair and kissed her eyes. She did not resist him. When the Cossack released her she wrung her hands and gazed upwards, blinking away her tears, and murmuring something which sounded like a complaint. The Cossack stroked her head, but she made not the slightest alteration in her posture. He struck his knee with his fist, while uttering an incomprehensible word as though he were taking a solemn oath.

"So they've made a bargain of it!"

The old fool's words, spoken so many years ago in Irenetsa's hut, came back to Razin's memory, and he answered that distant voice:

"Yes, they have struck a bargain."

He raised the flap and entered the tent. The man swiftly rose to his feet; the princess neither moved nor looked at the ataman; she remained sitting as before, wringing her hands.

"Zeineb, begone!"

The Persian captive by now understood her master's oft-repeated injunction and vanished quickly; she might never have been there. The Cossack held out his hand in greeting. Razin did not take it, but seated himself in his accustomed place. He opened the nearest coffer and took out a pitcher of wine and two silver goblets, which he filled.

"Be seated, Lavreiev. Drink!"

Vaska Uss accepted the goblet and said:

"Father, the maid is dreadfully homesick. She ought to be set free and sent back to her native land. There's no taming a wild bird when it is caged."

"I did not capture her, Vasili. The ever loved and remembered Piotr Mokeyev brought the princess to me. If I let her go, his memory will fade. Drink! But there is one thing I have thought of. Mokeyev and I met on the Volga. Shall we ask the Volga what to do?"

Once he had drained the goblet, Uss spoke simply and without boastfulness:

"I occupied Tsaritzyn for you, father. I was marching with the Cossacks and camped outside the town. The inhabitants shut themselves up inside. They thought you were on the way with the fighting men. Later they kept asking 'Where is he?' To which I replied: 'Razin has gone to raid the Kalmuks.' So what with one thing and another, they realized that we were a company of peaceful men. They began to haul water from the Volga again, and, whilst on their way, they placed obstacles so as to prevent the Cossacks from taking the town unawares. I had issued instructions that they were not to be molested in any way. We began to chat with the people in the suburbs and to do an honest trade. Thus they got used to us. I gave them vodka and heavy Ukrainian wine. Not long after I heard them complain of the voivode. 'Well, why don't you get rid of that brute?' said I."

"Drink, Vasili!"

"Lead us to the city if you do not feel capable of overcoming the voivode's minions on your own account. I promise you we shall do the place no harm. They brought us a priest in secret, and I took an oath and kissed the cross, saying that I should do the town no harm. In the course of the night they knocked off the padlocks and chased away the sentries; thus were we let in. We strung up the voivode Timoha Turgeniev. The commander of the musketeers led his men to the assault of Tsaritzyn, but we trained our cannons on them from the walls. Those commanders who refused to surrender were drowned, and some were hanged."

"A splendid feat, Vasili. Once we have taken Astrakhan we shall have ample supplies for the winter. But I am not so pleased with your idea of taking the girl to Persia. Moreover, you cannot undertake the task single-handed, for the Kumiks—or, worse still, the Lezghins—will seize her."

"Well, father, she certainly cannot go alone."

"True enough! But if I allow you to act as her escort, where shall I lay my hands on someone to replace you? We have so few gallant men left. Sergei perished at Resht, the shah killed Ivan Serebriakov and Piotr; and now you seem to want to plough a lone furrow. Think the matter over; look around. The people are flocking to our standard; they are simple folk and know not the use of firearms, but are armed only with axes and bows and arrows. The encounter with the boyars is bound to be arduous; we will not always be able to persuade the suburban population to be on our side. The tsar and the boyars have engaged foreigners as master gunners, range finders and captains. These are well trained in the art of modern warfare. Yet we must beat them and fulfil our promise to reach Moscow and the tsar's palace, there to burn the slanderous documents and to free the people from serfdom."

"I know, father, that ours is a hard task."

"It certainly is no easy one, but once begun there is no turning back. The people flock to us; they wait; they ask for action. Yet you want to take a woman to Persia, and, once there, you will become a Persian."

"Candidly, father, I have out of pity promised to take her home."

"In promising this to her, you forgot me. All said and done, she is my prisoner. You know as well as any that an ataman's booty is a special sort of booty, the best and most coveted. This custom is a very ancient one, and none dares to stretch forth his hand to seize what is the ataman's. You, like Sergei, are my sworn brother. Sergei laid down his life for me, for such was his fate. I should have done the same for him without a thought. Herein lies our strength. But you do not think similarly. That is because you are of alien blood. Your mother was not of Turkish stock for nothing!"

"Father, she was not Turkish, but Persian. She taught me to read the Koran, and, were it not for my father, I should be a Mohammedan."

"Just what I was saying! You are an alien!"

"Father Stepan, I thought you might give me the maid as one brother to another. She and I understand each other; our road is one and the same. Forgive me for being so frank, but she does not love you."

"I have no regrets in regard to the princess, for I do not love her. What is so galling is to lose a man like you. All the bitterer because, like Sergei, you are fearless, always ready to put up a good fight, and have an enterprising mind. When I am gone you can take up the leadership and carry on for the great cause."

"Let me have the Persian maid, father, I have fallen in love with her. Even were you to slay me on the spot, I cannot deny that I love her."

"Have you found room in the tents?"

"Yes, I have."

"Now go! On your way past Stepan Naumov's tent—it's the one nearest the salt marshes—ask him to come here to me."

"Farewell, father!"

9

Razin sat immersed in thought. With elbows on knees, his large hands were buried in his thick locks. Outwardly, Naumov was his double, save for being narrower in the shoulders and having a slight stoop. As he took his seat he touched the ataman gently on the elbow.

"You sent for me, father?"

"Yes, Stepan, yes, yes!" Razin put on his cap, tossed his head and, filling two ladles with strong mead, drank off one, while handing the other to his captain.

"Drink, Stepan Timofeievich!"

"What's that you say? My name is Naumov, father."

Razin repeated stubbornly:

"From henceforth you are Stepan Timofeievich!"

"What can be the matter with you, father? A bold warrior, Vaska Uss, has arrived in the encampment with about a thousand Cossacks. Rumour has it that they took Tsaritzyn on their way hither. Your forces are growing day by day; your fame is spreading. Yet you seem out of sorts and look sad."

"You fancy I am crazed? Not at all, captain! Listen. I have made up my mind to dress you in my own attire, give you my trappings, which are familiar to many Cossacks, and will give you my cap and turban with its gold tassels, this very one. You will put it on and set out for the Don with all the honours of an ataman. The tsar's scouts will dog your steps and report to the tsar and boyars. They'll ask themselves: 'What's Stenka Razin up to now?' Meanwhile, I shall stay here, put on a captain's uniform, wear a coat pulled in at the waist, hang a whip at my side and hand over the mace to you. If needs must I shall shave off my beard. Only my most intimate followers will know who I am. As for the rest, I shall be the ataman's captain. Stories are afoot that the tsarevich has fled from the tsar and the boyars to join the ataman. This is greatly to our advantage. To this legend I have added another: I ordered that a river barge should be draped in black and placed at the disposal of a runaway priest in a black cassock with a cross on his chest. He's a man who bears a slight likeness in face and beard to the degraded Nikon, whom I had seen in Moscow when he was patriarch. Devil a bit do I care for Nikon, but it will enhance the truth of the legend. Now you, when you have time to spare, ought to have a look at the true Nikon. You'll have to visit the Ferapontov monastery and question him. It may be possible to rekindle his rage against the boyars. That would be fine! If he were to join us, the whole of Russia would be roused, women, old men, and everyone. But I feel in my heart that the old man's flame

has been extinguished. Since the tsar, the boyars and all the court rascals tell lies, deceive and spread false rumours, why should we not do likewise?"

"I did not catch your plan at first, father. But now I understand, it seems to me a fine one."

"Listen! Here's what we'll do. The cannons, which are already on the barges, must be placed in the bottom and covered up with straw and linen waste; those which cannot be concealed will have to be reported to the voivode. He'll have to be told: 'We need these pieces to defend ourselves against the eaters of raw flesh when on the march to the Don from Tsaritzyn.' The river barges, the flat-bottomed craft and the canoes must go with you. There will be plenty of rowers, for a considerable number of axe-swinging peasants have joined us. It is a pity, captain, that many of our men wear homespuns and bast shoes, and are not accustomed to the use of arquebuses. The boyars and landowners saw to that. When they attempt to fire they close both eyes. I doubt whether the boyars will give us time to train them. Well, the devil take the whole lot of them! My head is meant for this kind of thing, but I'm sorry for yours. When you are sailing the Volga, Stepan, and happen to come upon any fettered musketeers or soldiers, knock off their shackles and lure them into joining us. Every man who can handle an arquebus is welcome in our ranks. When these convicts have been released from their irons they will board your barges without having to be asked. When you reach the Don, do not go to Cherkassi or show yourself to the veterans. Many of them have known me since my childhood. Take up your position on the island at the junction of the Don and the Donetz, between Kagalnitskaia and Vedernikova. It is a big island. Do not set up tents, but make a settlement of dug-outs with a moat and escarpments. The lumbermen will prove useful in the work. You will not be lacking in hands to help you. When merchants sail downstream to Cherkassi, stop them and trade with them; buy up all the grain you can; to avoid famine, build warehouses wherein to store provisions. Send a reliable man to Cherkassi to invite my wife and children to join you. My brother Frol left at the same time as Lavreiev, but so far has not turned up. Tell Oliona the truth; but my sons do not know me, so you will have to behave to them as if you were their father. Oliona knows how to hold her tongue. If the veteran Cossacks demand payment for lead or gunpowder, let them have it. But I advise you not to interview them yourself. Let Oliona deal with them. Do not allow the veterans to see the underground settlement. In due time I shall come to your settlement, and then you will have to disappear. During my absence from here, Lavreiev, Vaska Uss will replace me. As soon as you reach the Don, write to Yaik demanding the release of Fedor Suknin, who was seized when he left Persia. Yaik has always been obedient to the Don. I intended to get Suknin set free from here; all the same you must write to Yaik. Why don't you drink?"

"Tell me more, I am listening to you, father, and wondering when you will order us to be on the move."

"Time is short. I shall let you know. We have to await a passport from the voivode so that your journey will be unhindered, Stepan Timofeievich. I want you to start with all the honours of an ataman and a hearty send-off by the commanders of the musketeers. Have higher heels fixed to your boots; I shall pad the shoulders of my coat so that you will appear broader. You'd better touch up your eyebrows with antimony. Do not speak with your natural voice; just wave the mace and roar. When necessary, veil your face so as to keep up

the legend. If you should meet any messengers bearing letters from the tsar, take the documents and tear them up and burn them or throw them into the water."

"Oh, father, what honours will be mine! Ha, ha!"

"You'll have more spies on your track than honours, I fear. Take the Kabarda steeds with you, the ones the Persian merchants were bringing to the tsar; also extra clothing and jewels. When you pass through Tsaritzyn, find the former voivode. Don't kill him, but make things as hot as possible for him."

"Unkovski is a spy, father, and now he'll have a chance to know me."

"Go now, Stepan, check up the guard, and then sleep."

Razin saw the captain out of the tent. When he returned he raised one side of the Fagaran carpet and—as usual—saw three candles burning on a low, carved stool. The princess lay asleep under a thin silken coverlet on cushions thrown helter-skelter over the rug. A tiny foot with henna-stained toenails showed from under the coverlet; the dainty toes moved; the dark, braceleted arms were thrown above the head; the pale face was in shadow; a deep, clearly outlined blush burned on her face. She breathed heavily, and the ring in the shell-pink ear quivered; the delicately chiselled nostrils showed the mark where the erstwhile ring had been. Under its azure coverlet the princess's naked body shivered, for apparently she was ill; but nevertheless her figure was exquisitely beautiful. Leaning forward, the ataman jerked at the carpet, and the whole tent quivered at his powerful movement. The lines on the ataman's forehead were smoothed out, and a gentle light came into his eyes as he gazed down for a moment, until his head with the greying locks drooped on his breast. Then, with a toss of his head, which flung back the ends of the turban, he turned away his face and sighed.

"Were I a believer I should make the sign of the cross over this mute creature who has been caught like a woodland bird. At times she complains, at others she sings. But what does she sing about? She is like a captive bird, which my poor brain cannot understand. Damnation take it! I pity Vaska—and I pity her, too, the alien. If only I could understand what she is complaining about it would make things much easier."

The ataman flung himself on the rugs without troubling to extinguish the candles. His sword on its sparkling chain jingled, and his cap rolled off. Razin snored; now and again the snoring ceased; he ground his teeth; it seemed as though he were listening to something as he slept. Outside, from the suburbs, dogs barked; more distant ones answered the call from the town; then the barking ceased. From high up in the starry heaven came a sad, sporadic ringing. On the escarpment in front of the Astrakhan cathedral a beadle, who was also the clock-keeper, struck the hour in accordance with the position of the hands of the clock.

The hours passed and midnight came.

Near the ataman's tent the sentry on duty floated by like a wraith in the gloom, shouldering his arquebus. From a Tatar hut on wheels he could hear a man's hoarse voice scolding a woman.

"You devil! You Satan!"

As he barked out the words one could dimly discern his head enveloped as in a hood by the tent-flaps.

## 10

Three clerks sat in the Government office: two were young men, while the third was elderly. The last, Piotr Alexeiev, was the voivode's favourite; his face was sallow and thin, his hair reddish and so well oiled that it hardly needed the black strap to hold it in place. Neither the secretary of the office nor his assistants were present. Papers lay on the table in front of the clerks. In addition to Alexeiev and the secretaries, it was the junior clerks' business to read these papers, but on this particular day, the seniors being absent, no one heeded the regulations. One junior clerk, with a scratch across his forehead and a red brush of a moustache, was reading aloud, carefully pronouncing each word as if he were learning to read the document. As this clerk read on, with certain omissions, Alexeiev remarked:

"I shall make you read it all over again, Mihail."

The young fellow went on, unheeding:

> ". . . and that horse had been entered and handed over, under receipt, to Pavel Matiushin, and, as requested, the said Pavel was to deliver the said horse under guaranty to the Astrakhan musketeer Andriushka Lebedev and another musketeer Senka Karetnikov by name. These two undertook that Pavel Matiushin would deliver the said horse in Astrakhan to the voivode prince Ivan Semeonovich Prozorovski; and in the event of the said horse being missing, he, Pavel Matiushin, would pay its full price. In the year 1667, on the third day of August, the Astrakhan musketeer Grisha Chikmaz valued the said horse brought by Pavel Matiushin, it being a bay mare with a right-sided mane and eight years old, with deep scar on the left flank, at 95 kopeks."

Having finished his reading, the clerk stretched himself and yawned.

"Cross yourself, or the Devil will fly inside you."

The young fellow took no notice of this remark. Dipping his finely pointed quill into the ink-well hanging on a strap from his waist, and closing its iron lid with a snap, he wrote on the margin of the document about the horse: "Oh, how my rump does itch!"

Alexeiev clutched the clerk by the sleeve.

"Stop this silly scribbling on the documents, Mihail, or you'll be flogged."

"Oh, how it does itch!" And the clerk, shaking some fluff from his pen, added: "As I write, Alexeiev, the thought of who is going to read this paper keeps on coming into my mind. Some Astrakhanian, a nobleman, has stolen a horse from a Tatar and refuses to appear before the voivode to pay for it. Judge for yourself: the Tatar has nobody he can lay a complaint before; he does not speak Russian and can neither read nor write; moreover, all the Tatar murzas are held as hostages in Astrakhan. So why not offer him ninety kopeks for the mare and have done with the matter?"

"What do I care about it, anyway? You frequent the Tatar huts on your way to Razin's brigands. Have a care, fellow! I've had some of their subversive leaflets in my hand, and the writing is very similar to your own. Vassia, stop scribbling on those documents! You've had a flogging once and almost got your dismissal. . . ."

Another clerk, his tongue in his cheek, drew on the margin of his document and replied:

"Well, Piotr Alexeiev, Mihail and I are never given any interesting papers to read, and bad ones should at least have some illustrations to attract the eye of a possible reader."

"Oh, lads, you are real pests. The secretaries will soon be here, and just look at the foul things you have scribbled on the petitions. And why do you make lewd drawings? This makes things awkward for me, seeing that I am your supervisor."

"Don't bother your head about the secretaries, Piotr Alexeiev. It's a bad lookout for all that the voivode cuffs everyone for the merest trifle. He ought to read the petitions and legal documents same as us. You are nothing but our persecutor."

"I shall report you for that! Once you have come to your work you must read every document, and I shall stand no nonsense from you. All said and done, we are working for the tsar."

"Listen, Mihail. As it so happens, today we are alone here with Piotr. So let's give it to him smartly, our persecutor."

"A good idea! Perhaps it'll teach him a lesson, and he'll leave off telling tales about us."

The youths grinned; both jumped up with a clatter; they rolled their sleeves up; the one who had been drawing shouted with a twinkle in his eyes:

"We'll give you a different head-dress, Piotr."

"Lads, this is not the street! A fight in the office while engaged on the tsar's business is unseemly. Come, be reasonable, stop it!"

"One place is as good as another! The coat you'll get as a reward for reporting us won't get crumpled."

"That's right! We'll tear a nice piece out of it."

The voivode's favourite ducked under the table.

"Brigands, you are not in the public square. . . . You'll be prosecuted for this!"

"It'll be us who'll prosecute you, you minion of princes!"

"Kick him! Here he is!"

"Slippery devil!"

"I've got him! We'll paint an archangel on your——"

"Sh . . . !"

The familiar knock of the voivode's staff sounded on the door."

"Mihail, it's the voivode! Slip the bolt."

One clerk put the bench in its proper place and resumed his seat at the table, while passing his broad palm over his face to remove the perspiration; the other went to the door.

The voivode repeated his knocking with stern deliberation. Alexeiev crawled back to his place and bent over the papers.

"You just wait, you devil! And keep a watch on your tongue!"

Alexeiev, while perusing a document, replied in a low voice:

"I shall not pass over in silence today's happenings."

"Well, report, if that gives you any satisfaction, and may the Devil take you!"

Ignoring the clerks, the voivode, his dim eyes staring into space, shut himself in his private office. There was a wooden structure between this and the clerks'

room, and it acted like a sounding-board. Prozorovski had merely to call for Alexeiev for an instant answer to come:

"Present!"

Alexeiev passed noiselessly into the adjacent chamber and bolted the door.

"We're in for a good scrape!"

"Let's kill him, Mihail."

"Rather than stay here I'd as lief write seditious letters for the ataman."

"Not so loud . . . !"

A voice sounded from the voivode's sanctum:

"Sit down and listen to what I have to say."

"I am listening, prince."

Every word could be distinctly heard in the clerks' office. The voivode spoke loudly and clearly in his nasal voice:

"Write: 'To Ataman Stepan Razin from the voivode Prince Ivan Prozorovski.' Ho, what ails your quill?"

"I have just finished trimming it, prince."

". . . You do wrong, ataman, in summoning many people to Astrakhan; it behoves you to dissolve your adherents. If you continue to muster them you will evoke grave displeasure from our great sovereign. You are to proceed with the utmost dispatch to the Don Cossacks, there to expiate your innumerable crimes against Russia and our great sovereign. Only thus can you redeem yourself, by faithful service in the Don Force. If you submit to the council of the Force's seniors, then shall the great tsar's displeasure be turned away, and you will earn his favour. As to the abusive language, prince Mihail Semeonovich, while drunk, pronounced against you, ataman Stepan Razin, do not take umbrage at that. He feared in his intoxication that the multitude, now assembled round Astrakhan, was a menace. What in his sober mind he intended to do was to urge upon you the necessity of disbanding all these peasants and Kalmuks and sundry other folk, then to strike camp and make for the Don. I myself was sorely grieved at my brother's rudeness in taking such an unauthorized step and have apologized to prince Semeon Lvov accordingly. Now, ataman, I beg of you to surrender your barges and cannons. God speed you safely to the Don. I, with prince Semeon, shall act as your loyal defenders and intercessors before our great sovereign.

"Have you written all I dictated? Good! Hand over the missive for me to sign."

In the outside office one clerk whispered to the other:

"Mihail, you'd better take off your boots and listen, for I feel sure the cur will now start making his report."

The junior clerk removed his boots and crept to the partitioning door, behind which Alexeiev was speaking under his breath:

"We are in a bad way, prince. Today the clerks began to beat me and were only halted in their assault by your arrival. This they did on the pretext that I had forbidden them to write obscene words on the margin of petitions, and Vasili acted even worse, for he drew a bare rump on a document destined for the prior of Troitsa monastery. And he had, furthermore, depicted the private parts and covered them with vermilion from the paint-jar. To conceal his

misdeed he had converted the whole thing into the initial 'B' and adorned it with gold arabesques. Moreover, Mihail frequents the Tatar encampment without the town, and I know for certain that he writes subversive leaflets for the bandit Stepan Razin. The murzas which we hold as hostages in Astrakhan are mentioned by name."

"We must not scare these clerks prematurely, Piotr. When the proper occasion arises I shall have Mihail arrested and sent to the torture chamber for examination. Vasili will receive a flogging."

The eavesdropping clerk trembled as he pulled on his boots.

"What did you hear, Mihail?"

"He has put in his report. You are to be flogged, and I am to be tortured."

"Let your mind be at rest. This very night we shall make our way to the Cossacks' camp."

The door opened, revealing the voivode seated at the table, while his beringed hand fondled his beard.

Alexeiev concealed as best he could the evil smile which flickered over his face. He avoided the eyes of his fellow workers as he walked in a businesslike manner to the table.

## 11

The Volga had never borne upon her bosom such a lavishly decorated craft as the ataman's golden-sailed barge. The tsar's big barge inscribed on its blackened sides with the word 'Eagle' looked like a beggar beside it. Dingy grey sails were tightly furled to the masts and halliards; iron cannons gaped with rusty mouths at the sides; heavy oars stuck clumsily out of the rowing-holes. A moustached German in a short, dark blue uniform with brass buttons reaching to the waist stood in the prow smoking a pipe and spitting into the stream.

"I wonder how it will all turn out," he remarked, "robbers decking themselves in golden attire!"

Turning deckwards, he shouted:

"Hi, gunner, look, there's a cannon!"

A gaily decked boat was sailing past the big ship. The oarsmen were dressed in blue velvet coats and red caps, set with pearls and surmounted by turbans with long tassels. A man raised his head to the black ship's high stern and called so loudly that his voice drowned the ripple of the waves:

"Just you wait, you tsar's raven! We'll wing you!"

The folk from the suburbs and the settlement, even the inhabitants and the Astrakhanians of the smaller fry, in red coats, flocked to the river banks to have a glimpse of the ataman. The wind caught the rumour of voices and tossed the sound to and fro:

"The ataman is leaving."

"Where's he going to?"

"Moscow! The tsar has bid him come. He's taking back the tsarevich, for the tsar feels lonely without his son."

"I've heard he's off to the Don. Why should he go to Moscow? He'd be forsaking the people!"

"No, he's going to Moscow! The tsar has summoned him. . . . He wants to see his son, Alexei; he is lonely without him."

"Are you blind, you folk? Can't you see it is the Persian princess?"

"A princess!"

"She's certainly a beauty."

"Ay, a captive. And what's the use of the likes of her? She is neither of our faith, nor can she speak our tongue."

"I can't see any need of faith. Razin himself eats meat on fast days."

"Veal only—that's white meat."

"Veal? For shame!"

There was a hissing like steel whetted on a grindstone as the spray glinted off the waves, following close one upon another over the blue-green crests. The spindrift looked like pearls scattered from a lavish hand. Razin wore a tightly fitting coat of scarlet velvet with sleeves reaching to the elbows, from which his yellow silk shirt puffed forth. His right arm clasped the neck of the princess, while the hand with its heavy ring hung down over her shoulder. The girl sat as if weighed down beneath her master's caress. He stooped forward in an endeavour to see the beautiful eyes. But she kept her lids lowered, and the dark lashes swept her cheeks. Knowing that she understood Tatar, Razin continued to ask:

"Do you love me?"

"No, I cannot love you."

Though she tossed her head with its silken veil, she was unable to escape the ponderous embrace and bent even lower so as to relieve the pressure, since she was too frightened to make any positive move. Razin himself removed his arm and, raising his head, said:

"Hi, grandad Vologzhenin, sing us a ballad!"

The dim-sighted bard, an old man in a dark blue coat and grey sheepskin cap, plucked at the strings of his domra and answered:

"I am tuning up for someone other than you, father. I mean to entertain the boyars, who are staring at us from the bank, and also let the Germans hear, too."

"Very well, go ahead!"

The minstrel, accompanying himself on the instrument, began to extemporize. Fragments of his song were wafted now to the Volga and now to the banks, according to the direction of the wind.

"Oh, you haughty-headed boyars
With pearl bedecked caps like stars . . ."

"You've made a fine start, grandad."

"It has never dawned upon you,
Never have you seized the clue,
That the folk arise for freedom. . . ."

"Really, you are outdoing yourself!"

"Let them free to own the soil,
The plains, the meads wherein they toil.
An' you refuse thus to behave,
All those you do now still enslave
Will raise an ataman to free them,
With sharpened axes as their emblem. . . .
Already they are grinding, grinding;
Axes smash and fires blinding
Will bring the boyars down to ruin. . . ."

"Oh, grandfather, fire has come!"

"No coat of mail or breastplate strong
Or sword or lance will right the wrong,
Or withstand the people's might. . . ."

"That's good, grandfather!"

"Be firm, ye folk, with hearts of fire,
Hew down the trees, make ramparts higher
Along the woodland roads. . . ."

Here the domra played as if in echo.

"Now prove your prowess ever more,
Let them know how great you are!
The taxes which the poor men pay,
Like idle tales, be they thrust away;
Decrees which made of us a scoff,
Which made muzhiks come on and off,
Force them wear a tattered clout,
Will all be cancelled out and out. . . .
Glance down from out your bastion towers!
See the gold-clothed in their bowers!
But now these tsarist folk high-born
Are clad in raiment dim and torn,
And dulled is all the shining gold,
And gone are all those pearls of old. . . .
With parched and itching throats now call
Their monks and bishops, popes and all. . . .
Princes may loudly weep and wail,
Without redress, without avail!
Their graves and crosses are destroyed. . . ."

"Come hither, my cup-beareres! A drink for the minstrel! My beloved bard, my story-teller, drink! Do you love me, Zeineb?"

"No love Zeineb, no!"

"Has the wine been brought? Now give me a cup for myself."

The ataman tossed off his wine when the singer had done the same; then he wiped his beard and moustache, looked around him with a stern eye and shouted:

"Good friends! Let us beat the kettledrums and dance. See, Mother Volga is dancing, and I, too, am longing for a dance."

As a feather in the wind flutters across a field, so was the craft tossed up and down on the waves as they piled up one upon the other. The pipers struck up, and the tambourines beat a gay tattoo. Staggering in his tipsiness, a man danced, uttering wild yells. The din was smothered in the rising roar of the Volga. The ataman drew himself to his full height, tossing the princess in his arms as though she were a child.

"Do you love me, Zeineb?"

"No. . . ."

Amid the spindrift, the golden garments flashed out, the silken veil bellied like a sail, and something bright lay stretched for a moment on the vast green and avid jaws of the waves with their white crests resembling rows of pearly teeth. . . . A green slipper with a gilt heel rolled under the bench of the boat.

"Oh, Allah!"

Then the terrible voice boomed forth and reached to the nearby shore:

"Take her, Mother Volga! She is my very own, and with her engulf the last memory of Piotr Mokeyev!"

The pipes and tambourines were silenced. The ataman waved an arm.

"Row ahead, and play, you devils!"

The gay patch of colour disappeared in the vast, insatiable indigo waters as into a pit. A howl went up from those on shore:

"He's thrown her overboard!"

"She's drowned!"

Razin sank to the seat with drooping head. Then once more the golden tassels on the turban sprang to life as he called softly:

"Grandad, entertain us to more of your lore. Sing to us about the brother's treachery."

"I read deep into your heart, father. You have torn a piece out of it, and that is not well."

"Sing, you dog! For such a speech I'd . . . Silence! I love you, bard, otherwise you'd have been in the Volga by now."

"You'll not hear another word from me."

The old man began to finger the strings of his domra, while the pipes and tambourines kept quiet. No one, not even the minstrel, dared look Razin in the face at that moment. The aged bard seemed to be searching his memory as with bowed head he pulled his cap down over his brows. He frowned. . . . Impatiently, the ataman waited. . . . Eventually the minstrel began in low voice to sing:

"Ah, the envious, envious traitors,
Who towards brothers act like haters . . ."

"Louder, grandfather! The Volga is so noisy I cannot hear."

The old man raised his voice:

"Offspring of a bitch's spawn,
Whose curs' heads everyone must scorn . . .
All through the day you sit and swill
In taverns till the dark night comes. . . ."

"Well, grandfather, I, too, am fond of the tavern."

"You, dear ataman, are a staunch friend, whereas I am singing about traitors."

"Look! Betrayal grips your hearts,
You drink and, like a dog which barks,
You belch forth foul obscenity.
To fill the tsar his treasury,
You strip us bare down to the cross.
Forsooth, your hearts must feel like dross."

"Now I see what you are driving at. Very good indeed. Let's have a drink of mead."

Razin clinked his ladle against that of the old bard. Covering his face, the ataman listened with bowed head to the ancient's song:

"Grieve not when, throughout the earth,
You give your lives, of little worth;
Sharing shame beneath the whip,
Because you lack faith in friendship
With men of your own kith and kin. . . .
Since all of us must die at last,
Traitors will hear the trumpet blast. . . ."

"Where do you pick up such words, old man?"

"From my soul, father; just pick them up like grains of corn."

"Friends, put to shore," cried Razin, adding in a low voice: "Ah, how sore at heart I am, grandad!"

"I know, dear ataman; did I not tell you that?"

"It is not because my beloved has gone hence that I am sad; but I foresee that evil is about to spring up between brothers. Ah me, there is nothing to do about it!"

## 12

At his office in the Government building sat the voivode Prozorovski. As was his custom, his hand cupped his beard, while his elbow leaned on the table, and his dim eyes stared at the wall. He questioned the clerk, but his gaze was turned afar. The young clerk with auburn hair fidgeted on his bench by the door and twirled the strap, which had fallen from his head while gabbling out his report:

"The clerks Vaska and Mitka absconded and have gone off to the robbers, prince."

Severe and perplexed, the voivode said in his nasal accents:

"But Razin has withdrawn to the Don, so what are they going to do in the robbers' den?"

"They are smart lads, prince, glib of tongue and handy with the pen. They are not the only ones; not a day passes but we find that musketeers and others of the junior services are joining the bandits. I myself have witnessed this. Two musketeers have fled today; they are Andriushka Lebedev and Karetnikov; they were to serve here for a year; they have taken their arquebuses with them."

"Oh, Piotr, things are obviously not going well. Do you think Razin intends to come back again?"

"That's precisely what my poor brain is puzzling out, prince."

"We are living in unsettled times; there's not a moment to waste in feasting and chattering. With the utmost secrecy enlist the services of spies and informers, disguise yourselves as small traders or as musketeers and mingle with the people; you must even enter the brigands' camp. I will inform our people of your coming, whether that be by day or by night."

"I understand your orders, prince."

"Go now, I hear prince Mihail's footsteps."

As the clerk went out, the prince came in. Mihail held his head high and stroked his beard with podgy fingers. His voice was loud and raucous.

"Well, we can thank God that we've rid ourselves of that bandit." Then, pausing by the table where his brother was seated, he added boastfully: "Voivode, brother, prince Ivan, I have a big scheme on hand. I am recruiting soldiers from among the Cherkessi, and, would you believe it, my supporters are also inclined that way, for the merchants, both Armenians and Persians, are raising funds and saying: 'Since there is now a Persian ambassador in Astrakhan, we are doing this to guard him and to enhance his prestige.' I have another idea. I mean to purchase many men and horses so as to be strong enough to chase into the steppe all this rabble which Razin has gathered round Astrakhan; thereafter, no trace of them shall be found. Furthermore, I have it in mind to drag these Kalmuk and Kirghiz elders on a leash to Astrakhan. There! What have you to say to that?"

"Pray leave me, prince Mihail. Your restlessness distracts my mind."

At the sound of his brother's severe tones prince Mihail stepped back and slumped on the clerk's bench.

"Well, brother Ivan Semeonovich, why do you not tell me whether you think my idea a good one?"

"Your nimble feet are a great impediment to your head, prince Mihail."

"Why, by God, what praise to receive from the voivode!"

"Leave God's name out of the discussion, Mihail. Tell me, did you inspect the musketeers today?"

"The musketeers, brother, are under the care of my commanders. They dislike an outsider to pry into their business."

"Are you aware that scouts have been dispatched to watch the road in case there should be any fugitives wishing to join the brigands?"

"Certainly not, prince voivode! Whether you like it or not, looking after musketeers is not my business."

"It is not only your job, but our common job. And have you not heard that both civil servants and musketeers are going over to the Cossacks?"

"I know nothing about that, brother."

"Precisely! And have you not observed that our great sovereign's peaceful nomad Tatars are moving their carts from their present sites and heading for Chilgir?"

"Oh, brother Ivan, they are merely anticipating the coming winter. Their cattle is growing lean, and they are seeking fresh pasturage."

"Fresh pasturage? Have you not noticed, too, brother, why the Kalmuks of the steppe Horde have abandoned the beaten war trails and are blazing fresh ones which all converge on Astrakhan?"

"I did not know this."

"You seem to be very ignorant, prince Mihail. Yes, you may proceed with the recruiting of a cavalry regiment; it may come in useful."

"You are concealing something from me, brother Ivan. Why are you doing this?"

"I do not wish to confide in you yet. I shall ponder the matter a little longer and make further observations. But this at least I may tell you: I intend to fortify Astrakhan, and in this I depend on your assistance."

"But, brother Ivan, Astrakhan is already well fortified; you need not worry on that score."

"Nevertheless, I shall fortify the town. Now off with you, and I shall send for you when I need you."

## 13

Razin, dressed in the dark blue coat of a captain and a Zaporozhian cap, was seated on a carpet. He was absorbed in thought, but of a sudden shook off his preoccupation to call out:

"Hi, Mitri!"

A young clerk in Cossack uniform emerged from behind a Faragan rug which screened off another part of the tent.

"Sit down." The Cossack obeyed. "Come closer!" The one-time clerk did as he was bid. Razin could now see his face clearly with its closely clipped, reddish moustache and the abrasion on his forehead. "How did you come by this?"

"I used to be employed by the voivode, father, but visited the encampment and also wrote your circulars. The voivode has a beast of an informer in his employ. His name is Alexeiev, and he discovered my secret activities. Once I was climbing through the pallisade when I felt myself seized from behind, so I struck out with my foot and caught the fellow in the stomach. He fell to the ground holding his innards and lay there bellowing like a cow. Then I ran away and hid in the town."

"You did very well! What was he trying to catch you with?"

"Some kind of hook or harpoon, probably."

"Well, you have proved yourself a smart young fellow, and I'm glad you decided to come over to us. We shall not treat you badly, though, of course, you may get killed by an outsider. Was it you who wrote those letters for the barges at sea?"

"Yes, captain, and I also wrote to the Kalmuks as I was told. Vaska is working on the barges coming up from the estuary to Astrakhan."

"I know that."

"All the commanders of musketeers have been slain; there are few among

the rank and file who refuse to join you, and Vaska is a clever fellow. Why, he even understands German."

"In you two I've found a couple of smart young falcons. Here is what I want you to do for me, Mitri. Dusk is coming on, and I wish you to make your way to the suburb and take a peep at the hut which is the last one in the row nearest the wall. Look in and see whether there is a light burning. But you'll have to move warily, for the voivode has let his spies loose. You must not allow yourself to be caught. If you see a light, creep in cautiously lest they happen to be on your trail."

"I understand, captain."

"A musketeer lives in that hut. Take this"—and Razin drew a massive gold ring, set with a ruby of the purest water, from his finger and handed it to the young man—"you will give this jewel to the musketeer and say: 'Chikmaz, the ataman awaits you.' Understood?"

"I know him, captain. He is called Grishka."

"Good, you are worth your weight in gold!"

"I shall not let myself be duped by the informers. I happen to know some of their faces."

"That, too, will be useful. Should Chikmaz not be at home, make your way into Astrakhan as stealthily as possible, taking a secret means of entry, for the gates will in all probability be barred. I am sending you because you know your way about the town perfectly."

The young man rose to his feet.

"Wherever Chikmaz may be, I shall track him down, captain."

"You had better disguise yourself as a musketeer or a small tradesman and darken your face. Many people might recognize you, since you were a clerk there."

The young man chose a musketeer's uniform and girt himself with a sword. Once he was fully attired, Razin inspected him.

"It would have been better to take a poleaxe rather than a sword which you do not know how to wear. Tighten your sash and don't carry the sword too low."

"It'll be all right! I shall take the sword."

In these trappings, he left Razin, who dozed as he reclined on cushions. The old story-teller, fumbling and groaning, tottered forward from behind the hanging carpet and, shuffling along in his felt shoes, lighted the candles. The ataman opened his eyes as the flame sprang up and, passing his hand over his face, got up.

"Grandad, you keep an eye on things here. If anyone should come on business, see him yourself. But keep your weather eye open lest he pry into this casket, for it contains the circulars."

"I shall be a strict housekeeper, dear ataman!"

"If you fancy some wine or mead, take it; but be moderate."

Adjusting his cap, the ataman thereupon went out. A streak of light, rising from the horizon, was beginning to dispel the murk. A full moon swung up from the lowlands in the direction of the sea. With slow and deliberate tread, Razin strode towards a distant tent which was silhouetted against the dimly glistening background of the salt marsh.

A thick candle burned within the tent, and swarms of flies were flitting round it and getting stuck in the running tallow. A big man in a crimson shirt without

the usual belt lay face downwards along the whole length of the tent. The man's back heaved as though he were noiselessly sobbing. Razin spoke as he entered:

"Lavreich!"

Vaska Uss, deaf to the call, remained prostrate. The ataman, stepping softly, knelt on one knee at his captain's head while placing a hand on his back. With a jerk Vaska raised his head with his cap clenched firmly between his teeth. As he let out his breath the cap fell to the ground. He spoke in low, savage tones:

"Do not touch me, Stenka!"

"Why not? Have you gone out of your mind? Fancy grieving like this over the loss of a woman!"

Uss buried his face in his cap and continued in the same voice:

"Are you a brother or a stranger to me? I cannot answer this myself, for my mind is in a whirl. Why did you drown her? You did not need her for yourself and yet you refused her to me. . . ."

"I drowned her so as to prevent you from deserting me. Have done with this! The Volga and the Khvalyn Sea will rock her bed until she reaches Derbent, her native land, which she loved far better than she ever did any of us, who were aliens to her. So why grieve? In any case she could not have lived long, for she spat blood at times. I have saved both you and myself from sorrow; if you had become strongly attached to her your feelings would have been more harrowed; she was so obviously nearing her end."

"Stenka, I must leave you; you have made my heart bleed; if I remain, something worse might happen."

"Sorrow will pass from you, Vasili, certainly it will. I have never allowed myself to mourn a wench, and neither should you. There will be many more."

"I am better left alone for the moment. Please leave me, brother."

"You are right, and I quite understand, Vasili. Allow me to pass my hand down your back."

"No! Do not touch me, or I'll gnaw your hands to the bone."

"Foolish fellow! Is it iron you wish to try your teeth on?"

## 14

A sharp nip was in the air; the moon rode high and made night into day; Razin, as he looked around, reflected:

"I wonder whether the tsar's people are on the move?"

Wagons creaked, horses neighed, cattle lowed; near by a small black donkey lifted up its voice to bray; a Tatar woman, her veil awry, was dealing the poor little beast resounding blows.

"*Iblis! Iblis!*"

The braying came from the self-same spot.

Felt tents had been hoisted on long carts; they moved slowly along, making a path of auburn-tinted brightness in the moonlight. Veiled Tatar women rode by on donkeys, camels or oxen. Droves of sheep and goats accompanied them; all their possessions were on the move. A bent old man sat astride an ass; from time to time he shook some grain into a sieve resting on a sack. In

the sieve, on a piece of sacking, were two hens, unable to see where to peck in the darkness. At the head of the caravan were Tatars in turbans and sheepskin caps, overcoats with the fleece turned outside, hunched on their shaggy mounts, legs bent in the short stirrups, quivers full of arrows strapped to their backs, bows to the saddle and whips in hand. Split up into sections, one section of the caravan was crossing the bridge, while another was approaching it. This bridge, which led to the Crimean bank, was built on barges with the planking about two feet above the water; it creaked and groaned as the procession made its way over it.

At the top of the moving column was a tall Tatar, the head of the nomad settlement, on a black horse, in a black coat with the fur on the outside, like that of the others, a coat of mail beneath the black coat, a quiver full of arrows and a bow at his saddle; across the saddle lay his red kaftan lined with fox. With an axe in his right hand and a whip in his left, he called out as a group approached the bridge:

"How many men?"

His bushy black cap hid his face save for his sparkling eyes and gleaming teeth. He controlled the traffic so as not to overburden the bridge, the shifting weight of which caused the water to ooze out in places and shimmer like silver.

"How many men?"

He was given the number of men and cattle; thereupon he would hold up his whip and lower his axe. Another wave of traffic, and he raised the glimmering axe and snarled:

"Who comes hither? Satan!"

From beyond the river came a groan:

"Chi-l-gi-ir!"

"Good!"

"Who goes there? Satan!"

The Cossacks came out of their tents.

"Where the devil do they come from?"

"They've been on the move for the past week. Is this the first time you have noticed them? They've constructed some sort of a bridge, but the Volga will make short work of it."

"Why are they fleeing?"

"From the Kirghiz, probably."

"Cossack, the Kirghiz are cruel to Bulgar Tatars; not same religion."

"I don't believe that's the reason. It seems to me that you think Astrakhan is going to be too hot a place to live in during the coming winter."

The Cossacks questioned the headman at the bridge:

"Hi, you eaters of raw flesh!"

The eyes gleamed from under the black sheepskin.

"What do you want?"

"You're as handsome as Lucifer. A murrain on you!"

"Same to you, you Russian devil!"

Razin kept watching the bridge; the caravan was moving across it, a dull silver line in the moonlight; the tail of it noisy and disorderly in the foreground, the head disappearing farther and farther into the valley.

"Chi-l-gi-ir!"

The Cossacks fell to discussing their own affairs.

"The voivodes will have fewer men to act as informers,"

"Yes, if a messenger is dispatched to the tsar, a Tatar is sure to put in an appearance."

"The encampment has passed on, but that woman is still beating her donkey. It refuses to stir."

"Give her a helping hand; shove a firebrand under the donkey's tail."

"They've broken camp. So shall we soon, and then we'll go right up to Astrakhan."

"Look, your horse has got loose."

"Why the devil should it at this time of night?"

"A Tatar mare neighed to him. Did you not hear? So he is following her to Chilgir."

"Following her? I'll give him Chilgir!"

"Do you think the infidels will reach Chilgir? It's away in the steppe, and there they'll be fighting one another."

"The steppe, the rivers and the hills are already powdered with snow."

"The snowdrift will be sweeping over the towns any day now."

## 15

Facing the stronghold, the Voskressenski Gate was towards the left angle of the encircling wall, not far from a convent. Here workmen were busily walling up the grilled gateway of the Mochegovski Tower, a little beyond the place where the musketeers kept their powder magazine. Though the gates were made of iron, they had, as Prozorovski said, become brittle with age. Wagons, drawn by oxen or horses, were bringing the bricks to where they were needed by torch-light and lanterns. The men did their work in mitts and wore sackcloth aprons. Row upon row of bricks rose while the townsfolk, who had rolled their trousers up to the knees, kneaded and mixed the clay and sand barefoot. The voivode had ordered that the work should be carried on at night so as not to create a panic in the town. In the daytime only one gate, that which led up from the Volga, was allowed to be open so that pedestrians could reach the market-place. But even here a strong watch had been stationed on the outside and within the city wall. The gate was closed at four o'clock. A straight road led from the Gorianski Gate to the market.

Supervision of the work was entrusted to the captains of musketeers and at times to the commanders. Occasionally Prozorovski himself would ride up on his stocky bay and silently observe from a distance what was afoot. He scarcely slept a wink; many more grey hairs had appeared recently in his black beard; his complexion was sallower; his dull eyes were sunken and constantly on the watch. The only person who did not arouse his suspicions was Alexeiev. This clerk was almost in constant attendance on the voivode, and even slept in the vestibule of his master's house.

After inspecting the new fortifications, Prozorovski would take a short cut to the other end of the town; riding at a foot's pace, he passed along the prison-like quarters of the musketeers, which stood in a row facing the market square with the back premises turned towards the wall in the direction of the suburbs. The voivode examined the sentries posted at the various entrance gates, and

endeavoured to overhear the conversations and shouts in the yards. Much of what he caught made him frown.

"Ah, the traitors!" he thought. "They have turned against our great sovereign. I issued strict orders that a watch should be kept on the estuary lest the robbers should try to escape and sail away to the Khvalyn Sea. Yet what have they done? Caroused with the Cossacks and handed over the barges. . . ."

Voices, bandying jokes and telling stories, came from the Mochegovski Tower. A bivouac fire was burning beneath the wall. Men were throwing all sorts of rubbish into the flames. The weather being mild for the season, they wore only their shirts, yet they gathered round the fire for a smoke or to relax their limbs. Just as in the days of Ivan the Terrible, so now, the contorted shadows of men, horses' heads, ox-horns, caps, hands and noses danced merrily upon the mouldy surface of the ancient wall. Musketeers lounged about smoking and chatting; occasionally they helped the workmen; axes gleamed; a motley display of regimental coats—white, blue and crimson—could be seen.

"Yours is a grand life, gallant musketeers."

"Ugh, the cur grudges a dog his bone!"

"Well, we don't have to pay them plough or grain tax. All we've to do is to serve and stay where we are told."

"Damn them! Had you been driven from pillar to post from childhood to old age you'd have a different tale to tell."

"Also, if you'd had to wait about in offices, where for every word misplaced you'd get a cuff in the face . . . Always the same old song: you've stood wrong; you've moved wrong!"

"A fine life, indeed! They drive you like cattle; now it is out to sea or up the Volga to defend people or to guard merchandise with never a thought for yourself."

"Shut up! Here comes the commander."

"Pot-bellied jackass! He's only strolling past. No need to mind him."

"Brother musketeers, the voivodes don't seem to trust us overmuch, do they?" said a short individual dressed in the garb of a petty trader. His face was covered with a black bushy beard; his eyes were barely visible; he was chewing the dented stem of a burned pipe, sucking, spluttering and spitting. "Just look at this tribe of devils patrolling the city!"

As he spoke, a detachment of fighting men in felt cloaks and shaggy caps emerged from the darkness, broken by the light from two lanterns. These were preceded by a couple of soldiers in German uniform—black caps with yellow stripes, and leather shoes. At the head of the detachment and behind the lanterns marched the captain, a German in a short coat with brass buttons. He shouted to the lantern-bearers:

"Hold the lights higher! Eyes front!"

He turned half about towards the soldiers in their felt coats and muskets on shoulders. His order was issued in broken Russian:

"Give foot! Give more foot! Ah!"

The men stamped on the ground and marched past. The masons jeered:

"He speaks like a blacksmith to a horse! Give foot! Ho, ho, ho!"

The petty tradesman said in a voice like a tinkling bell:

"All in black and carrying lanterns! One might think it was a Jewish funeral."

"Or a metropolitan's! Do you hear the bell?"

The watchman in the summit of the tower was striking the hour.

"Did you count how many were the strokes?"

"I lost count."

"It must be past midnight by now."

"We'll soon be through with the job."

"Lezghins, Armenians and Germans walk armed at night."

"Wait a while! You'll see that boyars' sons will soon have to patrol the city and man the walls in place of us musketeers."

"Yes, the boyars must have a headache! The Cossacks are living peacefully in their encampment, yet the voivodes are fortifying the city and forbid certain people access to the market. The water in the secret cisterns is being tested; they're cleaning out the wells."

"This is not the place to be talking about patrols being entrusted to foreigners instead of to musketeers, when the voivode himself hears all we say as he passes by."

"The Cossacks are keeping quiet, it's true; but there's a hubbub in the taverns. It was only yesterday that two Razinites were dragged to the torture chamber from yonder tavern near the convent."

"Yes, I heard of that."

"I actually saw the arrest."

"Have any subversive leaflets been read in the taverns?"

"None whatsoever."

"You lie, old goatee beard. Every Astrakhanian has read them: 'Surrender Astrakhan city! I, Razin, am against the boyars in the name of the tsarevich Alexei. You will have to deal with the boyars.'"

"There's something of a miracle for you! With my own eyes I saw Razin sail down the Volga, yet now you pretend he is here?"

"What's all this talk about? He has taken Cherni Yar and has drowned the voivode. Razin sailed for the Don, but his double is here. The ataman is a wizard, and neither sword nor bullet can harm him."

"The patriarch Nikon is with him on the black barge, the one nearest the sea."

"The ataman flies about on a magic carpet."

"What a fib!"

"I saw him myself one night flying just below the clouds."

"In that case, whether Astrakhan be fortified or not, the town is bound to fall to Razin."

"Sh! Do hold your tongue."

The shadow of the voivode riding on his stocky mount loomed grey in the dusk. All fell silent; only the tap, tap of the wooden mallets could be heard as they struck on the bricks. The wraithlike figure disappeared round the corner of the convent in the direction of the stronghold.

The black-haired tradesman's voice could be heard tinkling again:

"Well, like the soldier in the story, let's do some work."

The nimble fellow shoved his pipe into his trousers pocket, pulled off his homespun shirt and, rolling it up like a large sheet of official paper, spread it over the fire. The lice dropped out and crackled in the flames.

"You see what fibs they tell us. They say that lice cannot be got rid of unless one has a special tool. Yet here's fire doing a splendid job of it without any tool at all. Ha, ha, ha!"

"They're useless sort of cattle; no wool, no fat, and eat no end."

"Do you mean there are fat ones?"

"Undoubtedly," the half-naked little man went on in his tinkling voice, his baptismal copper cross dangling on his chest. "Once upon a time, brothers, there lived a cavalry soldier——"

"Lies—there are many soldiers."

"This particular soldier was very tall and stalwart; a fathom across the shoulders—not like myself, who am the merest dung beetle."

"Well, we're listening."

"So a flea and a louse came to live in his clothes."

"Sometimes one gets more than two hundred of them."

"The louse instructed the flea: 'When he is at home, you long-shanks, sit quiet and do not feed, because he will feel it. But when he is on parade, go for him.'"

"What happened?"

"Quite simple! They fed according to rule, remained alive and grew fat. The cavalryman, when on duty, had to cope with his horse, his sword, his musket and the colonel's blows; he was not even given time to relieve nature, let alone delouse himself. When he reached home he was dead beat. One night, just as he'd got into bed, the flea began fidgeting. So the cavalryman bethought him that the animals were feeding to no purpose. He pulled off his trousers and rolled the two friends out; the flea hopped out of the window; and the louse crept under the table. The soldier pulled it out by its hind leg——"

"It must have been a large one to have such legs!"

"Whether it was large or not, the soldier skinned it and got about a hundredweight of fat out of it."

"The devil he did!"

"This man knows how to tell a tall tale. Any more of it?"

"No, I've done! Give yonder father a trifle."

A tipsy monk, tall and lean in his black cassock, stood swaying over the fire, warming his swollen fingers.

"Father, you'd better hold up your cassock, or you will catch fire."

"I am not afraid of terrestrial fire, but I do fear the fires of hell."

"So that's how you feel. We're more afraid of earthly fires."

"Great wonders will occur in the coming years, brethren!"

"If you have foreknowledge of heavenly events, surely you are able to foresee earthly ones?"

"Your mockery, O man, is vain. 'Tis plain you have no respect for my knowledge."

"We are longing to hear what you have to say."

"We are listening."

"Brethren, I shall speak naught but the truth, which I have beheld more than once. Here is a vision vouchsafed me while I was away on business connected with the cloister."

"Well, what did you see?"

"In the settlements nearest this city, which in ancient times was named by the infidels 'Astra Khan' . . ."

"Have you not noticed that these infidels have gone away these many days ago? They broke up the whole of their pallisades so as to build a bridge for the crossing. . . ."

"And how they managed to bind it together passes my understanding, brothers, for never an axe did they use."

"They probably tied a reed rope to the horses' tails and swam the river themselves."

"Call that thing a bridge? Why, no sooner were they out of sight than the whole contraption was swept away by the Volga and carried to Khvalyn."

"The Volga does not stand still, neither does she allow anything in her waters to stand still."

"They cut down all the reeds around Astrakhan so as to build that crossing; yet the thing was a mere two planks in width with thin crossbeams."

"The marvel is that they succeeded in getting all their cattle across such a gangway."

"Their cattle is not like ours. The beasts are trained to walk along a single stake and, if need should arise, to take to sea."

"These reeds are by now well seasoned, so they are both strong and light."

"Enough of this chattering! Let the friar have his say."

"I shall speak of the sign upon the highways and byways, on the homesteads and villages, brethren. After the sun had dipped below the horizon, people saw a wondrous sight. The twilight was passing into darkness . . ."

"You dare not return to the monastery and face the abbot, father, because you are the worse for drink."

"Don't interrupt the holy man!"

". . . Out of the darkness towards the west, where the sun had just set, there appeared, as it were, a great star, which rolled across the skies like lightning, while simultaneously the heavens were rent in twain; and in the midst of the heavens, thus divided, there appeared a serpent with its head and tail aflame. Thus it remained for half an hour, and the radiance thereof cannot be expressed in words; and from within this radiance there appeared an image with head, eyes, and arms and legs outspread; the whole looked like the figure of a man. Then, as if a bolt had suddenly been shot, the heavens closed, but from the illumination, minute sparks descended on the roads, the houses and the waters. This vision has been given me more than once, brethren."

"What do you think the vision portends?"

"Such matters cannot be discussed among such a multitude of people as are gathered here."

"There are no informers among us."

"But I see service men in your midst, musketeers."

"Speak your thought. Should any dare harm you, he will be stoned."

"Ah me, but I fear the cloister's stone dungeon. It is so very cold there."

"Every one of us will protect you."

"This is how my poor brain conceives of the matter: a man of fire has already appeared or will soon appear in the cities and villages; his advent will bring great bloodshed—ay, very great bloodshed."

"How many times did you have this vision, father?"

"Twice was it vouchsafed to me, a sinner. Yes, twice!"

Someone spoke softly and timidly:

"'Tis said that the eternal lamp in front of Our Lady's shrine has gone out of its own accord."

"And it's the truth, because in these times the faith of many will become extinct. . . ."

"All because the voivodes are driving the people to exasperation by their constant looting and taxation."

" 'Tis also said that three tapers behind the altar light up of themselves, and when anybody snuffs them out they burn again."

" 'Tis said that when His Grace, the metropolitan Jozef, was told this, he wept and predicted: 'Many tribulations will befall the city.' "

"Another thing I have heard tell is that a man of great height went one night through the Voskressenski Gate straight into the stronghold and there burned away like a candle. This portends that the stronghold will be destroyed by fire."

The watchman in the tower sounded ten strokes.

"You see? It is far beyond midnight."

"Lend a hand, Trishka, and we'll lay another couple of dozen. Then to bed."

The bonfire was a smouldering heap and none added fuel to it. A loud voice came from out the intense darkness:

"Don't let the embers out completely. We can kindle a few sticks to light us on our way!"

## 16

Alexeiev, the clerk, sat in the smaller dining-room of the voivode's house amid cabinets filled with silver vessels of all descriptions. The place was dimly lit by two candles and oil-lamps, which cast a feeble reflection on the ikons in the corner. The clerk was busy sorting papers, and mumbled to himself as he carried on his task. He suddenly became alert, for a shuffling noise reached him, coming from the master's private apartments. He quickly adjusted his forehead strap and shifted his position to the extreme end of the carpeted bench. Prozorovski, wearing a blue silk dressing-gown over a silk shirt and red moroccan boots, entered. The clerk rose and bowed from the waist.

"Be seated, Piotr. This is no time to be bowing and scraping."

Alexeiev resumed his seat, while the voivode took another behind the table facing the secretary.

"We'll look through a few more papers, Piotr, and that will be enough for tonight. I am dead tired. For many a night I have not been able to sleep and have wearied myself by horseback-riding. I see everything as through a mist, and even my horse is jaded."

"Surely, prince, you could retire to rest and leave the remainder for tomorrow?"

"If my mind is worried I shall get no sleep. I want to know whether you succeeded in creeping up to the robbers' encampment. What are they up to? And is Razin here himself, or has he someone to represent him?"

"So far all is quiet in the camp, prince. The only trouble is that the musketeers at the estuary are carousing with the Cossacks, and some of the townsfolk and musketeers of the city garrison go to see them."

"Really? The musketeers? Which of the townsfolk did you recognize, and what precisely are they plotting to do?"

"I was unable to recognize any of them. Among the garrison I suspect Chikmaz and Krasulin. I shall endeavour to track them down and give you my report. The Tatars have abandoned their settlement, as I have already told you. I do not know where they have gone to; in any case, they are bound to starve on the way."

"No need for us to trouble ourselves about them. Let them perish, the infidels!"

"They paid tribute, prince, and thus enriched the tsar's treasury."

"This is not the time to think about tribute; moreover, they are not likely to perish—though, of course, they may kill one another. The weather is mild in the steppe, and the Tatars know of pasturages sufficient for the needs of their cattle. They will certainly not have started on the road without supplies; then there are always the trophies of the chase to hand. During the winter they run the risk of encountering a goodly number of fighting men and they go in fear of the Kirghiz. Once the rivers are frozen there will be much looting, and many will prowl around their encampments. The times are such just now that even behind stone walls one does not feel any too safe. Rumour is rife; estates are being burned, and the rabble are slaying many boyars. Ah me, the earth seems to have given birth to a veritable monster on the Don. Piotr, I foresee that many boyars' heads will roll in the dust. You and I shall not escape; we'll be made to suffer."

"The city is strong in men and walls."

The voivode fixed his clerk sternly with his dim eyes.

"You cannot divert my thoughts, Piotr. You of all people know what a storm is brewing against the boyars."

"You speak nothing but the truth, prince, and I am at a loss as to the best line to take."

"We must fervently pray the Lord to spare Astrakhan."

"It is seemly, prince, that we should always pray. Maybe we shall escape destruction."

"Whether my information is true or not, I have been told that the robbers have captured both Cherni Yar and Tsaritzyn."

"I have heard that report, too."

"Whom shall we send to find out?"

"It does not matter much, prince, whom you send, for he is sure to be caught. The Cossacks have made log ramparts, and their patrols are all over the place."

"A pity! I've also been told that wolves are abroad. They have never put in an appearance here before."

"I, too, have heard this."

"Flocks of crows are circling about—these birds are an evil omen. . . . Calamity is compassing us about, my lad!"

"It is true that there are multitudes of crows here."

"Tell Daniel Tarlykov to come and see me without fail tomorrow. He's a bold and alert commander. I must dispatch him to Moscow with a message to the tsar, starting that we are sitting here awaiting death; that most of the musketeers have gone over to the bandits; that the garrison is unreliable; that the townsfolk are no support; and that few noblemen are among us. By the same messenger I shall have to inform our great sovereign that prince Lvov has caroused with the robbers, entertained them at his house, and that Razin has spent the night there on more than one occasion."

"This very day prince Lvov has visited the tent of the robbers' captains."

"Has he, indeed? This goes to prove that not Vaska Uss and the captains are near the city, but that Razin himself has returned. He occupied Cherni Yar and Tsaritzyn on his way back from the Don. So obvious a fact needs no verification. In tomorrow's report to the tsar we shall have to add: 'Prince Lvov was dispatched by us up the Volga to scatter the brigands' camps and to fortify Cherni Yar. Instead of acting so, he turned back unscathed and declared that the musketeers have joined the robbers! Wherefore, sire, we are in grave doubts as to how we should act in the event of Razin attacking Astrakhan. How are we to know whether prince Lvov is going to fight alongside us or is going over to the Cossacks? While we are hourly imploring Almighty God, eagerly fortifying the city, following up and exterminating the traitors, prince Lvov is secretly visiting the Cossack encampment. What he talks about there is unknown to us. This much is known: he holds high festival with them. We, the voivode prince Ivan Semeonovich Prozorovski and his secretaries, await your sovereign and speedy instructions as to how we are to deal with prince Semeon Lvov in view of his confirmed malpractices. Great sovereign, in your merciful pity, pray send us your instructions as soon as possible.' At dawn tomorrow you must bring Tarlykov here and prepare the report. You know what to write. I myself and the secretaries will sign the document and affix the seal. One last thing! Did you collect that paper I mentioned from the German?"

"The one about the city wall? Yes, I have done so, prince."

The clerk drew a document from the pile lying on the table.

"Read it to me, and then we must go to bed."

"Description of the city walls and towers, made by the German captain Wieders in the service of the sovereign tsar and by captain Butler together with the commander of musketeers Daniel Tarlykov of the Astrakhan musketeers. Also inventory, faithfully made by the clerks Naum Kuritsyn and Afonka Karev, for the information of the Astrakhan voivode prince Ivan Semeonovich Prozorovski. The number and type of cannon and ammunition placed in the towers in case of attack by armed forces, more particularly the expected assault by the ataman Stepan Razin:

"Firstly: within the Voskressenski Gate at the base—in the event of close-range firing—is a short copper gun on a wheeled carriage of a calibre to take a three-pound ball; supply of balls amounting to one hundred and sixteen.

"Secondly: beyond the powder magazine is a grilled gate in the wall; at the base of the tower is a short-range copper gun on a wheeled carriage of a calibre to take a six-pound ball; supply of balls comes to one hundred and eighty.

"Thirdly: omitting two walls, supplied with cannon identical with the above, there is the angle wall facing the suburbs, where a short copper gun is fitted on a wheeled carriage, medium range, with two-pound balls and a stock of one hundred and fifty-two balls.

"Fourthly: in the tower of the red gates, leading from the stronghold to the Volga, are three copper guns on wheeled carriages capable of firing two-pound calibre balls, the stock of which runs up to one hundred and twenty-five balls.

"Fifthly: in the Mochegovski Tower, which gives on to the Volga, are

three copper guns on German-made carriages, built for sorties and campaigning. The first fires a three-pound calibre ball and is supplied with one hundred and twenty balls. The other two guns fire half-pound calibre balls, and each has a supply of one hundred lead balls; the remaining towers have similar pieces and munitions.

"In addition to the guns aforementioned are one hundred and twenty heavy pieces of artillery for long-range firing in strong emplacements in all the sixteen towers of the outer wall of Astrakhan city and on the seventeenth interior tower at the angle of the powder magazine and the stronghold; weight of the ball is twenty pounds."

"The small-calibre guns will be useful. The heavy long-range artillery will be no good at all. The late voivode showed a great lack of foresight. All they are good for is firing on Tatars in the steppes. Fancy emplacements! Such cannon cannot be adjusted to different angles: it always fires at a fixed point. Ah, Piotr, we have blundered, you and I. I forgot, and you failed to remind me, to make a list of artillery on the walls! Well, now go and find a sleeping-place. I, too, will say my prayers and go to bed. Tomorrow we must make a round of the towers, add more items, and question the gunners; they are better informed as to their guns than we."

"Good night to you, prince."

The clerk carried away the papers.

When the clerk had gone the voivode approached the ikons with their glittering gold frames, precious stones and dark images. He knelt down and made the sign of the cross with podgy hand; his beard moved as he prayed:

"O Lord, vouchsafe that the storm blow over. May the carnage not be great. Protect and preserve our sovereign. Have mercy on boyars, princes and the entire nobility; save them, O Lord, from attack by the senseless rabble."

## 17

The ataman's tent was aglow; the candles on the coffers shook each time the intoxicated, broad-shouldered and ponderous guests trod across the carpets, which covered the floor space of the entire tent. Prince Semeon Lvov sat beside the ataman, with Chikmaz to his right; slightly farther down were Mishka Chernousenko, the stocky Yaranets and Fedka Sheludiak, young, alert, bright of eye, chin and temples covered with dry mange. The old story-teller, in a new kaftan, which he had received as a gift, was helping Razin's treasure, Fedka from Samara, to pour out the wine. Fedka handed the cups round to the guests.

"We'll soon be paying your betrothed a visit, Fedka, very soon!" said the ataman to the youth from Samara.

"I greatly fear she'll have been beaten to death ere that day dawns, father."

"Not she! But even so, once we've seized Astrakhan, and some wench takes your fancy there, though she might be a boyarina, we'll have you wed her."

"But I love Nastia, father."

Stroking his curly, reddish beard, as was his custom, the voivode touched cups with the ataman before drinking.

"Stepan Timofeievich, do not attack the city. Wait until the tsar sends an

amnesty for you and your men. Your envoys have not yet returned from Moscow. The tsar is sure to pardon all your misdeeds, in which case there will be no further need of bloodshed and slaughter. You may as well know that, once you do start, it will turn out to be a very tough business. The Moscow voivodes have at their disposition highly trained foreign troops, and the cannon are no longer the same, but far better. What can your weapons avail against such as these!? Bows and arrows, axes and knives will get you nowhere."

"We have what we can get, prince Semeon. Our strength lies in our brotherly friendship. We shall win if we all hang together; if we scatter . . ."

"Slapdash methods are never the equal of good training. I tell you, Stepan, wait till your falcons return."

"I have waited long enough. Hear, prince, how the boyars have received my envoys. Come here, Lazar."

A tall, dark figure stepped out from a distant corner.

"Now, captain, tell the company what befell you."

The captain shook his head, bent forward and spoke:

"We rode into Moscow. I know their customs. When an emissary comes from the Cossacks he is met and escorted to a guest-house, where he is provided with food and drink until the tsar summons him to an audience."

"Well, what happened in your case?"

"We were met by certain secretaries and boyars, whose names are unknown to me. No sooner had we off-saddled than we were arrested by musketeers and led to the *Zemski Prikaz*. It is common knowledge that emissaries are never taken before this court, but only criminals. I guessed what they were about, and managed to escape my guards. All that day I slunk from barrier to barrier, mixing with the tavern frequenters. I learnt that all our men, except Lazunka, who made his escape with me, had been shackled and flung into jail. Thereupon I hastened back hither. By the cross I swear I am speaking the truth." Saying which the captain withdrew.

"Let's drink, prince Semeon. There is nothing else to learn of the manner in which the tsar honoured my envoys."

"What people! The boyars are giving vent to their spleen out of sheer fright. It is they who are fanning the flames of discontent throughout Russia," said the prince, shaking his head. "Well, Stepan Timofeievich, just one more to speed me on my way, and then I must be off."

"Come, cupbearer, and fill the bowls!"

"I know, ataman, that you will be wishing to discuss the approaches to Astrakhan, and I should be annoyed with myself were my presence to impede the course of your——"

"Now, prince Semeon, shall we drink another cup! I have no objection to your being amongst us. You are no informer."

The prince, having drunk, rose and bowed.

As though recalling something, Razin asked:

"Prince Semeon, will you fight with the city against us?"

The voivode, his kaftan showing dimly red in the open tent-flap, replied:

"When you march against the city, you will see for yourself that it won't be necessary to count your enemies. As for myself—I shall think matters over."

"Right! Go and think. And you'd better inform Prozorovski that it is useless for him to fortify the city. It belongs to the Cossacks, and we shall divide it among our units."

From the gloom outside the tent Lvov spoke again:

"It is so easy to talk to you, ataman; my heart warms in your presence. But I am tongue-tied when I have to deal with Prozorovski."

"Falcons, when we take the city, prince Semeon Lvov's possessions are to be left intact, and his life is to be spared."

"We know, father! Not a hair of prince Semeon's head will be touched."

Razin and his captains rose to their feet. Each was presented with a ladleful of vodka; the ataman raised his above his head, saying:

"The boyars kiss the cross when taking an oath; we shall pledge ourselves by touching the ladle."

"Here's to the ataman!"

"I have summoned you, brothers, for a talk before the battle, and one thing only do I urge upon you, gallant captains. You are free falcons, but those who serve me now must give up their freedom for the time being, must bow to my will. So far I have never poached upon the preserves of your liberty, my captains. I acted thus in the thrice-accursed Persian affair, and because I allowed you to have your own way I lost my champion warriors. So I want you to swear that henceforth my will shall be yours."

"We swear, Stepan Timofeievich!"

"We swear, father."

"We swear to die at your bidding if so be our fate."

"That is well! Hi, grandfather, have a drink and then play to us."

"Yes, father, but where is my little ladle? I am old and clumsy."

"You're a fine cupbearer! Ladling out wine to all and sundry, and yet you have lost your own ladle. Drink out of your boot so long as we all drink together."

"God forbid that I should ever drink out of my boot! Ah, here it is after all, the little pest!"

As soon as the toast was drunk, everyone sat down again. The old minstrel struck up his domra in a corner behind the coffers. The sound filtered through the din of the assembly, but no one was inclined to listen.

"Chikmaz!"

"Present, father."

"Let's all drink, Yaranets, Fedka Sheludiak, Lazunka, and you, Chernousenko, do not lag behind. Where is Krasulin?"

"Mounting guard at the barracks."

"Chikmaz, tomorrow you must stir up the musketeers in good earnest. We've had enough of shilly-shallying. My envoys are prisoners of the tsar."

"We'll make a sensible start by demanding our pay from the voivode."

"An excellent idea! And I shall start my operations by having the barges moved into the Balda river. The danger is that our enemies get wind of our plans and begin to fire off their long-range guns at us. So it is better to get in nearer."

"Karetnikov will show us a spot close to the town, father."

Vologzhenin crooned and twanged his domra;

"Today prince Mitrei's not at home,
To glorious cities he has gone
To fetch us goods from overseas. . . .
Falileievna, let's go, my dear,
And sit us down to have good cheer. . . ."

The flap of the tent was thrown aside, and the thick-set figure of a Cossack with a deep scar across the forehead stepped boldly in from the darkness without. Razin looked upon him with angry, bloodshot eyes:

"Who invited you to the ataman's tent, vulture?."

"I have nowhere else to go, father, except to you. I've come from the Don across the mountains and through the Kumik territory."

"Yes, I know you can scale mountains as easily as a goat. Why did you leave for Persia without a permit?"

The Cossack vouchsafed no reply, but his glance fell upon the powerful shoulders of one of the musketeers, and his eyes gleamed with pleasure. He took a pace forward and placed a hand on the man's shoulder.

"Chikmaz, my friend, how are you?"

But at the sullen gaze his erstwhile friend threw on him he recoiled.

Stroking his grizzled beard, Chikmaz answered reluctantly:

"I am much as I've always been."

The ataman rose heavily to his feet; the chain of his sword jingled.

"It is I who am addressing you, cur. Yet you dare pester another with your advances? Why did you quit my service without leave?"

"Father, I surrender my freedom to no one. I went away because I felt the need to do so. Now I have come back to serve you again. You can send me into fire or water, I shall not turn a hair."

"We are all free men; but he who serves me does not talk of freedom."

The Cossack took another step backward, a heavy frown crinkling his scarred brow. Putting his head in its russet-coloured cap forward, he repeated:

"I serve when the fancy takes me. If I do not like the service, off I go. I do not sell my freedom."

Razin ground his teeth.

"Satan!"

He struck the sullen face a mighty blow; the man reeled and knocked his head against the tent-pole; thence he sprang away, but tripped and fell; quickly picking up his cap, he pressed it to his mouth, from which blood was dripping. The ataman seated himself.

"If ever I set eyes on you again I shall kill you."

Spitting blood, the Cossack backed away and disappeared without a sound.

The old minstrel was still strumming on his instrument and crooning. Razin tossed his head and called:

"Fedka, bring more wine! Tomorrow, falcons, we must set our shoulders to the wheel."

"That we shall, father!"

"As soon as you bring the barges alongside the walls and have fixed up the battering-rams, the tocsin must be sounded as the signal for our men to scale the walls. Our men inside will receive them and dispose of the officers."

"That's the plan, Chikmaz. Now then, another drink. Grandad, give us a dance tune to enliven our hearts."

The minstrel began to tune his domra.

18

In the twilight of a spacious tent a big man in a crimson shirt without a belt lay sprawling upon the carpet. On a stool, covered with a damask cloth, spluttered a tallow candle. A Cossack, spitting blood, stooped as he entered. Without raising his head, Vaska Uss said:

"Tell the ataman again to feast without me. I shall take part in the attack on Astrakhan like all my brothers, and shall not be a laggard."

"Lavreiev, it is I, Shpyn."

Uss turned a pale countenance towards his guest and waved a hand.

"They persist in inviting me to their feast, Fedor; but I'm not in the mood. Come nearer! Who painted your face so nicely? A stalwart lad, yet you came to grief."

"You did not attend the ataman's feast, but I went. This was his welcome."

"So it was he who washed your face! Why didn't he give you time to wipe it dry?"

"I shouldn't mind had it been a sword-cut. But to strike a free man in the face with his fist is asking for trouble."

"Is your hearing keen?"

"I've never had my ears boxed, and today's blow took me unawares, but I've dealt many a one myself."

"Blow out the candle! I've no mind to bestir myself. Without the light they will think me asleep. If anyone approaches, lie low. We'll hear one another just as well in the dark."

Shpyn blew out the candle, and the voice of Vaska Uss reached him in the darkness:

"Sit nearer to me, and listen."

"I am here."

"Will you follow me, Fedor, as of old?"

"Wherever you will, Lavreich."

"That's mighty fine, my lad. Our destiny seems to indicate that you and I must work together. It has come to me that I should oppose Razin. Listen, there are so many eavesdroppers about. . . ."

"Speak on! I can hear the slightest rustle."

"The reason my heart turned against him is that . . . I'll tell you all about it later. Well, at the start we'll have to approach him furtively so as to grip him by the head. Ah me, no luck in love! Let Moscow do the honours. . . ."

"Go on, Lavreich."

"Razin will capture Astrakhan without fail. But I've learned that the voivode of Astrakhan has sent a messenger to Moscow with a report to the effect that Astrakhan is about to fall. This is what you must do: I shall provide you some rusks for the journey, and money, too; take some lead and gunpowder with you and make all speed to Moscow. Do not travel by way of the steppe, or the Tatars will slay you; nor by the river bank, for Razin's patrols are everywhere. So you'd better ride to Tarki. This is the route taken by the voivode's messenger. You will overtake him and join him. He'll be pleased to have you, for strangers cannot venture among the mountains without a guide. Make away with the man during the journey. Tear up the voivode's letter. Thus you will be the first to report to the tsar. On your arrival in Moscow make straight for

the Criminal Office and ask to see boyar Pushkin. He is one of the tsar's intimates. Say not a word to the other boyars, but tell Pushkin: 'Razin has taken Astrakhan, Cherni Yar and Tsaritzyn.' Samara will fall easily. Promise Pushkin—and, if you are admitted to audience, the tsar himself—that I shall entrust you to deliver them Razin's head in Moscow on condition that the tsar grant you and me an amnesty for all our past crimes. I know that in their relief at such news they will pay us handsomely."

"Why tarry, Lavreich? For the insults showered upon me, for the blow I received this night, and for the way he treated me at Yaik I am willing to slay the ataman immediately."

"Speak lower and listen. Do you hear anyone about?"

"No! I am listening."

"At one time in my life I left the Don to serve the tsar and was sent to fight against the Crimean Tatars. One day when I was drunk I persuaded the boldest of our lads to burn and sack two villages on our way. We raped the women and maids, drove away the cattle, sold them later to the Tatars and afterwards racked our brains to discover a means whereby we could cover up our traces. I overtook our unit, which was to winter in Moscow and was on its way there; I joined it; I received a handsome piece of cloth for a warm coat from the tsar's own hands. Listen well: I know all the tricks. Once he's taken Astrakhan, Razin will quit and leave me as his deputy ataman. But we have to be wary, for the boyars are a wily lot. Suppose our offer of service does not take their fancy? There may be voivodes who have it in mind themselves to capture Razin. In such case we, too, will be considered bandits. Then, while they are mustering their forces, I shall send out a call to the Cossacks on the Khoper and the Medveditsa and also to the Zaporozhian Cossacks in the Ukraine. A force will thus be gathered together, and you and I will be able to hold our own in Astrakhan. The city is strong with its cannon and walls; there is plenty of bread and other stores; and I shall become prince of Astrakhan. Should our scheme fail we shall have to bargain with the boyars for honours. If the worse comes to the worst, then we shall have to retire into the mountains' fastnesses and live among the Kumiks."

"All this is possible, Lavreich. But my heart is on fire to kill the ataman."

"We must stay our hands. If we slay him now the voivode will remain in Astrakhan. He will inform the boyars and the tsar that one robber has slain another, and it would be a good thing to clap these others into prison, too, or something worse! The boyars are notable turncoats; they say one thing and do another."

"Yes, that's the truth."

"One thing more: Razin can absolutely count on the protection of his men. I know he is suspicious of me and knows the reason why I bear him a grudge. If we kill him we shall be burned alive by our own brothers, for they simply worship him and know that only you or I would kill him."

"Yes, that's also true."

"Well, if you feel all right now, do as I tell you, Fedor. Where is your mount?"

"He is asleep in an abandoned Tatar hut some distance away."

"Not too spent?"

"He is a Caucasian steed, worth his weight in gold. Fleet of foot, eats sparingly, and is as sleek as if moulded of glass. . . ."

"Remain in hiding for a day or two among the seines. Then later . . ." Here Vaska Uss fumbled beneath the carpet. Having contacted Shpyn's fingers, he slipped a small wallet into his companion's hand. "Here's some cash for your outfit."

"My fighting outfit is in order. Have you any rusks? If so, let me have some of them."

"Call again another night, and I'll have them ready."

"Shake hands, Lavreich, and fare you well."

"Here's my hand. You know me, don't you?"

"As well as you know me. Tell me what to do, and I'll do it; murder, arson, anything, and never once look back."

"Trust me, Fedor! I may seem a turncoat on occasion, but you and I shall travel the road together without deceit or falsehood."

"I believe you, Lavreich."

The black shadow of a man glided smoothly from the grey twilight of the tent into the darkness without; the figure paused, listening tensely for a possible sound. All was quiet. Only the river murmured softly near by, while from the ataman's tent came the sound of voices raised in song.

"One road alone lies before me, ataman. I fear no man, but you will have reason to know more about Fedka Shpyn," murmured the shadow as it stalked away.

## 19

Screwing up his eyes in the strong sunlight, Chikmaz stood in the crooked porch of the musketeers' barracks with its timber balustrade. He wore a red kaftan with two pistols stuck in the dark blue sash; his cap was thrust into the breast of his coat, and in his hand he held a short axe. From the widely opened doors of the barracks came a stench of sweat, wooden privies and tobacco smoke. Musketeers stamped across the wide porch; on reaching the yard, they did not fall into rank as usual, but stood about in groups casting inquisitive looks at Chikmaz' determined figure. The men seemed to be waiting for something. From within the gloomy vestibule came the creak of the stairs beneath a descending body. A tall, heavily built commander in the white uniform of the Poltev units reached the vestibule from the secretary's office situated above the staircase. The commander waddled into the porch and with an arrogant, sidelong glance at Chikmaz said:

"Why are you in the porch, executioner? What are you loafing about here for? You know very well that the voivode has ordered you and Fedka Sheludiak to be in the city."

Chikmaz did not reply; he merely stared at his chief's back.

The commander shouted to the musketeers:

"You sons of bitches, what are you slouching about for? Been listening too attentively to robbers' talk, eh? Beware!"

Three steps led from the porch into the yard. Two musketeers stood smoking at the bottom one.

"Stand aside, curs! Make way!"

"There is no barrier, so step along."

"Go on sentry duty at once, you!" And with an oath the officer placed

his foot on the top step. An axe glinted in the sunshine. The head of the open-mouthed commander was severed as if it had never belonged to the shoulders; it spun round, spurting blood on the two musketeers nearest the steps; then it dropped on to the white sand. Spitting upon the commanders' head, a musketeer remarked as he stowed away his pipe:

"Chikmaz made a clean stroke of it. That head slipped off as though it were a pancake."

The man moved away from the porch; the body as it slithered down the steps stained his boots with blood.

Chikmaz turned about and faced the vestibule.

"Musketeers, I've started the ball rolling; now it's your turn to finish off the pot-bellies."

From the depths of the barracks dozens of voices responded:

"That we will!"

"Chikmaz, we hear you."

"Brothers, we are at one with you."

"Now then, brothers, hands off those who are with us."

"Right!"

Turning to the musketeers, Chikmaz drove his axe into the wooden balustrade and, while kindling his pipe, brushed the blood from his hand and issued the order:

"Now, brothers, knock down the dividing fences. Make the yards into one vast space and set fire to the joists."

Boots kicked up the white sand; scores of hands, armed with axes, attacked the fence which separated the neighbouring yards. The beams and struts were dragged into the middle of the yard, chopped up and kindled. Puffing at his pipe, Chikmaz said in a loud voice:

"Those who thwart us will be roasted on these fires."

On the other side of the broken fence was a second yard. This, too, was jammed with musketeers. Two men stood, like Chikmaz, in the porch of the barracks: Karetnikov, broad-shouldered and clumsy, with a thick head, and beside him a slender man in a dark blue greatcoat. This was Lebedev, who continued to shout in a shrill voice:

"Brothers, break open the tavern sealed by order of the voivode."

Karetnikov, coughing into his hand, boomed in a deep bass:

"First of all let us get at the vodka."

"To the stronghold! Make the voivode hand over our arrears of pay."

"Pay for two years of arrears."

"We'll force him to."

"But first let's to the taverns."

"Let's get vodka and drink."

"Hadn't we better first rid ourselves of the non-commissioned officers?"

"Brother, we are with you to a man, for are we not all rank-and-filers?"

"Yes, but if we let you go free you'll run straight to the voivode."

"We'll side with you."

"Down with the fence! Burn it."

In every yard—all of them now forming but one huge courtyard since the separating fences had been demolished—bonfires were blazing.

"Burn down the police offices, including the bugs and the clerks."

"Do no harm to the buildings! Where's Krasulin?"

"He's gone off with Olioshka, the convict peasant, to destroy the distant police offices."

"The secretaries have fled. We shall need the police offices to hold the trials in."

"Right, Chikmaz. We understand."

"Stop a while; listen!"

With a clatter of horses' hoofs the cavalry was advancing in a cloud of dust. The gleaming white mail of the voivode loomed ever clearer and larger. Prozorovski, at the head of fifty or more Cherkess guards, halted in front of the barracks. The horses snorted in the dusty square; arms clattered. With an Egyptian helmet on his head, the voivode sat his fallow bay in gilded harness, trimmed with tassels, a Cherkess cloth, covering its back and saddle ornamented with pearls.

"Are you itching for a fight? I'm aiming my arquebus."

"Stop! He wants to speak."

The voivode spoke loudly in his nasal voice:

"Men in the service of our sovereign, why are you committing this evil against the great tsar? What is it you ask for?"

"Our pay!"

"Why haven't you paid us for so long?"

"We're without proper clothing, and our families are starving."

"See, our felt shoes are in rags, while you wear moroccan boots and pearls."

"I shall see that you get your pay this very day. Cease this rioting and return to barracks."

"Open the taverns!"

"We want vodka!"

"There is much unrest in the taverns, men. The robbers are reading leaflets in abuse of the tsar and are inciting the people to revolt."

"Release the prisoners and the priest from Troitsa monastery!"

"Why have you arrested prince Lvov's house servant?"

"The servant is in custody on prince Lvov's own domains; the priest is at the monastery."

"We've heard that the priest was thrown into jail."

"He was gagged and bridled."

"He's a good priest; hand him over to us."

"That priest is a criminal, service men."

"Release the Tatar murzas and hostages."

"I shall have the musketeers and ordinary prisoners unchained, but I have no power over the hostages. They are detained under the great sovereign's pleasure."

"Release the murzas! Their camps have gone, so why do you detain them?"

"It's not for you to harangue us; you're not our chief."

"I am speaking to you because you have in a most dastardly manner slain your commanders. My rank is higher than that of a commander."

"We have not slain them all."

"I shall release the musketeers and see that you get your pay. Keep calm!"

"Hand over the priest from Troitsa!"

"Set the Tatar murzas free!"

"I shall give you vodka. Refrain from committing arson, neither allow yourselves to be drawn into revolt."

"Get us the vodka! Whew! Now we'll have a drink, brothers."

The voivode and his Cherkess retinue turned their horses about and rode away. When they were leaving the stronghold the voivode ordered that the city gates be barred, and he dispatched criers to the public squares. The townsfolk hastened to hear the proclamation. After a tattoo on the kettledrums a crier shouted:

"Astrakhanians! All those who are subject to the great sovereign Alexei Mihailovich of All Russia must repair to the voivode's court in the stronghold."

A second crier followed:

"Astrakhanians! Forsake your homes and businesses and betake yourselves without delay to the stronghold. You are summoned by His Grace the Right Reverend Jozef, metropolitan of Astrakhan and Terek, and by the voivode prince Ivan Semeonovich Prozorovski, for the purpose of taking the oath of allegiance."

Crowds of citizens from the square passed through the Voskressenski Gate to the stronghold. There, crowds upon crowds veered in a compact mass towards the chapel of the Troitsa monastery—a spacious, hexagonal timber structure near the gate; the chapel could not hold the multitude of people; those who succeeded in getting in kissed the ikons and lit candles, bought on the premises. The stern countenances of the saints gazed down dispassionately at the agitated worshippers. Many of them made public confession of their sins and then took their departure. In the doorway they were blessed by a big monk, whose solemn face resembled an ancient ikon. He made the Nikonian sign of the cross over their heads. The voivode's courtyard was dense with expectant crowds. There was a buzz of voices. Mingling with the townsfolk were the sons of boyars and other citizens of the nobility, German captains and those among the musketeers who had remained loyal to the oath. The voivode's house, which had always offered good hospitality to foreigners, was equipped with a balustraded veranda and outside steps, supported on carved pillars; the steps were faced with deal planks and covered by a tinplate roof.

"Are they coming downstairs?"

"They are saying something."

The metropolitan, in a dalmatic of cloth-of-gold, and holding a cross, descended to the lower porch. He was assisted by two priests, one of whom bore the weight of the gold cross. The metropolitan was followed by the voivode in silver-plate armour, helmet and sword. With the exception of the foreigners, all the people prostrated themselves as the procession came out on to the great porch.

"His Grace's golden dalmatic is a gift from the patriarchs."

"Which?"

"Of Antioch and——"

"Listen! What is he saying?"

Leaning upon his crozier, his head trembling beneath the jewelled mitre, the metropolitan handed the heavy cross to the priest and spoke in deliberate tones:

"O Orthodox people! Our city is threatened with great calamity and upheaval. The musketeers have murdered their commander Ivan Koshkin and other loyal servants of our great sovereign; they are in rebellious mood. I, Christ's sinful servant, therefore implore you, my faithful sons, citizens, musketeers and captains, to stand firm in the defence of the house of our most holy Mother of God. Fear not to perform any deed of valour entailing hardship

or suffering to yourselves. Whosoever will prematurely give his life in defence of sacred things, or especially in defence of the tsar's supreme authority, will reap a divine reward in the kingdom of heaven."

"Father, we shall all defend the city!"

When the metropolitan had ceased speaking the voivode delivered a stirring address to the gathered men:

"Citizens, captains, musketeers! For a long time you have been aware that a seditious rabble of Cossacks and refugee serfs, followers of the renegade Stenka Razin, have been swarming in the vicinity of our city. This brigand ataman has scorned the merciful amnesty offered by our great sovereign. Moreover, he durst send me emissaries demanding the surrender of the town. If any further proof of his seditious activities were required, it was furnished this very day, for the musketeers have beaten their officers to death, have arbitrarily broken open the tsar's taverns, are drinking themselves silly and are rioting. They have had word that the Cossack brigands and robbers are soon to appear beneath the walls of Astrakhan with battering-rams and scaling-ladders. Being of one mind with His Grace the metropolitan Jozef, I too implore you to make preparations for the defence of the city. Haul on to the walls cauldrons, peat and whatsoever things necessary to make fire. Haul water and stones on to the walls. Stand firm in the defence of the most Holy Virgin's house! For my part, I pledge myself to do all that is in my power to save Astrakhan. I will settle the arrears of pay so that the musketeers' restlessness may be assuaged. I have promised solemnly to fulfil their request to release the prisoners, except two, namely the brigand priest of the Troitsa chapel and prince Lvov's runaway menial, who was hanged by my orders."

"We shall stand firm."

"We shall fight the robbers."

"Do your best. If the voivode has his way he will start his government gently, but later he will squeeze the life out of you all."

"Silence!"

"I am not with the rebels! Surely a man may speak his mind nowadays?"

"Orthodox people, kiss the cross and take the oath that you will defend the city. . . ."

The townsfolk began to disperse; patrols marched along the streets to occupy posts at the main gates leading into Astrakhan. The monks in the Troitsa chapel were making preparations for vespers. The spacious monastery courtyard was surrounded by a tall fence overgrown with vines. The gates were never closed. Some of the townsfolk, especially women, were clustering round the chapel, waiting for the service to begin. The dark city hummed like a beehive. In the vicinity of the Voskressenski Gate, near the Preobrazhenski monastery, the musketeers had rolled barrels of vodka from the tavern and were drinking in the street. To light up the darkness they had set fire to the wooden premises which had once been the tavern. On their way home from the stronghold people tried to put out the flames, but were chased away by the musketeers, who declared:

"It is more cheerful with a fire."

"There's only the stone wall of the cloister near by."

"We shall not burn the town. Come and have a drink with us."

Many joined the musketeers in their revels. The enclosure was lit up further by flaming torches. Like black candles, the torches were stuck in between the

cross sections. The publican, fearing rough treatment, had fled. Inside the tavern musketeers stood counting out the drink-money and putting it into their own pockets. Clowns with trained bears and men in goatskins capered about in the flickering light. Seated at the long table were men wearing red velvet caps with tassels: "Razin's little sons" as they were called. Yellow leaflets lay scattered on the table; no one read them, except the voivode's disguised informers. These cautiously collected the scraps of paper and compared them among themselves.

"That's Mitka's writing."

"Damn the rascal!"

"Hear what Redcap, the blasphemer, has to say."

The velvet-capped men called the voivode obscene names and exalted the wealth, lavishness and glorious exploits of the formidable ataman:

"Our father sails across the seas on a magic carpet and flies on it in the skies."

"This very day he will fly in flames into Astrakhan."

## 20

Prince Mihail Semeonovich, the voivode's brother, patrolled the city with his cavalry and compelled the citizens to work on its walls. He rode hither and thither with a lighted torch in one hand and a naked sword in the other, while the Cherkessi, with candles fixed to their saddles, advanced at foot's pace so that the candles would not be blown out. The surrounding atmosphere was black and warm. The prince surged forward on his black steed, cutting the darkness with the murky reflection of his torch and making his breastplate and silver helmet glimmer.

The townsfolk under the voivode's directions carted and carried water, cauldrons and stones to the walls. The lower part of the black, cowl-shaped city showed up grey or white in the shifting light of the flames. Bonfires were kindled on the walls, illuminating the russet towers and battlements. In addition to prince Mihail, the city was also patrolled by mounted musketeers under the command of a veteran company commander, the beardless Frol Dura. Tipsy musketeers converged upon the stronghold from the taverns. The voivode had as yet not issued orders for the closing of the gates, since he was waiting for reports from his scouts and others. The musketeers, assembled in the voivode's courtyard, were shouting:

"Stop fortifying the city, voivode!"

"Give us our pay!"

Prozorovski was holding council in his chamber. He still wore his coat of mail, but had deposited his helmet on the dark blue cloth adorned with arabesques. Facing him at the table was the venerable metropolitan. The dalmatic and mitre, sparkling in the candlelight with all the colours of the rainbow, lay upon a bench in the corner. With his left hand he stroked his cassock and the cross on his chest; from force of habit he held the fingers of his right hand in such a way that one might suppose he was about to give his blessing; he absent-mindedly moved his hand over the damask cloth, and in addressing the voivode he frowned and shook his bald head.

"O my son! The city should have been fortified long ago. Time presses now. The people show much unrest. Do you realize that they are breaking into your own house?"

"Holy father, I am prepared for the worst."

"But my flock, son? Your flock is composed of soldiers, but mine contains many elements. We, like unworthy pastors, have been remiss in our duties. . . ."

"I do not consider myself guilty, father. I have no authority over the musketeers. I, together with the other voivodes, have received instructions from the boyars and our great sovereign to the effect that we are not to concern ourselves with the affairs of the musketeers."

"That is very wrong! To be at the head of military affairs and yet to wield no authority over the armed forces! How has this come about?"

"Such is the pleasure of our great sovereign. All these affairs have to be dealt with by the commanders and their officers. Hi, bring us refreshment!" ordered the voivode as he rose and approached the door. "Also bring in more lights."

Almost noiselessly, in answer to the voivode's summons, his wife entered the room, bowing and bringing with her on a tray mead, honey bread, grapes and white bread. Behind her, and as noiselessly as herself, came two young maids in nankeen gowns and with coloured tape bandeaux round their heads. They placed two three-pronged chandeliers on the table and lighted the tapers.

"I was awaiting your call, my master Ivan Semeonovich."

The voivode's wife wore a loose green satin coat and a coif of red velvet, trimmed with gold. She touched the metropolitan's parchment-like hand with her cheek and whispered almost inaudibly:

"Your Grace, my lord, pray give me, a sinner, your blessing."

Without a glance at her, for he considered it a sin to look at a woman, the metropolitan made the sign of the cross in the air over her breast and did in like manner over the two retiring maids. The voivode's wife bowed to her lord and remarked:

"My husband and friend, prince Ivan Semeonovich, do you hear the turmoil? The musketeers are deep in their cups and are brandishing torches and pressing towards the house. They are dragging your name in the mud, forcing the doors and demanding their pay."

"Well, boyarina, there is no money to give them, yet I promised they should be paid."

The metropolitan's hand fluttered above the table.

"My son and friend, prince Ivan, go out to the rioters, order them to betake themselves to the courtyard of the Troitsa chapel. I am going to the cloister and shall advance the sum out of my treasury."

"My spiritual father, as it is I am heavily indebted to you."

"Earthly goods are perishable, my son. If we survive we can settle accounts, and if we appear before the seat of God we shall find favour in His eyes for this."

The boyarina retired, but did not close the door after her. A youth ran in and prostrated himself before the voivode and then before the metropolitan. The old man blessed the stripling. Addressing the voivode, the youngster begged:

"Father, permit me to arm myself and go on the walls. I want to be a warrior."

The voivode rose, stroked his son's corn-coloured hair, carefully smoothed

out his crumpled dark blue, short-sleeved coat and, looking severely into the boy's greenish eyes, answered:

"Wait, Boris. This is no time to leave the house. Cannot you hear the rebels trying to break in?"

The boy left the room. The voivode went out to the veranda. Heads and torches could be seen oscillating outside the windows; the panels of the doors creaked and groaned; bolts and locks jangled.

"Beware of fire, voivode!"

"Hand us out our money in a friendly spirit."

Prozorovski, leaning over the balcony, shouted into the motley dusk:

"Lads! Betake yourselves to the Troitsa chapel. Money will be forthcoming from the monastery—but do not interfere with the worshippers."

"Good!"

"Let him who wants to pray do so."

"And we'll add incense and make the saints' beards crackle!"

Having partaken of refreshment, the metropolitan rose and summoned his attendant by tapping his staff on the floor. The voivode returned from the veranda, shaking his head and fist.

"In other days all these foul-mouthed tub-thumpers and blasphemers would have been subjected to torture. Now one has to swallow the pill with as good a grace as one can assume."

"Great calamities are falling upon us, my son."

A lay brother, the metropolitan's servant, entered the apartment, bowed low to the voivode and, after taking up the dalmatic and mitre, approached his master and led him outside. The voivode, holding a chandelier, accompanied his guest to the door, talking as he went:

"I am hoping that after they have received their pay—and this is some comfort to me—they will calm down. The trouble is that robbers have been released from jail, and that they may urge the people to riot. One of them, a messenger from Razin, has been strung up on the wall."

"My son, the musketeers are not alone in their rebellion. God save us! A short while ago, when the townsfolk were taking the oath on the cross, there were many ferocious countenances among them. Our ruin will come from those very citizens and from many others."

"Yes, father. Obviously prince Lvov is a traitor. He does not make common cause with us, and in nothing does he give evidence that he is a faithful champion of our sovereign the tsar. His house stands in the valley, and there is a secret passage from his gate to the moat. I fear him, father."

"You wrong him, Ivan. Prince Lvov will never venture to join the bandits."

"Give me your blessing for the night, holy father."

"I am not holy, but a sinful man. In the name of the Lord I bless His servant Ivan Prozorovski. Be not troubled. You cannot cross the ways of the Lord against His will."

Thus bidding the metropolitan farewell, prince Prozorovski returned to his room, where he found the boyarina waiting for him.

"Fedorovna! Tell the steward Tishka to order the grooms to accoutre my horse for battle and to bring it to the monastery courtyard at once. I am about to settle the musketeers' pay and shall then repair to the city walls."

Weeping, the boyarina embraced her husband.

"My heart is sore on your account, my master Ivan Semeonovich."

"We must be firm of spirit and not falter, Fedorovna. We have led sinful lives. May it not be that the time has come to pay whatever reckoning God wills? Forgive me, and farewell!"

The prince summoned two retainers and the clerk Alexeiev and sallied forth to the monastery chapel. The musketeers in the square were dancing; others shouted fiercely while brandishing torches and gleaming axes.

"Cease this chanting of prayers, friars!"

"Start a requiem for the voivode!"

"Give us our pay—unless the voivode has already embezzled the cash."

Through the open gates, black figures could be seen carrying coffers and bags across the monastery courtyard.

"Hi, brothers!"

"Here's the cash coming along!"

"Heigh-ho, the censer-swingers!"

"They've no pants under their habits, and yet I hear the jingle of money!"

A table and bench were fixed up in the courtyard for the voivode. The monks lighted lanterns. Prince Prozorovski seated himself with Alexeiev beside him. He took handfuls of coins from the coffers, laid them on the table and counted. Alexeiev wrote the names, patronymics, family names and ranks of the recipients on a long, narrow scroll of paper, gummed together. On receiving their pay the musketeers left the courtyard and went to the square to join in the dancing.

"It's a trifle dull to shout with a parched throat!"

"Brothers! Let's go to the tavern, those of us who have money. There are buffoons and music there."

## 21

On his tour of the town prince Mihail passed the white stone shops and warehouses where the Armenians, Persians and Bokharians stored their wares. Finally he arrived at the big tavern.

A disorderly mob of armed musketeers, all the worse for drink, presented itself to the prince's eyes. In the vestibule a tipsy man with a bass voice was singing; he was seconded by higher voices; from time to time a drum was struck to emphasize certain parts of the song:

"The wolves come here in the gallants' train,
Step forth with knives and they'll all be slain.
Boyars and clerks we shall give them as food,
Burn the houses and courts of all the brood!
To the memory of the boyars. . . ."

Again the drum was beaten, and the song continued:

"Of booty for wolves there'll be here and there!
They scent the bold ones, noses in air.
Burn! Sack!"

The drums beat again.

The prince was angered by the song and the sight of the drunken musketeers. He commanded:

"Close ranks without entering the yard; allow no drinkers to leave the premises! I'll teach them to sing bandit songs . . . I shall muster mounted musketeers and give short shrift to the rioters!"

As the prince rode away his armour and sword gleamed. The Cherkessi, with a ten-cubit interval between each man, surrounded the yard. While the prince was on the lookout for stray musketeers near the burned-out tavern close by the Preobrazhenski church he met with a man in a dark blue coat and Zaporozhian cap. The fellow seemed to be glancing round him furtively, and he supported himself on a short spear. Catching sight of the prince in armour bearing a torch, he turned hastily aside; the prince spurred his mount to a gallop; his luxuriant beard tossed in the wind; his helmet glistened. Prince Mihail Semeonovich called:

"Halt, robber!"

The prince fancied that the man accelerated his pace.

"Halt, you devil!"

The man in Cossack garb stopped and, turning, showed a pale face covered with blotches.

"Why strain your throat, prince? I am an Astrakhanian, by name Fedka Sheludiak."

"You are a robber in robber's garb."

"I wear what I can lay my hands on."

"That's a lie! These clothes are a gift from Stenka Razin."

"I tell you they are not! Anyway, it's none of your business."

The prince raised his heavy sword above his head.

"Take that!"

"And you take this! Your death will be no loss!"

Sheludiak swung his spear; the prince's body slumped back in the saddle, his fingers losing their grip on the torch. With a quick look round, Sheludiak made off. The prince's feet got entangled in the stirrups, so he did not fall from his horse; his cry for help faded on his lips. The back of his head sagged on the horse's croup. The beast stood still. The company commander Frol Dura, with his band of musketeers, came upon the prince. The musketeers held their lanterns and torches high, but they could see nobody about. Prince Mihail Semeonov lay huddled on his mount. The head of a Tatar spear had pierced his throat and come out at the back of his neck, where it had stuck in the steel of his helmet.

"This is bad, friends. I wonder who did it?"

"I reckon it must have been a horseman, and an infidel at that. See, it's a Tatar spear."

"You'd better keep your ears open and make a thorough search."

The musketeers with their lights scattered in all directions. Without dismounting, Frol Dura lifted the body of the prince to his own mount and caught the bridle of the riderless horse with his boot. Then he rode slowly away towards the stronghold.

"Too bad—too bad . . ." he kept repeating.

He was overtaken by the musketeers.

"Not a sign of anyone."

"No rider to be seen, Frol."

"Such was his fate."

The musketeers dismounted inside the stronghold, bore the dead prince into the chapel and laid him on the floor below the ambo steps near the altar. The people gathered round were horror-struck. The monks lighted tapers at the head of the dead man and swung their censers over them. Prince Mihail lay with his big teeth bared, head tilted back, his luxuriant beard hiding the wound; but blood trickled over his shoulders and his coat of mail. In the square the musketeers were dancing and occasionally striking a decrepit tocsin drum. None save one of them so much as glanced round as the prince's body was carried into the chapel, and he remarked indifferently to a comrade.

"Looks as if another commander has paid his reckoning. I suppose he'll be given a requiem?"

"There's many a nobleman who will follow in his train, I have no doubt."

In the monastery courtyard musketeers swarmed round the table at which the voivode was seated; they were shouting, arguing and using threats. Prozorovski did not utter a word. He saw nothing but the outstretched hands and the clerk Alexeiev at his side.

"How much is owing to this one?"

Receiving the clerk's reply, he handed over the money and again and again repeated:

"Write that down, Piotr. Put in the name and the sum."

"I know, prince; you have nothing to worry about."

A monk, standing behind Alexeiev, bent to the clerk's ear and whispered:

"The traitors have murdered prince Mihail. His body lies in the Troitsa chapel near Saint Kyrill's shrine."

Alexeiev started back in alarm. When the voivode stooped to draw more money from the coffer he said:

"We'll see to the distribution, prince. The monks will lend a hand, and I'll endorse. You go and sigh unto God in the chapel. The cathedral, too, will soon be open . . ."

"I am afraid that without my presence they will rob you."

"Go with an easy mind, prince. They are tipsy, but still keep some sort of order and are able to count all right."

"Very well, then. Work hard, Piotr."

The voivode elbowed his way to the chapel, took off his helmet at the entrance and, making a large sign of the cross, prostrated himself. Rising from his knees, he heard the clock strike eight times, which meant that it was midnight.

"The dawn will soon be here."

The watchmen at their posts had barely time to strike the hour, when from beyond the walls on the Volga side drums beat a rapid tattoo. Simultaneously, three firebrands fell into the stronghold: one spun round on the sand, but the two others dropped on the outbuildings of the cloister and set them on fire. Came a clatter of hoofs, and a band of mounted musketeers galloped into the stronghold. The foremost of them cried out:

"Make way! Where is the voivode?"

"Back to your job, man! I know all there is to know," shouted the voivode in reply, hastening to where his horse was tethered at the other side of the courtyard.

Before leaving the stronghold the musketeer cried again:

"Razin is attacking Voznesenski Gate with battering-rams. Wieders has been killed by his own men. Take note of that, voivode."

As the musketeers left, the townsfolk, women and children, flocked in. Day was dawning. The bell in the cathedral tower struck up mournfully. In answer to the bell from the wall came the stentorian voice of Chikmaz:

"Brothers! Sound the tocsin from the tow-e-ers!"

"Father is coming!"

"Co-o-ming!"

## CHAPTER TWO

### LAZUNKA IN MOSCOW

#### 1

In the darkness outside, and from all parts of the city, one could hear the creaking of gates and of wickets being closed. The clock in the Frolovski Tower struck the hour; this was followed as usual by echoing notes of gongs, placed at the gates of Moscow houses. Then a deathlike stillness spread over the town. Now and again this stillness would be broken by the clatter of hoofs as a boyar and his retainers went by with lighted torches, which cast yellow reflections in the puddles of the muddy streets; or an executioner, cursing loudly, would trudge through the slush with a lantern and a permit; or malefactors would slink like shadows in the gloom and lurk in corners on the lookout for the glint of halberds, which betokened the passage of mounted musketeer patrols. Only from across the river Yausa, in the German settlement, came bursts of shouting and singing, for these mercenaries were making merry at a wedding party and bawling songs.

An old retainer opened the door leading to an apartment dimly lit by the oil-lamp in front of the ikons and introduced a man whose face was thickly overgrown with beard and whiskers and whose hair fell to his shoulders. The man stepped boldly forward in his yellow boots. No sword was visible, but nevertheless there was one concealed within the folds of the long Cossack coat, and pistols protruded from his sash. At every movement a scarlet coat showed under his dark blue uniform.

"Have a look, mother boyarina. You'll never guess who he is."

"Oh, what a fright you gave me! Why, you old fool, is it not a sin at this time of night to burst in on me, a woman, in her private apartment, with some strange man?"

"But is he a stranger? You call me squint-eyed, but on this occasion I fancy it's me who is seeing straight."

"Who is it you have brought? Let me see!"

The plump, shortsighted old lady, in her silk summer dress and plain coif, came close up to the guest. He advanced to meet her. The servant stood bareheaded at the door.

"Lord have mercy! By holy Saint Nicholas! Can this be my Lazunka?"

The little old lady fell upon the hairy man's neck. The faithful old retainer warned:

"Mother boyarina, you ought to take care."

"Whatever for, Mitrofanich?"

"Well, you see, people say that our visitor has long since been listed as a deserter from the tsar's service. You have heard that more than once."

"True enough! People often slander one another from sheer envy."

Lazunka, with his arms still enfolding his mother, asked:

"Are you keeping well, little mother?"

"I take things as they come, my son. You can go, Mitrofanich. Thank you!"

The servant left the room.

In the adjoining room, the door of which was open, voices could be heard. At the farthest end of it by the window, where on the sill burned three oil chandeliers, which cast their reflections on the mica, were two girls. One of them was fair, the other had long, dark tresses. They were busy rummaging in coffers with coloured tin clamps.

"Take off your coat, my son."

Lazunka flung his coat and cap on the bench beneath the window. He then appeared in his tightly fitting scarlet velvet coat with a floral design in gold and sleeves reaching only as far as the elbows; the Cossack cap had a border of sable and an ochre-coloured crown. The hilt of his sword scintillated with diamonds. The old lady fingered the cap and had a good look at the undercoat.

"My son, why, you're smart enough for the tsar's review! Just look at your clothes; the coat is of gold tissue; the sword, priceless." She held him by the shoulders and, raising her eyes to his face, said under her breath:

"The tsar is calling up the services from every town; all the nobles and important citizens are rallying to Moscow with horses and arms, mail-coats and cuirasses. You see, 'tis said that a robber, a dauntless assassin, has appeared on the Volga and is burning the towns, murdering voivodes, persecuting and destroying God's church. It is therefore dangerous for anyone to walk the streets of Moscow, for the tsar's spies are hard at work tracking people down and hauling them off to the Criminal Office. The common people, too, are good-for-nothings; they are restless on account of the levies, and summon meetings in the suburbs; there they hold unseemly discourse, saying: 'The time has come to abolish taxes and levies.' I'm sorry, but I cannot recall the name of that fierce assassin on the Volga . . ."

"Mother, when we are with strangers do not call me your son, call me Maximka, and pretend I am a distant kinsman. And should any be suspicious, say: 'A kinsman has arrived, a boyar's son without property, to take up service in the tsar's cause against Stenka Razin.'"

"Stenka? Stenka! Now I remember. Wait while I light a candle—it is dark with only God's little flame. Why are you so secretive?"

"The rumour Mitrofanich mentioned is correct."

"Oh, how can you have the heart to frighten an old woman like me? Is such bad news really to be believed? My cruel neighbours certainly did reproach me for being the mother of a traitor, and they made out that you had been sent to the Volga to escort a convoy of grain from Saratov, and there were others, too, who were acting as guards to the patriarch's monks, and the robbers slew them, and you went over to the bandits. . . ."

"I'll tell you all about that later, little mother. Now give me something to eat. Does that room, or rather closet, over the store-room still exist?"

"God preserve us, why should it not?"

"Have it arranged for me to sleep in. I cannot stay long in Moscow. I wanted to have a look at you and ask about my sweetheart Afimiushka. I must leave soon."

"Why must you hurry, my dear? There's nothing to be said about Afimiushka. She lent a ready ear to every slander and even used abusive language about you, calling you a robber. . . ."

"Well, I suppose it had to happen. She's found someone more suitable, I expect."

"Yes, my child. More suitable? Well, he is richer and better born than we are. . . . It all depends on whether you offer your services to the tsar and what your pay is going to be, for, truth to tell, we've become very poor. There's your sister—you probably don't remember her, for she was so young when you left. She is betrothed. I'll call her."

"Not yet awhile; I would prefer to stay with you."

"As you will. She is sorting out her dowry with her maid. They have most likely not finished yet; when they have they are almost sure to come here and bring lights."

"You must also introduce me to my sister as a stranger."

"I wonder, I wonder . . . Luckily for us, well-to-do persons do not shun our company because of our poverty. They are taking Dariushka off my hands and do not despise her. Her betrothed's father is a merchant of the merchants' guild; our aristocracy is impoverished. The patriarch's court is not as it was since the boyars deposed Nikon—or maybe he resigned of his own accord. All I know is that he was tried, condemned and deported to Bielo-Ozero. Now we have a new patriarch—His Holiness Jozef. Dear me, fancy my keeping you hungry all the time! Mariushka!"

"Do not summon anyone. Try and manage yourself, little mother."

"Very well, I shall serve you with my own hands with joy. But it is a pity the joy will be so short-lived."

The little old lady fussed about, trotted off and returned with a pitcher.

"Here's some ginger wine."

"That's good, my own darling mother."

"I also have some little white loaves and cold mutton, ham and home-brewed beer."

She went out again and brought in more food.

"I feel all muddled in my head. Must I really believe the worst, my son? I had so looked forward to your sharing in the wedding feast and staying with me for a time. But I see I was wrong."

"I have no time to spare. As soon as the maid goes away I'll see Dariushka. Yes, she was but a small child when I went away, and now she is betrothed. How time flies! She must have forgotten me . . . and she need not know. But, my dearest, I shall be a true brother to her."

"There is something fishy about all this, my son. What is it?"

"I shall tell you later."

"Eat—eat your fill."

"Don't forget to call me Maximka in front of my sister."

"Yes, I'll remember."

The young girl, accompanied by the maid, entered from the adjoining room. They brought with them the lighted chandeliers and placed them on the table.

"Mother, this won't do. See if they'll not have this up against me that a strange young boyar's son was here in our room at night. . . ."

"My little daughter, he is a kinsman from Yaroslavl, Maxim by name, uncle Ivan's son. We let him come in here because the other rooms are cold and untidy. He will soon be gone, for he has no time for idle chatter. You may go, Mariushka, and take heed of your tongue; you know with what severity I keep an eye on my daughter."

The maid-servant bowed and, glancing furtively at Lazunka, left the room.

"Sit down, Dariushka; the young man is your kinsman and a very welcome guest. He has brought us a message and news from Lazunka from far-distant towns."

"And presents, too," said Lazunka, as he rose and fumbled in the deep pockets of his overcoat, whence he extracted a gold chain and two rings set with diamonds. "This is from your brother."

The young girl looked at the jewels with flushed cheeks.

"Oh, they are beautiful, mother; I'll tell the priest Ivan to enter them into my dowry register."

"So you are already drawing up a register?"

"Yes, kinsman. It has been drawn up by the priest Ivan Pankratov of the Church of Saint Nicholas-in-the-Sands on the Arbat. Would you care to have a look at it?"

"May I, mother boyarina?"

"Of course! It is here in the coffer."

The young girl ran lightly into the next room and, groping her way in the dark, found the coffer, unlocked it and started to rummage its contents. Her mother observed:

"This mead is very potent; you'd better drink warily," and with a glance round she added softly, "my son!"

"Have no fear, my dear. This sort of stuff is not likely to intoxicate me."

"You've got used to heavy drinking on the Volga, I expect. You never used to drink before you went away. Well, God be with you! Only you'd better drink within reason."

Dariushka relocked the coffer and brought with her a long, yellowish strip of paper.

"Read it out loud, good guest."

Lazunka read:

"Dowry of Darya Ivanovna Bashkova, spinster, daughter of the widow of the boyar's son Bashkov:

"Satin pelisse, fox-fur with paws, silver lace, silver buttons;

"Double-faced taffeta pelisse, squirrel fur, silver buttons;

"Damask linen summer cloak, ochre-coloured, with silver buttons;

"Loose coat, green, hare's fur, silver buttons;

"Nankeen summer coat, sky blue;

"Cap, crown embroidered, silver-gilt ornaments;

"Velvet cap, Polish style, silver lace trimmings at the seams;

"Three-cornered cap with ear-flaps, lined with sable;

"Silver gilt chain with crosses attached;

"Ten rings;

"Bed with bolster and counterpane;

"Hare-pelt counterpane, covered with a material of floral design;

"The maid Mariushka with all her belongings, and, if she marries, her children, to be included as a life-long dowry to the bride."

"And that's not all. There are also ikons."

Lazunka had by now become slightly exhilarated, and, moreover, he had long grown accustomed to other modes of life. So he remarked:

"Everything seems quite as it should be, mother boyarina. What I can't understand is that a human being, a maid, should be included in the dowry together with pelisses and caps."

His sister stood up angrily with flashing eyes and a frown on her brows.

"I refuse to release Mariushka! I need her services. Besides, it is forbidden nowadays to speak as you have just done."

"You must realize that he has been travelling a great deal and seen many towns. Perhaps manners and customs are different there? After staying with us for a while he'll get used to our ways," interposed the mother.

"Well, he comes from my brother Lazunka. I can hardly recall this brother of mine at all. But we must not even mention this Lazunka of ours, much less . . ."

"Why are you speaking thus, little daughter?"

"I did not tell you at the time, mother, but you remember that I stayed with my betrothed's sisters?"

"How could I forget?"

"A secretary called on them. He sat behind a partition and questioned them about me."

"Mercy on us!"

"He said it is rumoured that Lazunka, a boyar's son, nicknamed 'Zhidovin', when on the Volga or some other river, joined the bandits and was serving as a captain in Stepan Razin's forces. May not your son's betrothed be his sister?"

"Fie on you, Dariushka!"

"I have not yet finished, mother. My betrothed and his father answered 'No' and changed the subject. But the secretary persisted: 'Should she be a relative of his, one ought to find out all about her; they are the great tsar's enemies.' Then my new relatives said to him: 'They do not belong to the same family, secretary.' As I watched from the window later I saw that they drove the secretary home in a tipsy condition. I was afraid to speak to you about this earlier, mother, for I feared lest you be vexed and forbid me to visit them again. But now our guest has mentioned the matter I see no object in hiding it from you any more. Do not be angry, darling mother. Things are getting worse in Moscow. When Mariushka goes to market she hears the common people bragging: 'We are expecting the ataman Stepan Razin in Moscow; he'll do away with our enemies, the boyars, secretaries and clerks, and he will abolish taxes and serfdom.' For such speeches menials are seized and executed."

Said Lazunka abruptly:

"Mother boyarina, will you order my bed to be made? I am very sleepy."

"I understand and shall prepare a place for you myself. After all, you are not a proper stranger. Please retire to your room, Dariushka."

The girl kissed her mother, bowed low to the guest and went out. Lazunka, gazing after her retreating figure, mused:

"My sister is a real beauty. She's able to stand up for herself no worse than her lover. No harm will come to her and mother. The father, being a merchant, has money, and he is sure to bribe the greedy secretaries and thus stifle rumour."

"Why put it off? Tell me, my son, what is the evil deed you have committed?"

"I'll let you know tomorrow, mother. Now I'm too sleepy."

"You are right. We'll have time for a talk tomorrow. Now I shall make you up a bed, and you must have a good rest."

"But this I must say to you: it is not the rebels who are robbers; the worst robbers are those who have stolen the people's freedom."

"Where did you learn such speeches, Lazunka? What do you mean by the people's freedom? The common people are accustomed to bear the burdens imposed by the boyars; why should they not bear the burdens imposed by the tsar?"

"The boyars treat the people like so much cattle; and this cannot go on."

"So that is what you have in mind? What about His Holiness, the patriarch? He gives his blessing so that the people may be ruled. For this he is responsible to God. The tsar sees to it that persons of noble birth all over Russia live in plenty, and the common people are among us to make things as easy as possible. What do the common people really know? All they can do is to riot."

"The people do not rebel for nothing, mother. They are seeking freedom. If ever the ataman does reach Moscow, then the rule of boyars and tsar will cease."

"Curb your tongue! Such subversive speeches will bring ruin on our heads, and instead of a place of honour at my daughter's wedding I shall be cast into jail, or, what is even worse, shall be racked."

"Make my bed, mother. We shall never agree. I merely rouse your anger."

"Now you're speaking in a more reasonable way. You have drunk too much and have been talking a lot of rebellious nonsense."

After retiring to the room his mother had prepared for him Lazunka remained a long time in pensive contemplation of his father's rusty armour and sword in its tattered scabbard, which hung on the walls. He found a pair of Turkish pistols with chipped flints on the locker in a corner.

"I'll put in some new flints and take them along with me," he reflected as he lay down. "It is all up with my betrothal. My mother is old and cannot adapt herself to new conditions; my sister fears my name because it might interfere with her future prospects; nothing is left to me but to leave as soon as the town barriers are raised. I must see to it that spies do not track me down."

At peep of day the boyar's son dressed and was ready to go when his mother entered.

"Had a good sleep? You'll speak differently now, my son. You gave me a terrible fright last night when you sang the praises of the rebels."

"Forgive me, mother, and farewell. I am just off to have a look at Moscow, for it is long since I saw the city. Everything seems so changed, so built over."

"But why are you saying good-bye? Surely you will come back? Have a care of yourself, and if you have done wrong, please do not shame or frighten me or your sister. You know as well as I do that she has her life and happiness at stake."

"Farewell, mother," and the young man held her in a tight embrace. "Find comfort and joy in what you have and do not grieve over your losses."

"Have I any losses to be disturbed about? Oh, my son, a mother's heart

may feel sore, and her tears may refuse to be kept down. . . . Besides, you have given me no time for rejoicing. Well, God be with you!"

The old retainer met him at the gate.

Lazunka embraced the old man in his arms, who smelt of onions and lamp-oil.

"Good-bye, Mitrofanich!"

"May God forgive you, boyar! Don't think ill of me. As for me . . ." The old man wept.

Lazunka moved away, but the faithful retainer caught up with him and whispered:

"Do not let your mother see you. I know that you are fighting our cause, for a menial's life is a bitter one. But, boyar, should anything happen . . . I am not afraid of the rack! Well, if anything should happen to you, come here, and I shall hide you and never betray your whereabouts."

"Thank you, old man!"

## 2

Threading his way to the musketeers' settlement, Lazunka found the scorched site, but failed to recognize it, for he saw nothing that resembled what he was looking for.

"So many years have passed by, and it is all built over now."

He turned back, but still obstinately continued his search. Charred beams, scarcely visible from among the overgrowth. Trees had sown themselves between large brick warehouses, their doors securely fastened by padlocks. Lazunka persevered. Behind the warehouses he discovered some bushes, the remains of a fence and tall weeds.

"Can this be the place?"

He stepped over the old, sunken fence, crept through the thick weeds and about thirty paces ahead perceived a low roof, mantled with faded grass. A mist was rising, and the roof could barely be seen. He approached and found that the building was a long one with the roof propped up by mouldering posts. The interstices between the crossbeams were filled in with turves.

"I wonder where the entrance to this cellar can be?"

He walked round without finding it; rank weeds concealed everything, and many tracks crossed one another in the thicket. A thin drizzle had started; bushes, roof and surroundings were all enveloped in fog. Lazunka no longer knew from which direction he had come, for the warehouses were wrapped in mist. The captain paused, undecided, and for the first time, lit a pipe. While at home he had refrained from smoking out of consideration for his mother. There came a crackling sound a little ahead of where he stood, and he heard someone approaching out of the fog. Taking a firm hold of his pipe between his teeth, Lazunka laid a hand on one of the pistols.

"If it's one of their spies, he'll not know I am here."

A young man came towards him with resolute gait. About seven cubits away the stranger came to a halt. He was wearing a lamb's-wool cap with the ear-flaps turned up, a dark crimson coat, a pink sash with tassels.

"Hi, Cossack, what's your business here?"

Lazunka was taken by surprise and did not answer. The youth, who had pushed back his cap, might have been Razin except that he was twenty years younger. He had black, curly hair and knitted brows; like Razin, he held his arms akimbo, which position made his cloak stick out.

"You're not some old fogey, are you? So why are you prowling about this place?"

"I'm looking for an entrance to this house."

"What for?"

"I've been told, young man, that a woman named Irenetsa lived here."

"And what may be your business with her?"

"I come from afar and am not a Muscovite. I've brought her a message and gifts. From whom I shall tell her later."

The youth came nearer. He had long since spotted the pistols and noticed the sword beneath Lazunka's coat.

"Very well. But if you have come with evil intent you'd better have a care."

"And who may you be?"

"Her son."

"Good!"

Following the youth through the thicket, Lazunka reflected:

"So this is Razin's son? Yet Stenka never mentioned him. How alike they are!"

They descended into the cellar. A solitary tallow candle burned upon the locker in the wide vestibule, and by its light one could discern a low doorway between tall coffers.

"My mother is not at all well. She moans and weeps at times, but I know not the reason for this. She puzzles me." Then he added: "Stoop lower, or you'll knock your head against the lintel."

Under his feet the boyar's son could feel steps, covered with some soft material; the smell of a room constantly lived in assailed his nostrils. Lights twinkled. The youth introduced him into a lofty room with a stove in one corner, while in another there burned many lamps before the ikons, and two candles guttered in a three-pronged chandelier, placed on an antique oak table. A woman, her fair hair showing traces of silver, lay upon a heap of brightly covered cushions. The face was shrunken and sallow, the eyes closed, the body so frail as hardly to be outlined beneath the coverlet; it was stretched straight and flat and looked lifeless. The youth leaned across the table and said softly:

"Mother, here's a Cossack wishing to see you."

The woman did not open her eyes or alter her position, but murmured:

"A Cossack, my child?"

"Open your eyes, and you'll see him."

The woman remained silent and kept her eyes shut.

"I have a message for you from Stepan Timofeievich, from Astrakhan," said Lazunka in a loud voice.

A tremor passed through the thin body beneathed the coverlet. Slowly the woman raised her hand, passed the palm over her face and, turning her head with a great effort, opened her eyes.

"God, what eyes!" thought Lazunka, staring as he fumbled in the depths of his coat pocket. He drew forth a silver chain with a small gold cross attached; at each end of it four dark blue sapphires glittered.

"The ataman sends this to you."

The woman drew her loose robe together with her bare left hand, but did not take the jewel. She spoke almost inaudibly:

"Had I my breasts, I should not be hiding myself like a thief evading the guards. The cross . . . Oh, my dove . . . my precious falcon . . . my Stepanushka . . . he sends me a gift . . . he has not forgotten me. . . . Dear guest, have you come from afar? You ought to have some food, but I can barely stand; my feet are as water; for hours I lie like a log. I've not been stricken with illness, but I seem to be melting away like a candle. Meanwhile, I am not doing credit to the house. Vasili, my dear, go to the vestibule and bring me the vessel from the locker, the one embossed with an eagle, and a goblet, too. In this man we have a precious guest, so even were it to cost me my life he must be honoured." She spoke in a sing-song manner, and Lazunka fell more and more deeply under the spell of her eyes and voice. "Ah, dear God, how precious you are, young man!" She smiled sadly, lowered her feet to the ground and sat up in bed. "Go, my child."

"Yes, mother," said the youth as he left the room to do her bidding.

"And now, my dearest guest, sit down here on my bed. Fear nothing, for mine is not a catching sickness; it is but love-sickness and not bodily failure."

Lazunka flung his coat and cap on the bench, quickly unbuckled his sword, drew the pistols from his sash. As he was throwing these, too, on the bench, one of them fell with a thud to the floor.

"How sweet to my ears is the fall of a pistol! It seems as if it were but yesterday . . . Stepanushka, my falcon, used to drop his like that or kick it under the bench. . . . Now I hear these familiar sounds again, but the tread of your feet is different. . . . Yes, just as if it were yesterday. Yet how many are the years which have gone by!

Lazunka seated himself, and the youth returned with the vessel and goblets.

"Ah child, why two goblets? Must I drink, too? Drink, beloved guest, it is excellent strong mead with a cherry flavouring."

"Mother, I'd better be going. The boys are getting up a fisticuffs match on the other side of the Moskva river and have asked me to come."

"They won't kill you, will they?"

"Of course not! As soon as the fight begins I'll throw off my long-sleeved coat."

"Well, go, my child, but take care of yourself."

"Never fear, mother," cried the youth as he sped on his way.

"That's the kind of lad he's growing into: now it is fisticuffs; now it is twirling a sword, then examining pistols and screwing in their flints. But he has not yet learned to shoot properly."

"I'm a crack shot, because I was born a boyar's son, and as such we were ordered to learn how to shoot. I'll teach your boy."

"He takes after his father, Stepan. If you teach him he'll soon pick the thing up, my dear."

"I shall teach him without fail."

"Drink, it's good for you. To me you have brought both sorrow and joy."

"Father Stepan Timofeievich told me to seek you out, and said: 'You will be welcomed like some cherished kinsman, Lazunka.' "

"Did he really? How else could I have received you?"

"He spoke much about you and always referred to you as his best beloved among all the women he has known."

Though Lazunka knew very well he was lying, he said this because he knew that every word he uttered concerning the ataman gave his hostess a new lease of life.

"Did he speak so of me? Oh, how am I to thank you for coming? I shall become strong again after such bliss. I feel even fit to sing and dance today. Shall we have another drink? Vasili must have had a wave of intuition to have brought two goblets!"

Irenetsa's hands trembled; she could not lift the wrought-silver vessel. Lazunka rose, pushed aside the candles and filled both goblets.

"Let's drink to my bright falcon, Stepanushka. Here was I, a sinner, about to die, and now I live again. Oh, my dear, you have come at the right moment."

They clinked glasses and drank. Irenetsa drew the pillows nearer, propped up her back and wished to know:

"Did he ask about his son?"

"Time pressed. He had to hurry, because there was to be a council with his captains and orders to issue when I bade good-bye to him. So he said but little about his son."

"How could I expect him to say much? Why, the child was in his cradle when Stepanushka had to go away."

"I recollect that he mentioned some old man. Where is this grandad of yours? 'A wise old man, but he must be dead by now,' was what father said."

"My dear, of course he is dead. But how can I bring myself to tell you the manner of his going? Stepan loved old Grigori. In those days, when Nikon was patriarch, he altered the Scriptures and ordered the old copies to be burned. This seemed to send my grandad Grigori off his head. He would scream, jangle his irons—you know he always wore gyves—and cry: 'Great slaughter and bloodshed will ensue from Nikon's doings.' Also that it made no difference which way one crossed oneself, whether with the left or the right hand or with the whole palm or with the thumb out. If there were such a being as God, then He would harken to any prayer, but if there was no God, then it did not matter even were one to beat one's forehead on the ground; nothing would avail. I tried to quieten my senile grandad by kindness and persuasion; sometimes I scolded him. All to no purpose. He continued to shout in the market-place. So ancient was he and so trembling with age that the people flocked round him. Then, so people say, he began to shout the self-same words in a tavern. Nikon's spies were everywhere. He was seized secretly lest the people should intervene. They dragged him from the tavern to the torture chamber, where he persisted in crying out the same words. They found out where he lived and came to overhaul his things, and discovered among them some books on herbs and spells. So with his books, the old man was burned alive in the courtyard of the patriarch's office. I think he was condemned as a sorcerer. Well, dear, after this the secretary of the Law Office intended to send for me and Vasili. What would have befallen us I cannot say, but I was beside myself with fright, and what with grief over the absence of my beloved, I took to my bed. This is an evil world, but there are a few kind folk in it. I found myself protected by a man I never thought would do such a thing. At the time my Stepanushka was taken

to the torture chamber, and when his brother Ivan was done to death by Kivrin and prince Dolgoruki, I was so distraught that I hastened to see the boyar. But he in the evil of his heart took me to see Stepan hanging in irons in the torture chamber. Then it became clear to the accursed old boyar that I loved my falcon. He questioned me about my baby boy Vasili, because he wished to extirpate all Stepanushka's family at one stroke. This same villain led me into the torture chamber and told his secretary to hold my hands, the while he himself tore off my breasts." Baring her chest, she sighed: "Look, falcon, it is as though wolves had gnawed my breasts. Boyar Kivrin tore them off with red-hot irons and then ordered the executioner to get on with the rest of the torture. But the secretary, who had witnessed the whole torment, then turned out to be—what might be called—my guardian angel; he either loved me or felt moved to compassion for me. I heard him expostulating with the boyar, trying to persuade the ruffian to release me. That man's name was Efim, and it was through his services that I was let off what remained of the torture. Later it was this same Efim who stood up for me and Vasili against the spies. He is now in the intimate service of the tsar. He asked his new master, as he had asked boyar Kivrin, to have pity on us. That is why our case has never been brought to the Office. Oh, how I have suffered! Not on account of myself, for I am a sick woman, and if only I could be vouchsafed one glimpse of my Stepanushka I'd die in peace. But I am fearful because of my son; he is so bold, so hot-tempered, restless, fearless . . . In Moscow, as you know, one has to live a double life. To be dauntless here is to get oneself into trouble."

"I had it in mind to wander about Moscow today and listen to what the people are talking of. It would come in useful to the ataman and myself were I to know Moscow well."

"My son told me that it is dark and rainy today, therefore the barriers will be up early. You had better not go, my dear. I'll pull myself together, lay the table and give you something to eat. You can take your stroll tomorrow, but you'd be wise to change your clothes. Such bright attire would attract the attention of spies or robbers. Dress as a small tradesman, then you'll be safe."

"I've been thinking the same myself, only I have no idea where to lay my hand on suitable clothing."

Irenetsa rose with difficulty to her feet. Lazunka assisted her. She threw on a green dressing-gown, went to the vestibule and brought back some food.

"This will not come amiss after your journey."

"I have been journeying today."

"And may I ask where you have been that you did not come straight to me, my dear guest?"

"I went to see my family," answered Lazunka with drooping head.

"Your boyar kinsmen?"

"My mother and sister."

"I expect they are afraid of you."

"You are right, they are. But I have no intention of paying them another visit yet awhile. Perhaps later, when . . ."

"I understand! You have either to be with Stepan Timofeievich or with the boyars."

"You have guessed right."

"Eat more, falcon. None can gainsay that it's a cruel happening to lose one's own mother. Have another drink, and if this brew is not strong enough I

have another, and some vodka. After you have had your fill I shall show you a secret room, where you can stay as long as you like."

The meal over, Irenetsa led Lazunka to a large coffer behind the stove. As he raised the lid, she said:

"Push aside the clothes which are against the back wall."

Lazunka obeyed.

"Now feel with your hands and you will find a knob. Press it!"

Lazunka again obeyed, and the back of the coffer slid down.

"Now crawl in. There's a little closet below. If you find it too stuffy you need only slide back the window and you will get fresh air. A perpetual light is burning before the ikon, but if you find it too dark, light a candle. There's a bed with blankets and all you need. Push back the trap-door and it will click to. When you want to get out, you'll find another latch, which will lower the door. All sort of folk are liable to enter by the front entrance, burglars as well as others. But none knows of this little room. It is furnished with a well, so you will not lack water. It was built in bygone days as a retreat from fires and robbers. It is heated, too."

Lazunka picked up his belongings, climbed into the coffer, groped with his feet for the steps and raised the trap-door to its place. The room he found himself in was not large; a tiled stove stood in a corner; the whole was dimly lit and glowed like faded cloth-of-gold; the seats and benches were upholstered in smoke-coloured velvet; an antique copper mirror in a silver frame hung from one of the walls; in a corner was an ikon of Greek workmanship, a sombre image with an oil-lamp burning in front of it. The ikon itself was encased in diamonds and pearls upon a background of gold tissue, ornamented with a thistle design in silver thread. The mirror hung above a chest; its shining surface reflected a bearded man with keen eyes, dishevelled locks and wearing a cap. Lazunka smiled, and the copper background gave back the smile. Knowing it to be his own reflection, Lazunka stated:

"It's myself all right. But I have grown very hairy; I wonder mother and Mitrofanich ever recognized me!"

He spent a considerable time reconnoitring this decorated subterranean chamber and pushed back the small ornamented mica window to let in a cool breeze.

"Here's a place of refuge from all one's enemies." Candle in hand, he approached a squat table with embossed silver legs, opened the heavy lid of a casket placed thereupon, and saw that it contained gold ornaments and jewels, necklaces, bracelets, rings. All was covered with precious stones.

"Oh-ho, my hostess is almost as wealthy as the ataman himself." Lazunka clapped down the lid of the casket and examined the walls. The one nearest the stove was covered with sable pelisses, women's jerkins of marten fur, encased in woollen or silk materials, and damask coifs with pearls, soft moroccan-leather boots, embroidered with river pearls.

"It's lucky that the secretaries and clerks know nothing about this secret chamber! If they did, the mistress would soon find herself in jail, and the treasure would be pilfered."

In another corner a large portrait resembling an ikon was hung. With his candle in hand, Lazunka approached this, too. The painting was dark; it was a half-length picture of an old man in a tall marten-fur cap and indigo-coloured kaftan. The kaftan was drawn in at the waist with a yellow sash, embroidered

in a floral design and with pearl fringes; the hilt of a knife stuck out of the sash. Filled with curiosity, Lazunka skirted the walls, till suddenly the stillness of the place made him realize his utter weariness.

"I slept badly last night. I'll lie down." He blew out the candle and, turning back the silk coverlet of the bed, reclined on the pillows without discarding his cap and was soon fast asleep. On waking it was impossible for him to make out what time it could be, so he went up the steps, wondering how he was to open the door. By the dim light of the ikon lamp he caught sight of an iron hook, which he turned, and the door slid down. He stooped low as he crept forth from his hiding-place. Irenetsa cheerfully put order in the room. The stripling was sitting on the bench clad in the same clothes he had worn the previous day, cap on his knees.

"It looks as if day had come," said Lazunka as he drew the door to behind him. "I'd like a wash."

"Come this way, dear guest, and have your wash. I'll soon have the water ready."

Irenetsa went to the vestibule and returned with a pitcher and towel.

"Now have a nice wash. You really do look rather black. I call you dove, but you are more like a raven!"

"A raven, but not of evil intent," retorted Lazunka with a laugh. "Has the day already come?"

Irenetsa smiled sadly as she poured the water into his cupped hands over the basin.

"The day is God's own, but men are the tsar's beastly devils."

"Now then, Vasili Stepanich, show me a place where one can shoot, and I shall teach you how to take aim."

"What a fine Cossack! First he nearly cures my mother and now he's going to teach me to shoot."

"Where are you bound for, my little falcons? Have a meal before you start. Vasili, bring our guest a pair of peasant boots and ordinary clothes—you'll find some in the coffer and a cap besides."

"By the time you have prepared breakfast, hostess, we'll be back."

Lazunka went off with the boy. As Irenetsa laid the table, dished up the food and placed pitchers of kvass, home-brewed ale and mead on the board, she heard the report of a pistol outside, above the house.

"This shooting will bring the informers down on us I fear. They are always on the prowl."

The two soon returned.

"Our guest is a treasure, mother. You should see how he fires a pistol! I've never met his like. Look at this cap. I tossed it in the air, and he shot through it; he can hit even a button."

As they sat eating, Lazunka remarked:

"I am your father's servant, Vasili."

Irenetsa shot a warning glance in the speaker's direction and said:

"If you've eaten as much as you want, my son, go and fetch him a change of clothes. Our guest wishes to see something of Moscow."

Vasili left the room, and Irenetsa turned to Lazunka:

"I have always told Vasili that his father was dead. I felt that otherwise he might harbour resentment or believe he was a bastard, and that he might cease to love me. I fear this above everything."

Lazunka changed into the clothes Vasili brought him, while Irenetsa made a parcel of his fine Cossack raiment.

"Where shall I conceal your sword, dear? Shall I take everything down to the hide-out?"

"Yes, hostess, and the pistols likewise—barring the little one, which I intend to take with me. And now, Vasili, my newly made and gallant musketeer, come along, and we'll see Moscow together."

"I shall need you, my son, so don't stay away too long."

"I'll soon be back, mother."

The two went out.

3

In a corner of the tsar's council chamber stood a round stove of painted tiles; farther along, beneath the windows, were some benches with carved legs but without mattresses; the carving on the benches was so fine as to look like lace. The ceiling was gilded and decorated with pictures of saints, some of whom wore the cowl of the strictest order of monkhood, others held open books in their hands. The arches were painted with coloured designs. Faintly visible on the dusky gold background of the walls were the heads of lions and eagles with outstretched wings. The table was covered with a scarlet-and-gold cloth, and on the wall above the seat where the tsar sat were ikons, whose halos of diamonds and pearls were surrounded by stars, inside each of which was the image of a saint. The lighted lamp sent forth a smell of burning oil. Incense floated in from the chapel: the tsar was at his devotions. A clock of foreign workmanship stood on the tsar's table; it represented a knight in silver armour and helmet, with a spear in his right hand. The dial fitted into the shield, borne upon the knight's left arm. A silver inkwell with sand-box and swan's quills, a gold whistle instead of a bell, completed the outfit. To the left was the secretaries' table, covered with a black cloth and strewn with papers. The men leaning over this table were Efim, the late boyar Kivrin's ward, now a man with a long fair beard and hair parted in the middle, and three other secretaries. The Secretary of State wore a cap resembling those worn by musketeers, but it had a scarlet crown and was adorned with pearls and marten fur; round his neck hung a braided pearl chain with a golden eagle as pendant. Near the tsar's seat were two boyars in summer coats of satin, their sleeves embroidered with a pattern in gold. One of these boyars was dressed in yellow, the other in blue; both wore hard, straight, rather high hats with flat crowns, wide at the top and narrower at the base. Nearest the tsar's seat sat boyar Pushkin, stooping, broad, long bearded and leaning on a staff. Beside him was the tsar's latest favourite, a man of new-fangled ideas, a lover of foreigners; he had a short beard and closely cropped hair.

Into this twilit chamber entered a chamberlain carrying a lighted candle and wearing a velvet kaftan. Slowly, deliberately and solemnly he lit the candles on the tsar's table; three thick wax ones and the fourth made of tallow. He then retired as haughtily as he had entered, without vouchsafing a glance at anyone. From the chapel came the booming voice of the reader and mawkish

exclamations of the tsar's confessor, who had taken the day's service out of his turn, though on ordinary occasions the priests were wont to take it in strict sequence. The boyar in blue turned his head to his neighbour with the staff.

"Boyar Ivan Petrovich Pushkin, you should not seek retirement, but remain at your post. Our great tsar is extremely satisfied with and gratified by the services you render him."

The boyar in yellow said nothing.

"Is it possible that the boyar is wearied of the daily contemplation of our sovereign's illustrious eyes?"

The boyar thus addressed gave a jerk to his hat, grunted, but otherwise was silent. The other continued undaunted:

"It is not for prince Odoyevski to be proud of his noble birth."

"It is the fashion nowadays not to hold noble birth in such high esteem. I think that service and intelligence carry more weight."

The boyar moved his head to and fro as he spoke, and his beard parted company with his staff.

"Once upon a time I was in great demand, Artamon Sergeievich. Now there are others who stand between me and our great sovereign."

"You are clever, boyar Ivan Petrovich. But surely even a superior intelligence must have its reverses occasionally."

"I do not catch your meaning, Artamon Sergeievich. Are you referring to me?"

Now the boyar in blue turned a deaf ear to Pushkin's remark and continued airing his views:

"This question of precedence is centuries old; it is as futile as it is foolish. I do not care a fig where I sit, even if it were under the doorstep."

"Those who are of low birth need grumble at nothing. They can lie in a trough, provided there is food. But the honour of our forbears forbids us to sit below an Odoyevski."

"True, I am lowly born. My forbears were clerks, boyar, yet we do not go unhonoured by the great sovereign."

"That's just it! I have been silent, boyar Artamon, but you kept on prodding me as if I were a bear, so you must not mind if I show my claws."

"Reproaching me with my low birth does not offend me, Ivan Petrovich. What angers me is that a man of intelligence, and still fit for work, should abandon his task out of sheer stubbornness."

"One more observation, Artamon Sergeievich, and I have done. To prince Odoyevski I will cede not only my place at table, but I intend to open a way to his preferment, saying to him: 'Here, prince, take over the cases of brigandage.' I am too old; it is time I retired."

"That will depend on what the great——"

At this moment the sacristan in his black cassock emerged from the chapel in his heavy top-boots, tried to walk on tiptoe to avoid making unnecessary noise, but could not keep it up and came shuffling along. He smelt of tar, stale spirituous liquor and radishes. The reader as he came forth stuck a missal into the breast of his cassock and hastily crossed the room. The boyars rose from their seats. The tsar, accompanied by his father confessor, issued from the chapel. He was in jocular vein.

"Has there not been a happy family event at your home recently, father Andrei? It would please us well to be godfather to your new baby. In any case,

you can expect to see me soon. I shall call on your wife, who is famed for her home-brewed wine."

"A visit from you, great sovereign, will indeed be an honour. The archpriestess and I will be overjoyed to welcome our radiant sun! Though we have none to be christened just now, your godchildren, sire, are growing apace. Vouchsafe us this joy and have a look at them."

"Your reader, father Andrei, smells too strongly of radishes; this is no serious disadvantage to a clergyman, but with the addition of tar . . . I expect I shall have to face the expense of providing him with a pair of goatskin boots."

"He drinks too heavily, sire, and takes every gift to the tavern. The only reason why I keep him in my service is because of his voice. It's a wonderful organ!"

"You should treat him to sour apples, Savinovich; they are said to be an excellent remedy."

"I can always try, sire."

The tsar added:

"You may go now, father. I have business to attend to."

With a low bow the archpriest left the chamber. The tsar took his seat.

"Sit down, boyars. I need advice from you two. First of all, Artamon Sergeievich, when would it be best to arrange for a review of our troops and, what is most important, are many of the new levies of boyars and their sons arriving in Moscow?"

"Sire, the registers indicate that many noblemen of Novgorod and Yaroslavl have not answered the call."

"There is a special order to the voivodes concerning this matter; we have a copy of it here, boyar. We shall discuss any additions that ought to be made in it presently. Secretary, apprise us of the contents of the letter."

The secretary of the Assessment Office rose and unfurled a long scroll. He began to read, omitting the name of the voivode, for this was already known to the tsar. He pronounced each syllable clearly:

> " 'In respect of those nobles and boyars' sons whose names are noted in the tithe register as subject to the payment of tithe, and who have failed to put in an appearance at the tithe office to pay their tithe, it behoves you, voivode, together with men of virtuous character, who have been duly selected to question the tithe-collectors as to the whereabouts of said nobles, boyars' sons, newly baptized murzas and Tatars and to find out whether they be on service or missions or business in some other way. Also some may be deceased, and if not, why have they failed to report for the tsar's service? Is this through indolence or owing to their poverty? And has the recreant an estate or ancestral demesne? Where does he live? What are the tithe-collectors' reports concerning these men? The said nobles, boyars' sons and newly baptized should be enrolled in the tithe register in accordance with the ordinances of the towns, and if boyars' children, atamans, Cossacks and Tatars prove, when the check-up is made, to be absentees, then the registrars and men of virtue of these towns should question the nobles, boyars' sons, princes, murzas and Tatars concerning such absentees. All that may be learned about these absentees must be entered into the registers, signed by hand, and the sovereign informed without delay, and the register——' "

"Enough!"

The secretary bowed and returned to his place.

The boyar in blue spoke:

"Sire, the voivodes Yuri Boriatinski and Bogdan Matveievich Hitrovo have sent in a complaint that their baggage and cannon were ill-equipped, and that there is a shortage of artillery specialists, so that it is necessary to recruit volunteer specialists without delay. If the voivodes advance to clear the towns of brigands, such fully trained men will be urgently needed, since the brigand bands are increasing in number day by day and are moving up the river to Samara."

"What people these are, boyar! We send them to serve the state, and see what happens!" The tsar's eyes shifted to the brightly lit secretarial table. At a glance from the tsar the secretary of the Ordnance Office tossed his long beard over his shoulder and proceeded to read:

" 'Register drawn up by Vaska Borisov and Ivashka Klimov, master gunners, foreign trained, drafted into the great sovereign's service. Supplies required:

" 'Cannon for eighty-pound grenades and one hundred and fifty grenades for said cannon.

" 'Cannon for forty-pound grenades, with one hundred and sixty grenades for said cannon.

" 'Four hundred vents for these; gunpowder for copper and wooden cannon, according to the need thereof; also for incendiary balls refined saltpetre, six hundred pounds; inflammable brimstone, two hundred pounds; wax, eighty pounds. Pitch according to need; two copper cauldrons, one of them to the capacity of sixteen gallons for boiling pitch. Four hundred pounds of flax; tar according to need; another cauldron of about five gallon capacity for refining saltpetre;

" 'Copper pestle and mortar for pounding up the ingredients of incendiary balls;

" 'Camphor, fifteen pounds; antimony, twenty pounds; quicksilver twenty pounds;

" 'Five hundred wooden wads for said cannon;

" 'Five hundred two-yard lengths of rope;

" 'Forty yards of good dyed homespun;

" 'Scissors; sledge-hammer for driving nails into the incendiary balls; three sieves; a board of limewood, on which to mix the compounds;

" 'Sixty iron rings for the incendiary balls and sixty cups for same; also barrels from which the incendiary balls are fired, according to need . . .' "

"Enough! To whom is that document to be handed?"

The tsar looked severely at the boyar in blue. In a loud voice the secretary concluded:

"By order of the great sovereign, all these various supplies are to be delivered from the Ordnance Office to the Novgorod Office, to Artamon Sergeievich Matveyev and the Secretaries of State, Grigori Bogdanov and Yakov Pozdnyshev."

"Yet today, Artamon Sergeievich, I have received intelligence from the master gunners that so far they have received nothing."

"I was absent, sire. In company with the district marshal Zamytski, I visited the localities where the voivodes are wrangling, and I collected their

mutual complaints. I have informed the Assessment Office of this, but I gather that the facts have not been reported to you."

"Well, never mind now, boyar. Look into the matter yourself and see to it that these men get what they need. Should there be any sign of dilatoriness on the part of the Ordnance Office, make a thorough investigation and then report to me."

"It will be done at once, sire."

"Ivan Petrovich, I wish for a report from you."

Pushkin rose.

"Sire, I shall come immediately to the point."

"That's all to the good, boyar."

"Sire, the musketeers have reported to me today as follows:

> " 'For some days past, as we change the guard in the early morning, we have heard shots coming from the direction of the musketeers' settlement, fired either from an arquebus or a pistol.'

"I at once began to investigate the matter, and discovered that on a waste plot of land at the back of Shorin's warehouses there is a dwelling, which is to all outward appearance uninhabited. According to the land taxation register, this house belongs to a suburban woman, Irenetsa by name. On the face of it she seems to be quite in order; a quiet sort of an individual who goes to church and to market and lives with her son. I have my own ideas about her. When the captains of the godless renegade Stepan Razin arrived in Moscow they were taken to the *Zemski Prikaz* to be examined, then they were deported to various towns. Yet even now, sire, I cannot feel sure that a couple of them may not have escaped from the patrol. . . ."

"This is interesting! Continue your report, boyar."

"I have asked myself the question as to whether this woman may be an accomplice of theirs. We have made a thorough search of Moscow, but so far, sire, have not laid hands on them. But I have a suspicion of their whereabouts. Who has permission to use firearms? By your pleasure alone, sire, or at military practice, has a person the right to shoot within the city and its suburbs."

"This woman's case must be investigated, boyar."

The boyar made no reply, and the tsar remained silent, too. From the secretarial table rose the sedate figure of Efim, who bowed and said:

"In memory of my benefactor, boyar Kivrin—may his soul rest in peace!—I crave permission to speak about that woman in the great sovereign's presence."

The tsar waved an acquiescent hand.

"Sit down, secretary, and abide your time."

Efim obeyed and took up his papers. Pushkin resumed his speech:

"Only yesterday, sire, a robber Cossack sought me out at the Criminal Office; he said his name was Shpyn, and told me, 'I have come from near Astrakhan,' and handed me a note from a Cossack captain who goes by the name of Vaska Uss, which said:

> " 'I implore the great tsar to grant an amnesty to me and to the Cossack Shpyn, to forgive all our crimes and to permit us to serve you, the great tsar, in the ranks of the Don Cossack Force; for which I shall, in my turn, annihilate the bandit Stepan Razin.' "

"Have you brought the note with you?"

"No, sire, for the bandit snatched up the note as it lay on my table and tore it to shreds. When I turned upon him in anger, he said, 'I fear nothing! Do not ask me for more information than what I have already given you, if you wish Vaska and me to serve the tsar.' Immediately after, I interrogated the Cossacks concerning this Vaska Uss, sire, and have also found an old document at the Foreign Office. Herein it is stated that Vaska Uss has been guilty of criminal offences against the senior Cossack Assembly as well as against the great sovereign. One of his crimes is that, while in the tsar's service, he sacked villages and hamlets all along the road. At the moment when the man Shpyn tore up the note, doubts assailed me, sire, and I therefore thought it wiser to refer the matter to you and receive your orders as to what had best be done about this Cossack."

"We are living in troublous times, boyar. Whosoever shows that he is a foe of Stepan Razin should be attracted by kindness, be he a Cossack captain, a Tatar or a Cheremniss. So you must install the Cossack Shpyn in one of our hostelries, provide him and his horse with food such as is allotted to all the Don Cossacks. As concerns the services offered us by the said Vaska Uss, this will have to be debated separately when we are gathered together in full council."

"I shall see that all your orders are carried out, sire."

"Another item on the agenda for today, boyars, is the following: I sat in council with our most holy patriarch today, and our holy father pointed out that the time was ripe for the renegade Stepan Razin to have anathema pronounced upon him. What is your opinion in this affair, boyars?"

"If you, sire, in council with the most holy patriarch, have come to a decision on the subject, then it is not for us to intervene."

"The most holy patriarch advised me to assemble certain wise men and ask their opinion."

"Such an event would strike terror into the hearts of the menials. My advice, therefore, is that boyar Artamon Sergeievich, who is a learned man, should consult his books and likewise look up what foreign customs are in such matters."

"Ivan Petrovich is right, Artamon Sergeievich."

"Sire, if I may be permitted to speak, I can say that I have read many works about foreign peoples, their religions and customs, and have questioned numerous foreigners, but nowhere have I found such ferocious methods as those used by the Persians."

"But then, boyar, they are infidels. How can infidels know anything about pronouncing anathema on a person?"

"Well, sire, at the feast of Bairam-Oshur or the Day of the Assassination of the Prophet or the Day of Moharrem, the Persians place the effigy of the assassin on horseback, complete with bows and arrows in their quivers; they lead the horse round the town amid a great multitude of people, and each member of the crowd spits on or strikes the effigy. After much manhandling of the effigy of the Prophet's assassin, it is taken into a field and publicly burned. Is not this a form of anathematization?"

"It is most certainly, boyar Artamon. But the patriarch abhors anything resembling such mummery."

"The patriarch will see in the effigy the image of the damned whom the priests have triumphed over."

"Artamon Sergeievich, you should have said 'the clergy'. Your story about

the effigy, so it seems to me, is not inappropriate. What do you say, Ivan Petrovich?"

"The pronouncement of anathema in combination with an effigy, sire, would be more terrifying to the common people."

"Therefore let us have an effigy dressed up as the rebel. Now I want to know, Artamon Sergeievich, when you are likely to invite me and the princesses to some play-acting?"

"Very soon, sire. A special pavilion is being erected with the utmost speed in the village of Kolomensk for this purpose."

"Resume your seats, boyars. You, Ivan Petrovich, and you, boyar Artamon, let us all now hear the secretary's report concerning the strange woman mentioned a little while ago."

Efim rose.

"Great sovereign! My benefactor, the late Pafnuti Vasilievich boyar Kivrin, spoke to me of this woman Irenetsa on the memorable day of his death, on which he was about to set forth in defence of the truth against the late Ivan Kvashnin. . . ."

"What old scores are you raking up, secretary?"

"These are the words my benefactor spoke, sire: 'Efim, betake yourself to the musketeers' settlement and visit a woman named Irenetsa—the woman whose house stands on a burnt-out site—and see whether she harbours any brigands or has any connection with the robbers captured today in the empty German homestead outside the Nikitski Gate.' But, sire, in my overwhelming grief, and amid all the various duties and rites concerning Pafnuti Vasilievich's death, the matter entirely escaped my memory and I failed to carry out my benefactor's instructions. It was invariably my custom, sire, to fulfil all my benefactor's wishes faithfully and without delay. Great sovereign, I beg of you to command me to carry them out now. Many a time has the boyar appeared to me in dreams and signified his displeasure by shaking his head reproachfully at me, but I could not guess in what way I had sinned against him. Now I realize fully. I shall investigate everything which concerns this woman and present a full report to whomsoever you, sire, shall designate."

"Is it not too late in the day, secretary? I do not interfere in such matters, but leave all decisions in the hands of the boyar Ivan Petrovich. I shall abide by this arrangement."

"Sire, I have no objection to secretary Efim Bogdanov, Kivrin's son, conducting such an investigation. The woman's case is not proven; the shots, maybe, were fired by tipsy rioters or dragoons—especially since the spot is an uninhabited one. Let the secretary take with him a few of the city musketeers and make a search. Thus the secretary will atone for his omission and pay due respect to the memory of his patron boyar Pafnuti Kivrin. The old man had a genuine love for the tsar and Russia. And while I am speaking, sire, will you be so gracious as to release me from the handling of affairs of brigandage? The post is coveted by prince Odoyevski, and Romodanovski also has his eye on it."

"No, boyar! I want you to wait a little while before handing in your resignation. Another post will be found for prince Odoyevski. In such times as these we need every available service. This is no moment to displace governors from office."

The boyar rose to his feet, stubbornly nodding his head in its tall, flat-crowned hat; he bowed profusely and repeated over and over again:

"Be not wrathful, sire! Release your servant; release him, sire!"

"I must go, boyars. Come and share my meal. You must also join us at the board, Secretary of State. An invitation must be issued to some of the privy councillors, since there are many affairs of military importance to review."

The tsar, holding up the skirts of his brocade garment, slowly rose and moved away.

## 4

Lazunka crossed the Moskvoretski Bridge. He was debating within his mind:

"Shall I go to Ivanov Square? It is there that rumour will be rife."

Looking round, the boyar's son sighted the familiar bath-house. The walls bulged more than ever; the windows, stuffed with bath-brooms, were nearly level with the ground.

"That's where father Stepan met me with a sword-thrust. How different things are now! I wonder if he misses me? He stood up for a trollop at that time and was caught. . . ."

Behind the bath-house, a little way along the bank, stood a tavern. People from the bath-house, with bath-brushes tucked in their bosoms, turned in at the public bar, and those on their way to the suburbs did not pass it by.

"All said and done, a tavern is as good a place for gossip as Ivanov Square. I can find out all I want to know there as well as anywhere."

Disguised by Irenetsa in a half-length coat and a grey apron, Lazunka looked like a small shopkeeper.

The day was sunless, a pall of grey cloud obscuring the light. On the counter, therefore, candles burned. The publican hated the darkness, for he was short-sighted and therefore feared to miscalculate the takings. As he gave the change he thumbed each coin and held it up to the light.

"Why not bite it?"

"Hold your tongue. Have I asked you for advice? Surely you must know that for every mistake a publican makes he gets the whip on his back at the great execution place."

"That would not do you any harm! You've grown such a belly and are so gross that you'd not feel it much. Besides, how can you avoid making a mistake when your back parlour is full of women?"

"Are you by any chance appointed controller of taverns? Even the real controller has not a word to say against me."

"I'm a drinker, and am just talking to you to give my tongue a bit of exercise."

"Then don't crow so much. Be you cock or cockerel, the Devil will jump down your throat. Six kopeks—six, I say! Pay, you devil."

"Take them, you old skinflint."

The doors leading to the back parlour stood wide open. Inside, round the gaping black stove, the tavern women were huddled for warmth. These were the younger and better-dressed girls. Townswomen, in search of their husbands, also frequented the place. The husbands, once found, would ply their womenfolk

with intoxicating drinks and then make for the back parlour with their wives. The public-house jades would tell the townswomen's fortune by palmistry or with cards. Some sang songs. Lazunka was asked to move farther along the seat he occupied; the long table became overcrowded, and the ancient benches creaked and groaned beneath the weight of new arrivals. Drinks were spilled over the table.

A shrill voice was heard behind Lazunka:

"Hi, brother drinkers, can't you make room for Ersh?"

"Squeeze yourselves a bit more so that Ersh Ershovich can have a seat. Ersh has never been a secretary and was dismissed when he was a clerk. We can at least make room for him in the tavern."

The rubicund drinkers on the bench opposite Lazunka squeezed themselves together. A man with quick, thievish eyes and a moustache, which moved up and down as swiftly as blackbeetles, took his seat at the table. His head was covered with tufts of fair hair.

"Now then, cupbearer, give us a jug of frothy liquor."

Taking the money, the potman brought the liquor.

"Where have you been swimming, Ersh—what pikes did you meet with?"

"Let me have a drink first, brothers. Then I shall tell you the whole story without interruption, so that those who were present in the Kremlin yesterday, and those who were not, may get the proper sequence."

"Not everyone has the time to spare."

"Some are deterred by fear. They know what the floggings are like in Ivanov Square."

"Only those who steal public funds need have any fear."

"Now listen! It was proclaimed from the tsar's bedchamber that the ataman Stepan Razin is an apostate and that he is to be anathematized today by the priests."

"Well, upon my word!"

"I actually heard the words, and I also heard how the boyars and princes are to be summoned to go to the Volga and fight Razin."

"But the nobles have no liking for warfare."

"This time they have been ordered to do as they are told, and with threats. The secretary read: 'Go and fight for your sovereign and for your homes. Those nobles who refuse to fight, and stay at home—such will be deemed recreants and will have their estates confiscated. Such estates will be handed over to the men who make a stand against the brigands.'"

"Who went to the review of troops which the tsar held on the Devicheye Plain?"

"What would have been the use of going? None are allowed near enough to see anything. Today's review was not of nobles and princes, but of cavalry and peasant levies."

Suddenly there was the boom of a cannon; the shelves in the public house shook, and the vessels tinkled.

"Hear that? Come along, lads."

A party of drinkers left the tavern; the men seated at the table never budged.

"There's plenty of time."

From the same direction, beyond the Moskva river, came the rattle of carbine and musket fire.

"What does this firing mean?"

"Well, you see, the mounted men and the foot soldiers are firing in the tsar's presence. The German colonels and lieutenants are showing how well they have trained the men."

"The review of the boyars is a separate affair," remarked Ersh. "They are building a large house for the reception of the great dignitaries and the nobles. It's on the Devicheye Plain, and there is to be a throne installed for the tsar."

"I've been taking a look round. Some boyars with their retinues and kinsmen are rallying from all parts of the country wearing the armour and harness of their forbears."

"What's it like?"

"You never saw horses so richly caparisoned. Silver and gold from feet to head and ears; even the beasts' tails are bedecked with pearls."

"They'll drop some of that gold on the battlefield."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing were we to crawl about the field and see what we could pick up in the way of pearls; one might fill a cap with them. . . ."

"Better make for the Volga, otherwise the boyars will capture and impale us. . . ."

"Good pickings for us that would be."

A tipsy man wagged his head and boomed forth in a bass voice:

" 'Tis said, Orthodox Christians . . ."

"We're not learned! Just mere drinkers!"

"Listen, drinkers! 'Tis said that the degraded patriarch Nikon has taken up his abode with Stenka Razin. He comes——"

"Where did you get that rumour from?"

In a corner behind the barrels a tall, intoxicated man in monkish garb and a layman's felt hat stood clutching the topmost hoops of a cask; he was dozing, but at the sound of Nikon's name he raised his head and bellowed, while endeavouring to force his palsied hands to let go:

"Brethren! Not with the blessing of Christ, but with beating and stripes, do Nikon's adherents try to convert the people to their way of thinking. Ancient Orthodox Russia is being trampled upon by swine. Ah, woe is me, the faithful will be driven away to some far-off filthy hole!"

The publican called out:

"Potman, turn this devil out. He can wag his tongue elsewhere."

"I shall say no more."

The tall fellow emerged from behind the barrels and went to the door. On the threshold he swept off his hat with a flourish and, pitching his voice to a lower key, bawled:

"Brethren! He who sides with our archpriest Avvakum is a servant of Christ; those who work for Nikon are devils." And with these words he disappeared.

"May your throat be slit, you devil!" shouted the publican.

Lazunka sipped his mead leisurely while eyeing the women. The back parlour was becoming livelier and livelier. The women had ceased to tell fortunes, and were now chatting, singing and arguing. One of them sang a wedding song in a mournful voice:

"Into our house a young bride is led,
In our store-room coffers are spread . . ."

She clapped her hands and continued in her drunken voice, jerking her head the while in its dirty fustian coif:

"In our stables the horses are fed,
With iron clamps the coffers are bound,
Of latten the locks are yellow-red,
And the keys are of gold to astound.
Of cotton are made the many hose,
Of finest leather the pretty shoes . . ."

Another woman, small, lean and as tipsy as the first, was talking to a third, a hefty young one with a jug in her hand:

"And would you believe it, dearie, as we drove with the bride . . ."

"With the bride? That's a good one! The bride!"

"Well, dearie, we were acting as go-betweens, and two of us were chosen, dearie, and who should enter our closet but the witch in person."

"Beware of mentioning such folk," the publican remonstrated.

At this rude warning the woman lowered her voice:

"And she ordered us, dearie, into her own closet and bade us stretch ourselves flat on the ground. She then stuck a candle in the corner and lit it, but there was no ikon to be seen. It was kind o' darksome in her closet, and the witch held a hatchet in her hands. . . ."

"Woman, I have warned you. Read the notice on the stove," the publican repeated in a loud voice.

"Best not tell any fibs here; drink!"

"Your health, dearie! You, too, must have a drink. There, that's as it should be. God be with you, I am not lying. The witch walked all round us as we lay on the floor and banged her hatchet just behind me. 'Oh,' thought I, 'she will chop off my gown.' It was a long gown with gold trimmings——"

"She's never had such clothes in her life," came from someone else.

"You hold your tongue. You're no better than the rest of us. Well, dearie, the witch walked round me a second and a third time, tapping with her hatchet and mumbling charms while we lay quite still. Then she fetched a spruce log, cut out the pithy heart of it and withdrew from the closet. So off we went after her, dearie, in her very footsteps. She stuck this core of the log into the bridegroom's boot. Then we drove away with the bride, dearie. Also . . ."

The singing wench was joined by another, and they started a new song, lifting shrill voices in their duet. One of them began to dance, humming, while the other sang the refrain:

"Oh, sweet mother mine,
Oh, how joyful!
Here my lover comes
Bringing presents.
Welcome, darling mine,
Best, most precious. . . ."

The publican urged on his servant:

"Keep an eye on the drink money!" And then he passed into the women's parlour.

Everyone stopped singing and dancing to bow as he entered. The most intoxicated shrilled:

"Kiss Feofanushka on his bald patch!"

"Look here, wenches, you are mischievous jades and reprobates. I would see to it that you got a good talking-to in broad daylight. Why don't you read the tsar's and the patriarch's epistle?"

"Where can it be read, Feofanuskha?"

"There it is, nailed to the wall."

"You read it to us; none of us can read."

"Potman, bring a candle."

Taper in hand, the publican drew his finger along the lines and stammered out the words on the paper which hung behind the stove, where blackbeetles were busy rustling about:

> " 'Decree issued by the great sovereign in conjunction with the most holy patriarch, and addressed to all the publicans placed in the tsar's taverns. A widespread increase of drunkenness has been observed among all conditions of men, also acts of a rebellious nature, such as mockery and buffoonery with every conceivable malpractice. A great frenzy has arisen among Orthodox Christians, through the evil of these disciples of Satan. . . . Sundry, forgetting God, have followed in the footsteps of these buffoons. . . Wherefore be it known that none who practise such mockery, travesty and buffoonery shall be admitted to the tsar's taverns.' "

The publican turned on the women and said:

"Yet what are you devilish women doing here in my private parlour? You disobey the tsar's decree by dancing, singing, telling fortunes and talking about witchcraft."

"Well, you need not vent your spleen on us, Feofanushka."

"At closing-time any of us you may choose will go along with you and, if you feel so disposed, will to bed with you."

"She-devils! Speak softly! There's many who might peep in here, and the tsar with his troops will ride past any moment now. So don't drink too much, or you'll turn into glass, and what will be the use of you then?"

Lazunka had meant to leave long ere this, and had only approached to have a look at the women. He stood sideways, leaning against the doorpost and peering into the parlour. As the publican was going out he collided with Lazunka. His pale, red-lidded, protruding eyes glared, and his goatee trembled as he shouted:

"You unbaptized, blackavized scoundrel, what are you after here? Thief! Brigand!"

Lazunka had firmly determined on picking no quarrels whatsoever with anyone, so he retreated without saying a word. The drinkers were elbowing their way out. Priests, carrying a cross and ikons, were crossing the bridge; the tsar rode at the head of his troops after having held his review on the Devicheye Plain. The choir was dressed in lilac cassocks, and following them came two boyars' sons in mail coats and morions, beating kettledrums, which swung from a strap at their sides and were ornamented with tassels, fringes and bells. Behind these rode the corpulent tsar in a surtout of scarlet velvet with gold-embroidered sleeves, sides and hem. Dangling from a gold sash was a knife in

a curved silver sheath, studded with gems, which were fashioned into flowers. His cap was similar to those worn by the musketeers, but with the crown of sable. In the tsar's rear, to right and to left, according to rank, rode two voivodes: the chief, prince Yuri Dolgoruki, and his assistant, Scherbatov. Both were grey-haired men and were attired in old-fashioned, dark-blue cloaks fastened on the right shoulder with metal clasps. The voivodes were followed by district marshals in red kaftans with high collars, which spread out behind like wings. The crack regiment of musketeers, mounted on white horses and dressed in crimson coats, scarves tied crosswise over the chest and yellow boots, came next. Muskets were fastened to their saddles; their swords hung from one side, while on the other were bows and quivers of arrows. Their caps were of lynx fur. Next came the elected marshals from the districts, cavaliers in armour with helmets or morions. The dragoons were similarly attired, but had, in addition, lances and axes attached to the saddle. Behind these came the militia, mounted on a motley collection of horses, soldiers from the towns and rural communities. Each had been provided with a sword, a brace of pistols and a carbine. Behind the mounted militia walked the infantry, clad in rough peasant overcoats, single-breasted coats and bast footgear. Some had arquebuses, others staves, axes or bows and arrows. The rear was brought up by the artillery, which consisted of ten brass pieces and three of iron. Gun-carriages plodded behind with the gunners beside them in dark blue uniform. The artillery was led by a portly commander in a blue kaftan with a boyar's silver decorations on his chest and gilt pendants on his sash. A beaver cap sat jauntily on his head; he rode a black charger. Arrived at the bridge, the artillery halted so that the gun-carriages could catch up. Lazunka made his way through the crowd and reached the bridge. When the artillery officer came to a halt, the regimental clerk cantered up to him on a short-legged, stocky roan, shouting:

"Listen, gunnery leader!"

"What is it?"

"Please grant me a favour. Time is too short to go to your office."

"What's the favour?"

"To take this order and hand it to the secretaries."

"You can read it to me here. Certain orders are liable to get a man into trouble. So much I know."

The clerk doffed his cap, took out a sheet of paper and, holding it in one hand and his cap in the other, read:

> "'To receive at the Ordnance Office a consignment of powder, lead, cannon-balls and a complete gunnery equipment.'"

The commander asked:

"Is there a list?"

"Yes, at the end of the order there is a full register together with the necessary transport to be claimed from the secretary Grigori Volkov."

"I know the man."

"The secretary knows from which posting stations to commandeer the carts. The load is to be a quarter of a ton each."

"Of course, it is not correct to accept documents on the public highway, but in this instance we have nothing else to do. In any case, the business is to our benefit. . . ."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

The clerk, having delivered the order, put on his cap and rode across the Moskvoretski Bridge. The crowd surged in his wake, and Lazunka was carried along with its stream. In an open space on the other side of the river, near the new Church of Grigori Neocesarea, the exterior of which was gilded and painted in different colours, a burly, moustached and purple-faced German was drilling a company of spearmen in forged armour. The brightly polished brass sparkled at every cumbersome movement. Sweat poured down the broad faces of the soldiers, but the captain gave the men no respite.

The sinewy German, his brass morion tied under his chin with blue tape from the ear-shields, shouted continuously:

"Hold that spear correctly, you rascal! Now, one—two; you clumsy fellow! Spearmen have to look smart; your king pays you double as spearmen. Look how I do the movement. One—two. You say your armour is heavy? That is not so. Your morions are too big and have no ties under the chin? Hi, officer!"

A shabbily dressed captain stepped from the ranks.

"Officer! The spearmen of your platoon don't know how to fight—that they don't. Now then, one—two! Hold your spear in your hand thus—thus; place the blunt end on the ground. Left wheel, rascals! Left—right, hand on sword! So-o-o, one—two, attack!"

The townsfolk hastened to the Kremlin. Lazunka heard:

"The pronouncement of anathema on Razin will soon begin."

Lazunka began to thread his way back.

## 5

Day was drawing to a close; bells began to ring; the crowds, pressing into the Kremlin, became denser and denser. Inside the Kremlin the raised, covered pathway leading from the tsar's palace to the cathedral was overlaid with red felt. In the square itself there was so much mud that it stuck to the feet. No one was to be seen in front of the government offices, except two thieves who were being flogged outside the Criminal Office and four publicans who stood in single file outside the Treasury Office. The latter were letting down their trousers to be flogged where they stood. A scribe deputizing for the clerk counted the strokes and proclaimed the crimes for which they were being punished. Near the block lay the ledgers and accounts dealing with the drink money. The executioner, in his three-quarter-length velveteen coat, administered the final stroke to the publican at the end of the queue.

"Bah! You long-beards, you have been the cause of my working overtime. See, all the other executioners have gone home."

Having adjusted their trousers, the men picked up their ledgers and made for the Red Square with faltering gait. One of them moaned:

"I was only a trifle short of the scheduled quota of drink money, and that was the governor's fault. But the clerks believe the governor and mistrust us."

"I got my flogging for nothing, but thought it wiser not to protest."

A third added:

"Now I know what Ivanov Square means. This is my first whipping."

The fourth and last remarked as he shivered:

"Better not boast. In our job a man gets skinned for no fault at all. The voivodes with their taxes have scared away the people, so where are tipplers to be found? That is why the taverns are short of profit."

Lazunka drew back to make way for the beaten publicans and went towards the churches. A very old boyar was walking along the pavement in the direction of the Uspenski Cathedral. A crier with a kettledrum tried to avoid treading on the old man's toes. When the boyar came to a stop he ordered:

"Inform the people!"

The crier beat the drum, and when this had ceased he proclaimed:

"People of the Orthodox Church! Today in the Uspenski Cathedral the godless ruffian, apostate and thief Stepan Razin will have anathema pronounced upon him. The great sovereign has issued orders that you are all to be present, but you are not to step with your muddy boots on the covered pathway. Furthermore, the great sovereign has decreed that the mounted retinues of princes and boyars are to ride in an orderly fashion and take up their stand behind the Ivanov Belfry until the conclusion of the ritual and to refrain from causing annoyance to the people or using bad language. He who disobeys the will of the great sovereign Alexei Mihailovich will be flogged more mercilessly than a thief."

The crier, accompanied by the boyar, entered the cathedral. Soon thereafter came the tsar with his boyars. Lazunka stepped over the pavement, and, edging his way into the porch of the Uspenski Cathedral, was lost in the crowd of beggars and sundry other folk, who were pressed back by the boyars into a dark corner. When the tsar and his court had passed into the fane, various persons were allowed to enter. At first the churchwarden refused to permit people flock in indiscriminately, but the tsar's favourite boyar, Matveyev, said severely:

"Be off with you! The common people are to see and hear everything."

Lazunka, working his strong elbows to right and left, managed to reach about half-way down the cathedral, which was gloomy and austere with its paintings of saints on the walls and arches. Vapour rose from the vast assembled crowd, mingling with the fume of incense. Candles glimmered faintly here and there. Only at the altar, thick candles, standing by the cross, shed their light on the gold and silver chandelier, the crosses and the vestments. The royal gates leading to the altar opened. The service was stilled. Alone the reader continued to drone out the psalms, but even his voice was drowned in the darkness, in the sighs and prayers of those who had not interrupted their devotions. Someone beside Lazunka whispered:

"They are changing vestments."

The tsar stood on a raised dais on the side of the chapel. Slightly below the dais, but above the crowd, the princes and boyars were assembled.

Priests in black vestments and holding lighted tapers in their hands issued forth from the altar doors. They were followed by monks in black habits and cowls. The congregation withdrew as far as possible to allow room for the clergy to form a circle in the centre of the church. A painted wooden effigy, dressed as a Cossack wearing a sword at its side, seemed to Lazunka to appear from nowhere in particular. The effigy bore no resemblance to the ataman. One of the priests intoned a psalm in stentorian tones. The priests turned their tapers downwards, and the wax dribbled on to the floor. The choir of monks sang slowly and sternly:

"To the apostate and rob-ber, Don Cos-sack Ste-pan Ra-zin."

And the choir responded in unison:

"A-na-the-ma!"

A bishop in black vestments and mitre came through the altar door leaning on a black staff. Slowly and solemnly he descended the steps of the ambo until he reached the circle, the clergy and choir making a passage for him. The bishop touched the effigy on the chest with his crozier and declared in a voice loud enough to be heard throughout the church:

"The robber Stepan Razin is accursed!"

"Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!" came in response from the choir.

"Now and for ever and ever, the robber Stenka Razin is accursed!"

"Anathema! Anathema!" repeated the choir.

Again the bishop struck the effigy's chest with his crozier:

"The apostate and robber Stenka Razin is accursed! Anathema!"

"Anathema," the choir chanted sombrely.

For the third time the bishop struck Razin's image, and the words re-echoed from the arches:

"Begone, accursed apostate, heretic and robber Stenka Razin! Anathema!"

The choir responded:

"This is the day when Judas forsook his master and embraced the Devil."

Razin's effigy was hauled by the priests and choir into the Ivanov Square, where a bonfire was already lit beyond the pavement near the Ivanov Belfry. A hirsute executioner raised the effigy above his head and hurled it into the flames.

Bells tolled mournfully. In the dusk, groups of boyars could be discerned walking in the tsar's wake out of the cathedral. Lazunka, as he made for his night's shelter, heard exclamations on every side:

"He's damned!"

"Razin is excommunicated!"

"Excluded from the entire Christian community!"

"God preserve us from such a fate!"

"Is it not a terrible thing, brothers?"

## 6

Lazunka refused both food and drink. Irenetsa lay on her bed pale and exhausted. Her son had been in the cathedral without seeing Lazunka. The boy, knowing nothing of the truth, called Razin a robber and rebel, telling his mother about the burning of the effigy and about the anathema. Though Irenetsa wept, she did not tell her son the truth, and the boy went out. Lazunka sat at the table with drooping head.

"Listen, my dear. It will be a bad lookout if the people desert Stepanushka. My old grandad foretold him this more than once in days gone by."

"It will not matter in the least if the people forsake him, hostess. What would be really serious is if the Don Cossacks and the Yaik folk listen to the priests and abandon the Razin forces."

"That would, indeed, be a terrible misfortune, dear."

"But ere the priests' growl reaches Yaik and the Don we shall be in Moscow with the ataman."

"God grant that what you say may prove true. The tsar is rallying a great many soldiers, and Vasili says that the Germans are drilling them day after day."

"I saw that myself."

"The sickness has come upon me again since I heard the news of this fresh menace to my beloved, and my legs are like water. If you do not wish for any food, at least have a drink of something strong."

"I have no time to lose, hostess. I hear somebody coming."

"Creep into the secret chamber. . . ."

The boyar's son stepped lightly behind the stove and disappeared into the underground room, where the oil-lamp continued to shed its amber light. Lazunka fastened the trapdoor, took off his boots and remained sitting on the steps to hear what would happen overhead.

"Now then, fellow, lead the way."

The voice sounded strange and authoritative.

The boy's voice was heard saying: "Wait a moment, secretary. My mother is ailing and is often asleep; I shall wake her."

"See here, my lad. I am not alone. Show us the way. I'll go quietly so as not to startle her."

"Be it as you please, but you'd better stoop a bit."

Irenetsa was dozing when the secretary sat down heavily at the table opposite. Her son said:

"Mother, here's a secretary with musketeers. Look up."

Irenetsa gave a start, and her wide, frightened eyes slowly turned on her visitor. A secretary in her home—why? He had on a black coat; round his neck was a wide pearl stole, from which dangled a gold pendant in the shape of an eagle with outspread talons. In his hand he held a staff. He addressed the stripling:

"You go out, my lad, and fetch the musketeers in from the yard. I want them in the vestibule. If you have any strong liquor in the house, let them have some. None shall trouble us with the night coming on. I must have a talk with your mother."

As he was going out, the youth asked:

"You do not mean to harm her, do you? She is a sick woman."

"Be easy, my lad; just do as I told you. Don't tell the musketeers anything about the house. Hold your tongue."

The boy nodded his head and went out.

The secretary took off his beaver hat and stood it upright on the table; then he blew out one of the candles in the chandelier so as not to be dazzled by its light, smoothed his long, greying hair and began to speak calmly and softly:

"Do not be troubled in your mind, Irenetsa. Can you hear me?"

"I can, secretary."

"Do you recognize me or not? It was I who, long ago, saved you from boyar Kivrin's torture chamber, and who, moreover, prevented a search being made of your house by the secretary of the Criminal Office. I have now persuaded the tsar to entrust this investigation to me."

"Oh, secretary, what can there be to investigate about a sick woman?"

"People with calumnious minds will invariably find something to investigate. Reports have reached us that you conceal Stenka Razin's men. You must forbid them to come here. I shall search the place and send in a report that nothing has been found. But suppose they disbelieve my report, and others come and

make a search? Take measures that you may not be caught. We are going through troublous times. What good will it do you to be shackled and flogged?"

"Oh, secretary, how good of you to warn me!"

"There is nothing to thank me for. You may or you may not know that I fell in love with you at that time so long ago. But you had given your heart to another. When the late boyar burnt your breasts I was overcome with the pity I felt for you, and that pity is with me to this day. I honour the boyar's memory for all the kindness he displayed towards me and for all he taught me. So you must not curse him for the wrong he did you. Rather should you pray for him."

"I have never cursed him, secretary Efim . . . I am sorry, but I do not know your patronymic."

"It is Pafnutich. The boyars call me Bogdanich, as if I were a gift from God. I do not like the boyars."

"What? Yet you sit so near the tsar?"

"True, I do, but I keep my eyes open. There have been secretaries who have been in the tsar's confidence and yet they have been seized and exiled by the boyars—some to Bielo-Ozero and others to Siberia. Not a few have had a taste of the lash."

"The sovereign tsar will not allow any harm to come to you."

"Well, you see, when the boyars bring pressure to bear, anyone, be he secretary or patriarch, may have to suffer. Remember what happened to Nikon. He was a most intimate friend of the tsar, yet he was exiled to Bielo-Ozero, and 'tis rumoured that he may be sent still farther afield. The boyars esteem only those who belong to their own class. We, who belong to the common people, are considered enemies. The boyars dislike me because my mother was a serf in domestic service. They respect the memory of my late benefactor, and thus they have tolerated me so far. The movement which Stenka Razin has started" —the secretary paused a moment before adding in a low voice—"I approve of this movement. But anyone who should come to know that your son was begotten by Razin would betray you because all the children of brigands are being done away with. So far the boyars have no suspicion. I cannot take such a sin upon me as to betray you. If you can spare the lad, give him into my keeping. I shall train him to be a menace to the boyars. I have accumulated enough wealth to last me my lifetime. There are only my wife and me, so your boy would be no bother to us."

"Oh, secretary, how can I thank you? Day and night I worry about what is going to happen to my son. I am an invalid, and were I to die, where could such a young boy go? His fate is always on my mind."

"Give him to me. Nothing but good will come of it."

"If, when I am dead, you will look after him and teach him, you will earn my everlasting gratitude, and so long as I live I shall pray for the boyar who burnt out my breasts."

"That's right, pray for him! He needs your prayers. I shall not forget your son, but shall teach him to read and write. I shall adopt him because, just as the boyars look on me as a bastard, so will he be also, and such folk have no place in this world."

"I do not know how to thank you. But my Vasili is no pauper. I have plenty of clothes and jewels for him."

"I have enough of my own."

"Do you think, secretary, that Razin will reach Moscow?"

"The people are expecting him. Not only the common folk, but small shopkeepers, artisans, junior clergy . . . all are waiting. But Razin will never get as far as Moscow. It is impossible to pit his peasantry against the might of the tsar's army. Razin's men fight with fists, pitchforks, scythes, whereas the tsar's men possess a vast quantity of arms and ammunition; yet more important, the tsar's soldiers are being trained by expert foreigners; all of them receive special rations and pay. Their one and only profession is that of making war. They hire themselves out to any country which is willing to wage war. . . ."

The secretary rose and put on his cap.

"Irenetsa, you have nothing to be frightened about. I am going to call in the musketeers and have the search made."

The secretary knocked on the door and called in a loud voice:

"Come here, musketeers!"

The little door was thrown open, and Irenetsa's room was filled with dark blue coats, grey caps, sparkling halberds.

Efim drew himself to his full height and ordered in strict and formal way:

"Make a quick search, tsar's men. I have examined the woman."

One of the musketeers asked:

"Shall we summon the youngster, secretary, in case he should bolt?"

"Yes, and keep him inside the room under guard."

Another musketeer spoke in defence:

"He won't run away, secretary. He is a lad of fine address."

The secretary answered:

"The law lays it down that the lad must be present."

Vasili was called in. He sat on a bench between two musketeers. Three others set about the search. Irenetsa said:

"You see that large cupboard by the window; open it; it leads to a kind of annexe. Better search it. There is no one here, and neither do I conceal anything."

The room smelled of drink, tobacco and tar. The search took a long time. At length the secretary and musketeers emerged from the annexe. In the front room they removed the ikons from their places on the wall, examined everything and looked underneath the benches.

"No one and nothing," reported the musketeers who had taken part in the search.

Seating himself at the table, the secretary unfolded a sheet of paper and began to write. Without looking at Irenetsa, he inquired:

"Have you any secret places about the house, woman?"

"There is a cellar under the vestibule."

"Search the cellar, musketeers."

"We have already done so, secretary. Pray do not be vexed with us, but there was some strong drink down there, and we took a draught or two. Would you yourself like some? There's plenty."

"No, you may have my share."

The secretary finished his writing and asked:

"Which among you lads can read and write?"

"Three, namely Grishka, Kuzma and Ivan Kozyrev."

"Sign this paper and let us be going. It is late."

Before leaving, Efim gently stroked Irenetsa's hair.

"Remember, Irenetsa, I shall train the lad. Let me know when the time comes. And pray forbid any evildoer to come here. I warn you that there may be another search."

Raising his cap, he crossed himself, took up his staff and left the room, accompanied by Irenetsa's son. The musketeers stood swearing in the vestibule as they fumbled for the door. The boy, candle in hand, guided them to the rear of the warehouses. The musketeers had carried away the casks of home-brew they had found in the vestibule.

"At least we have not toiled for nothing," remarked one of them. Another voice replied from behind as the men swung the casks along:

"Would that we were more often as lucky. Nothing wrong with the house and plenty of home-brew."

"He's a fine stripling, that woman's son."

"Grisha has stolen a crimson summer gown, brothers."

"Hush, or the secretary will hear you."

"The secretary has gone."

"I may have taken the gown, but I drank sparingly."

"Oh, do shut up! The others pilfered, too."

Voices and men became engulfed in the dusk of the narrow suburban streets. Irenetsa's son listened long to the retreating steps of the musketeers, and then returned home. He made straight for the concealed door and shouted:

"Come out, good guest. All's clear."

Lazunka emerged, dressed for the journey.

Irenetsa said:

"I am afraid they may come again in the night. Sleep here, my darling, or the night watchman will catch you. Besides, the barriers are down."

"Even if they tried iron padlocks, Moscow could not hold me; much less will the barriers prove a hindrance. Thank you, hostess, for all you have done for me. Give me a message to convey to Timofeievich."

Irenetsa did not move, but began to weep. Then, through her tears:

"Good guest, say these words to my falcon: 'I love you unto death.' Why are you going away without taking supper? Faintness will overtake you on the road."

"Moscow has fed me to satiety. Farewell!"

"If ever you return, come here and stay with us."

Irenetsa's son accompanied Lazunka as far as the warehouses. Here they embraced.

"Learn swordplay and how to shoot. Be like your father and love freedom."

The boyar's son quickly disappeared. The boy was left musing:

"I wonder who my father can be? This guest, after all, told me nothing."

## 7

During his wanderings through Moscow Lazunka had discovered that the barrier leading to the German settlement was never secured. While in their cups, German officers had not infrequently beaten the watchmen. The tsar had ordered

that "the foreigners were not to be restrained", and the watchmen had ceased to guard the gates. Lazunka, therefore, made for the suburb, which was filled with the sound of unknown songs with an accompaniment of a hand-organ issuing from a brightly lit little house. The boyar's son caught sight of a Cossack, who, seeing Lazunka, waited by the gate.

At first Lazunka was pleased at meeting with one of his companions, but when he saw the face with its scar across the forehead, and recognized Shpyn, he immediately became alert. He thought:

"The father did not send him to Moscow."

On reaching the barrier the boyar's son likewise refrained from passing through the wicket. Shpyn, who never controlled his temper, shouted:

"Now then, robber, step along!"

"Why this abusive language? You're no better than anyone else."

Whenever Lazunka scented danger he endeavoured to keep exceptionally calm.

Shpyn, who was being liberally entertained at the tsar's expense in the hostelry, had made up his mind not to rejoin Razin.

"I am the tsar's servant," said he.

"He is bold and strong, but, unluckily for himself, obstinate," thought Lazunka, covertly adjusting his pistol.

"Since when have you become the tsar's man? You lie!"

"That's no business of yours."

"Go through first, you traitor to our cause."

"Musketeers! Musketeers! Razin! . . . ."

"You've made a serious mistake, you devil," exclaimed Lazunka, taking a step towards Shpyn. . . .

A pistol-shot resounded through the air, and Shpyn dropped before he had time to draw his blade; wriggling, he lay on the ground; there was a buzzing in his ears; blood flowed from his mouth; his hands clutched feverishly at the wicket. His right hand still gripped his sword, while his left reached towards the gate. With blackened and bloodstained face, Shpyn fell over and lay supine in the mud.

As the night swallowed him up Lazunka reflected:

"A bad piece of work. The pistol was of too light a calibre. I reckon the fellow may recover."

But there was no time to linger. A couple issued from the little house. The man was a tall officer in black uniform with his sword at his side; in the patchy light from the window the woman appeared to be gaily dressed. Seeing Shpyn's body, she cried:

"Oh God, what is this?"

"Nothing worth worrying about, dear Fräulein. Merely a tipsy dragoon has blasted his own mug. These Russians are not like us; they hide in the woods so as to escape war, for they are cowards; or else they sprawl about dead drunk awaiting the lash or imprisonment so as to avoid fighting."

"But, captain, he has a sword in his hand."

"That is not hard to explain, Fräulein. In their drunken sleep they dream of the Devil, who makes them angry. So they chase him away. When a dragoon is drunk he will, in his sleep, slash at tables, benches, and so on, till he drops down anywhere."

"Poor brutes!"

"Dear Fräulein, the cattle are not worthy of your pity. These are stupid, lazy and cruel people."

The captain in black uniform led his lady away from the gates into the darkness of the streets.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ASTRAKHAN

### 1

RAZIN sat on the steps of the Troitsa monastery chapel, drinking with his captains. The execution of noblemen, boyars and clerks had just taken place in the square of the stronghold; they had been beaten with sticks, musket-butts and poleaxes. The early-morning sun was reflected in the pools of blood. The bodies of the slain had not yet been removed, and the square was filled with the reek of death. Prince Ivan Prozorovski's corpse lay on the slope where it had been thrown; his arms were stretched wide apart, and his silver-plated mail was covered with blood; the prince's head, still in its cap, had fallen to one side and the dim eyes stared up at the sun.

Razin's black velvet kaftan was girt about the middle with a blue, tasselled belt. A sword swung at his side, and on his head he wore a red Cossack hat adorned with pearls. Casks of vodka were rolled to the broad porch by musketeers.

"Please drink, father."

"Here's your very good health, Stepan Timofeievich!"

Not far from the cathedral, women were weeping. Some had head-dresses covered with pearls, some wore velvet with gold bandeaux, some had embroidered kerchiefs. They stood or lay near the cathedral walls; the old wives of the executed boyars stared vacantly skywards. They muttered exorcisms and prayers.

The door of the chapel had been thrown wide in the rear of the ataman and his captains. From the depths of the church could be seen two very old and silent monks in black cowls embroidered with crosses and skulls. They were kindling the lights in the tall candelabra at the feet and the head of Saint Kirill. They were calmly crossing themselves, performing their tasks slowly, absolutely indifferent to what took place outside the shrine.

Stenka held a silver cup in one hand, raised his head and, with his left hand, pushed his hat to the back of his head as he shouted to the musketeers:

"Falcons! Cease killing and drag the dead to a pit in the courtyard of the monastery. Also I want you to find my priestly ambassador, down whose throat the late voivode thrust a gag before he hurled him into a pit."

"The Troitsa priest is alive, father. The monks were panic-stricken and set him free from the dungeon as you advanced on the city."

"That is good news."

A musketeer, his face and hands stained with blood, asked:

"We are taking the slain to the pit, father, but near by there is a monk counting the dead. Is that all right?"

"We do not conceal our deeds, and if it amuses the old fellow he can make a list of those he wishes to pray for. Well, Chikmaz, let us have another drink."

"Let's drink, father. We managed this business very well. That's the way to treat the nobility and their clerks! We should do it more often!"

"The loss of Astrakhan will remind them of the death of my father, Timofei, and my brother Ivan. Falcons! If you find any clerks who did not steal from the people, bring them to me."

Three clerks in long blue coats approached the chapel and uncovered.

"Are you clerks?"

The men bowed.

"Yes, father, we are clerks."

"Then go to the offices and keep an account of the drink money. Order some more wine and heady mead. When the Cossacks divide the spoils in the little town of Yamgurcheyev and set apart the share which belongs to me, I wish you to make a list of it and have the stuff taken to the warehouses. That being done, you must take a tally of the townsfolk, of those who are strong and fit to bear arms. Then make an inventory of the houses, together with the vineyards and cellars of the slain. Make a reckoning of how much corn and other provisions there are, see that trade flows smoothly and collect all the taxes."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, ataman."

"We are ready to carry out your wishes."

The clerks bowed, made the sign of the cross, looked happy and hurried away from the stronghold.

"One thing more, lads; shut all the gates of the town except the Nicholas, Red and Gorianski gates. One tavern is to be kept open, the one which leads into the stronghold and the town. The poor shall have their drink as they are wont. Hello, Fedka of Samara!"

"I am here, Stepan Timofeievich."

"Go with the clerks and check the drink money; also find the former publicans and bar-tenders. Find out which of them plundered and tell them to come and answer for their misdeeds. You are to be superintendent of the taverns instead of them. Those among the barmen who can prove that they were honest can retain their jobs."

"As you say, so will everything be done."

The black-moustached officer from Samara went off to do his chief's bidding.

Logs were dragged into the square, and axes were busily at work chopping them up. Gallows were being erected by carpenters.

The former favourite of the voivode, Piotr Alexeiev, was brought to the ataman. He had been unmercifully beaten. His red hair was dishevelled, and tears streamed down his face.

"Father, here is the voivode's head clerk. He managed his master's public purse."

"Are you Piotr Alexeiev?"

The clerk trembled as he replied:

"Please, father ataman, my name is not Piotr, but Alexei. I do not know why the voivode and clerks have persisted in calling me otherwise."

"What have you done with the voivode's money?"

"The voivode always sent the revenue to the tsar; even the musketeers' pay was doled out to them by the metropolitan here in Troitsa monastery."

"I have seen you before in my camp, when you were a musketeer. Do you remember Zhareni Bugry?"

"No good could come of it were I to conceal the fact. I am not a free man, and whatever the job the voivode gave me to do I was compelled to carry out."

"Do you further recall those clerks who wished to serve me, and how you wanted them to be sent to the torture chamber? But they managed to escape and became Cossacks."

"Do you refer to Mitka and Vaska? Well, they were lazy and not fit to be clerks. It was only the voivode's obstinacy which kept them at their post. They had nimble pens and read easily, but their minds were childish."

"You, of course, are perfect in everything, Piotr Alexeievich!"

"Alexei, please, ataman."

"Very well then, have it Alexei if you will. But even your name is double-faced. Would you like me to send you to Moscow?"

"Oh, Moscow! I have never seen it. I should greatly enjoy seeing the city."

"You will see enough of it before you die."

As the ataman drank with his captains he could see that the carpenters were making a good job of the gallows, which by now had the cross-beam on top. He pushed back his hat. Musketeers seized the clerk. Razin shouted:

"Let him gaze his fill on Moscow. Lift him high aloft!"

They tore off the man's kaftan and shirt and, thrusting into his side an iron hook, they swung him in the air. An old woman in black rushed towards the gallows, threw up her arms and screamed:

"Oh, my child! My little Alexei!"

"Ask them at least to bury my body, mother. Oh!"

"My child!"

"Falcons! Drive this woman away and tell her to come back tomorrow to bury the voivode's cur."

A young Persian boy the Cossacks had captured was brought to the stronghold. He swore in his native tongue, threatening somebody, shaking his fists and pointing in the direction of the Volga.

"This fellow, father, tried to escape with the Germans in the tsar's ship, *Eagle*. We burned the *Eagle*. The Germans took to the boats or swam in the sea, but this young fellow sat on the bank and wept."

"He is the son of a prince, the khan of Gilyan. His fate is to hang together with Alexei. Hello there, up with the khan's son!"

The prince was stripped, pushed towards the gallows, a hook thrust into his ribs, and he was lifted to the same level as Alexei.

"One more, father. He is probably a Persian merchant."

The musketeers and Cossacks pushed forward a man dressed in a cloak of pale blue velvet embroidered in gold with Arabic letters; his turban was of the same colour and flaunted a feather.

"I know him," laughed Razin, raising his cup. "Your health, Persian ambassador!"

"Drink it!"

"You fought against us by the torture chamber with your servants. You deserve to be hanged."

"God be merciful! If He thus wills it, ataman, so be it done."

"It is not a question of God's will, but mine—a wholly different matter. I wish you no harm. Falcons, where is his sword?"

From the porch Chikmaz emerged bearing in hand a sword with a golden hilt in a sheath adorned with wrought silver.

"It's a fine piece of work, but since Stepan Timofeievich so decides, take it, friend."

The ambassador took the sword.

"Go back to Persia and tell the shah that the ataman let you go, and he in turn must release the Cossack prisoners. I know that they are in dire distress in your country."

The ambassador bowed and turned to the interpreter, saying:

"Please ask the ataman to have my belongings returned to me."

Without looking at the interpreter, the ataman answered:

"Your belongings, ambassador, have been divided up among the Cossacks. I have no right to take from my people that which they have captured during a battle. Go as you are. Surely your life is more precious to you than any belongings?"

The ambassador bowed again and went his way.

"Musketeers! Bring forth the voivode's spawn, his sons."

"They are in hiding, father. You will find them in the metropolitan's house."

"Then go to the metropolitan and tell him that I have issued orders to yield up the boys."

The musketeers set off on their mission. In an hour's time the eldest Prozorovski approached the ataman. His coat was rumpled, he wore no hat, but his long hair was smoothly combed.

"Where is your younger brother?"

"He is coming with the monks."

"Very good! Now tell me, you prince's spawn, where has your father hidden his money?"

"The clerk Alexeiev managed all his monetary affairs."

"He does so no longer. Look!"

Young Prozorovski turned towards the gallows. The clerk, doubled up with pain, was tugging at the rope and hook with his blue hands; on his hips was congealed blood.

"Do you see?"

"I know what has happened, so what need have I to look?"

"If you know as much as you would lead us to suppose, then tell us where the voivode kept his money."

"My father never had any money, and all his goods and chattels were stolen by your thievish captains. They took it off to Yamgurcheyev. Why do you fancy it is here when you have it already?"

"Are you the prince's son?"

"You know I am, so why ask?"

"My family was exterminated by the boyars, and I intend to retaliate by exterminating the boyars, stock, root and branch. There are too many of you. So speedily have you multiplied that you swarm like blackbeetles in a warm cottage. Here! Hang the prince's offspring by the legs from the walls of the town."

Chikmaz rose and said:

"Father, I am an expert in this business. Allow me to deal with him."

He stepped up to the youth and, embracing him, whispered:

"Let us go, boy. Throw off your coat, it will only serve to impede the

hanging; bind your belly with your sash so that the blood will not flow too quickly to your head."

"Do your business and hold your tongue, hangman."

"So that's the kind of fellow you are?" hissed Chikmaz.

The monks brought the young Prozorovsky; he was in tears, and to stop his crying the Cossacks presented him with a honey-cake. He was a fair little boy in a blue silk kaftan and red leather shoes. He stared with frightened eyes at the drunken officers and the Cossacks with their spears and swords, but was too preoccupied to notice Razin. Only when the ataman spoke did he look at him.

"This one, too, must follow in his brother's footsteps."

The monks took the boy to the wall. The executioner followed with a rope.

"Summon the priests; they are all to stand here!"

The priests were collected from the houses belonging to the clergy, and if any of them resisted he was dragged by the hair and kicked in the back.

"Father has summoned you!"

The priests crowded round the chapel. Razin rose to his feet and, with his left hand on his hip, asked:

"Are you all priests?"

"We are, father."

"Well, you fathers, today you are to marry all these boyars' maids to my Cossacks. But should one of you refuse to perform the marriage rites he shall be put into a sack filled with stones and thrown into the Volga. Our Mother Volga will accept a priest as kindly as she does a Cossack. Have you heard?"

"We understand, ataman."

"Those old boyarinas who are not suitable to be wives are to be taken to the convent. You are to wait there until you are called upon to officiate. And you, Cossacks and brother musketeers, cast lots and take the young boyars' wives or daughters to wife as you do win."

"What a father you are, Stepan Timofeievich! Thank you!"

"We find the lack of a wife very irksome."

Razin found the weeping of the young boyarinas near the wall of the church irritating, so he shouted:

"You women and girls over there, I order you to sing wedding songs. That becomes the occasion."

Then he asked his officers:

"Why does one not hear the chimes of the clock?"

"Father," said Mishka Chernoshenko, "when you threw the voivode on the slope, the keeper of the timepiece was frightened and ran away. We can get the correct time by the sundial, which is in the other tower."

"Well, that will be near enough."

Musketeers and Cossacks took the boyars' wives and daughters out of the stronghold as they fell to their lot. Those who were leaving the square shouted boastfully:

"Today we shall break our celibacy!"

The captains and Razin continued to carouse in the porch. A thin tinkle of bells came from the chapel. People gathered round, but did not venture inside. Razin, noticing this, gave orders:

"Captains, drag the wine casks out of the porch so that this cattle may go to the pasture."

The barrels were taken away, and the people crowded into the chapel. A priest began to officiate.

Suddenly, from the direction of the Prechistenski Gate, there came the thud of a horse's hoofs. A man on a lame white horse entered the stronghold, his blue coat covered in dust.

"Somebody seems to be in a great hurry to be present at our banquet. Who is he?"

" 'Tis Lazunka, father, on his way back from Moscow. My, but he'll have some stories to tell."

"This is a great joy to me, my friends. Open the door of the cathedral, haul in the casks of wine, drive away the priests, and we shall hold high festival there."

Lazunka dismounted and approached the ataman.

"Good day to you, father Stepan!"

"My friend, come and embrace me."

"I am wearied with my journey and am covered with mud from the roads, damn them."

"My falcon, you are perfection as you are."

The two men embraced each other.

"Where can I put my horse? It is a good horse, but is as jaded as myself. The road was unbearable."

"Musketeers, see that the horse gets plenty of fodder and water."

The steed was led away. The barrels, containing vodka, mead and beer, were rolled into the cathedral. Razin, arm in arm with Lazunka, followed the wine. The ataman turned towards the musketeers and shouted:

"Place guards round the church while I am drinking. Those who wish to pray can do so in the chapel. If there is not sufficient room there they can worship in other of the city's churches. Lazunka and I intend to carouse in the cathedral. Take the younger Prozorovski down from the wall and hand him back to his mother to commemorate the return of this my beloved officer from the tsar's hell. I shall decide on the fate of the other brother tomorrow."

"We understand, ataman. We shall station a guard and see that your orders about the boy are carried out."

"One thing more: no harm must befall prince Semeon Lvov's house. He did not fight against us and has always been kind to the poor."

"Your wishes will be obeyed. . . ."

## 2

Through the windows of the cathedral dome the silvery grey light of the moon crept into the blue darkness. It broke off before it reached the shadowy recesses of the opposite windows. Down below, near the locked door, a pleasant voice was raised in song. It soared aloft and was heard to better advantage in the higher parts of the fane than down below among the various chandeliers. Near the holy gates, which were adorned with gilded carving, a table had been placed. It was covered with one of the holy altar cloths, and at it were sitting the ataman with his officers, who alternately scooped up in their ladles mead or vodka. The liquor flowed down Razin's beard, and from time to time he wiped

it clean with the sleeve of his coat. Then he resumed his drinking without touching a morsel of food, though this was plentiful. The place was lit with thick church candles bound with thin strips of gold. Shadows and lights flitted across the disapproving ikons. From the distant doors of the altar came the sound of someone singing. Lazunka sat there at a simple wooden table and was trying to tell his fortune by laying out the cards. He gazed at them and shook his black, curly locks. Then he picked them up, reshuffled them and lay them out again. The curved blade of a Tatar sword lay on the table, and the uptilted point served as candlestick.

Though his ladle was not quite emptied, Razin threw it on the table, and the liquor spread over the cloth. He rose heavily, but was not unsteady on his legs. The wooden steps leading to the altar creaked under his weight, and the click of his heels sounded like small, sharp horse's hoofs.

Lazunka raised his head, looked at the ataman and ceased to sing.

"Go on with your song, Lazunka."

"I composed it myself, father, but I am far from being pleased with the result."

"Don't mind that! Just sing it!"

Lazunka began:

"Oh, come with me, you merchant maiden,
And pray forsake your father's home;
My love, you then will know what's freedom.
And we shall sail upon the bluish foam
Of Mother Volga, and afterwards therefrom.
Shall spend the night at Tsarev town.
In Tsarev there is ne'er any bloom,
But only grasses grey and brown.
But what avails it to him who
Can see the flowers which, like crowns,
Amid the isles and water spume
And boats and sails resemble gowns?
And if it's flowers you will be wanting,
Oh, black-haired maid, I'll spread our tent
With pearls and gems to suit your longing;
Brocades with golden threads all blent . . .
From woods and hill and river bank
You'll hear the falcons calling;
You'll not have storms and rain to thank,
But o'er the water brothers calling. . . ."

"Very good, Lazunka, you can let your fancy roam in a song. Are you trying to find out your fortune?"

"Yes."

"Who taught you fortune-telling?"

"An old Moldavian witch, father. She was sitting in the square at Moscow, and I, being drunk, threw her a few kopeks. She tried to kiss my hands. But I did not allow her, and then she said: 'Boyar, would you like me to teach you fortune-telling?' 'Yes, do teach me,' I said. She laid out the cards once and then a second time, and so I learned the art. Then she handed me the pack of cards and told me to take them. I have never since parted with them."

"Have you found out anything?"

"Well, father, the outlook is bad. When the cards become obstinate it is wiser to let them be."

"What misfortune is in front of you?"

"It looks like death. I shuffled them several times, but always it comes to the same thing—death. Still, I managed to get out of Moscow without being killed. I shot Shpyn, the spy, but it would appear I was not quite so successful as I thought."

"If I catch the man, he will be hanged."

"I think, father, that Shpyn was sent to Moscow by Uss."

"Nonsense! What would he gain by so doing?"

"Vaska Uss is a mongrel, and mongrels always harbour evil thoughts. The Devil alone is able to understand him. He is a treacherous officer."

"Well, Lazunka, I have no high opinion of him either, but we are sworn brothers, though for the moment he is vexed with me about the Persian princess. But I feel sure it is not he who sent Shpyn to Moscow. Shpyn himself is the traitor. And did you yourself while in Moscow see the effigy which was damned and excommunicated by the priests?"

"Yes, father. They damned it and burned it in the Kremlin."

"Some of the peasants who joined us at first have since forsaken our cause because of the anathema. The Tatars, Chuvashi and Cheremissi are badly armed. They have merely bows and arrows, axes—not battle-axes, but of a kind for chopping wood—pitchforks and spears for pig-sticking. Such weapons are bad enough, but what is far worse, they are quarrelling among themselves. We have too few real Cossacks. Did you remember to order the secretaries to write to Sergei in Zaporozhye?"

"Yes, father. Here is what was written:

> " 'My friend, ex-ataman Serko! I send you my greetings and wish to remind you of your promised aid. Please send gunpowder and lead; call up volunteers and dispatch them with carbines and muskets to Astrakhan. The greater number of these volunteers, and the sooner they arrive, the better, and the more resplendent will be your glory and your share in the booty from the free Cossacks and their ataman Stepan Timofeievich.'

"It was sealed with your own seal, and I dispatched it by the daring messenger Gunia, from Zaporozhye."

"Has he started?"

"He left today, father."

"Good! Captains Osipov and Haritonenko, from the Don and Hopra, brought in some additional men. Samara and Saratov are in our hands, and their voivodes are slain. We shall soon send our men against Sinbirsk. Piotr Yurusov makes no sorties from the stronghold; he is afraid of us. Chernoshenko is craving for a battle, so why not make a start? I'll leave Chikmaz and Fedka Sheludiak in charge here so as to keep an eye on what Vaska Uss is doing. Do you believe him to be a traitor?"

"I am afraid he is, father."

"We'll wait and see, Lazunka. In a week or two's time you must make me sober and not allow me any strong liquor." The ataman bent low, and his

expression was terrible. "We have to hurry, Lazunka. If we fail in our enterprise it's the scaffold for us all."

"Father, I am afraid for your mind with so much drinking."

"Today, Lazunka, we still have power in our hands. Do not fear anything. Just bring me to my senses in a week's time. One thing you must know: I trust nobody. The only exceptions are you and Chikmaz. While I am sleeping off my debauch, you will have to remember that Vaska Uss is plotting and planning. Keep a wary eye on him."

The ataman went away. Lazunka placed the candles to right and continued to lay the cards. His voice sounded louder in the moonlit cupola of the cathedral.

3

Two days and nights went by, and still the ataman was drinking. His eyes were bloodshot. From time to time he would get to his feet and stagger up and down the church, slashing at the images with his sword. The gloom of the building was faintly illumined by lights, in which his blade flashed ominously.

At such moments Lazunka would shout:

"Father, sit down at the table."

Razin, hearing the well-known voice, seemed to remember something and would take his seat at the board, there to doze for a short while and then to resume his potations. Occasionally a small, hairy sacristan in a black cassock would sneak up to the altar. Razin called him a devil. The sacristan made several signs of the cross and replaced the gutted candles; then he disappeared through a little loophole in the altar. Razin, stretching his legs on the table, shouted:

"You devil, bring lights."

"As you please, little father."

The sacristan busied himself extracting candles from a coffer, spinning round like a peg-top in his haste. Lights flashed and were as soon extinguished. They were stuck on the sacred cloth and made this go up in bubbles before they went out.

"Lights, you devil!"

"Oh, Christ! The man does not even give one time to make the sign of the cross. I am getting lights." The sacristan continued to fasten the candles to the altarcloth, and he trembled as he did so, muttering:

"Oh God, be merciful according to Thy great mercy!"

"Have you sunk into the earth? Bring lights, I say."

The sacristan hastened to stick more candles to the cloth. Razin laughed wildly.

"So you've guessed how to do it, you Satan? Is there any wine left?"

"Be not angry, little father, there is some."

"Be off with you, you priest's rat!"

The sacristan vanished. Stepan drank the cup of mead to its dregs and wiped his greying beard with an unsteady hand while his head dropped to the table. The candles smoked; a smell of wax spread around. The vodka began to get heated from so many candles and sent off fumes. Reeling in his gait, the ataman

gazed with gloomy eyes at the lights, and, as if suddenly remembering something said:

"Yes, fire will destroy us. . . ."

With a sweep of his broad hand he extinguished the lights and trod the candles underfoot.

"So far so good," said he as he looked around. His eyes fell on the ladle, which he dipped again into the bowl and drank off at one draught. The faces of saints grinned at him from the wall. It seemed to Razin that one of them resembled Saint Vladimir of Kiev.

"You here as an equal to the apostles? You, an eater of raw flesh, a fornicator, a bigamist! Yet you are counted a saint! What part of your body is saintly? But maybe you have earned your reward by driving people into the river at the watering-places. Ha! Ha! Ha! All of you are as alike as two peas. You thought you were saving Russia, a boyars' Russia? What did you tell the peasantry? 'Feed the boyars and the tsar, and believe.' The wealth went into your own pockets and you have stored it away. You were wont to send away your wives. To enhance your saintliness you enticed youths into the monasteries. You forbade them to wear trousers, and made them don long kaftans and have their hair curled like women."

Razin dipped his ladle again, emptied it and slumped heavily down on the bench, concealing his bearded face in the palms of his hands. Then he saw as in a vision that the gilt walls began to move, and the ikons with them, and from out the spaces between the ikons came old men clad in black and holding tapers. They crowded behind the steps and began to sing. The ataman looked at them and never stirred so much as a finger. In the midst of the old men he saw himself, clad in black, too, with a piece of cord round his neck. From the throng of old men there now came forth prince Vladimir wearing a red and gold cap. The prince shouted in a sonorous voice:

"Anathema!"

The old men turned their tapers upside down. Vladimir drew his sword and smote Razin while calling out again the word:

"Anathema!"

The old men began to intone funeral chants.

"You devil-worshippers! I am alive, and shall show you! . . ."

Razin snuffed out the candles, rose clumsily to his feet, pushed back the bench and pulled the altarcloth from the table. He stepped towards the vision, but he found himself hurled down the steps. He ran towards the main lectern, wishing to get a purchase on it; but he merely grasped the cloth with which it was covered and fell to the ground. The lectern swayed, but did not overturn; the cloth slid down together with the ikon on it and covered the drunken man as if with a blanket. Razin slept.

Lazunka rushed to the ataman's aid, fearing lest the candles should set fire to the building, but seeing that Razin had put them out, he decided:

"He'll be all right now. Tomorrow I shall wake him and not allow him any more drink."

Lazunka returned to his place and, in the stillness, fell asleep. A sudden knocking aroused him. He went to the door and asked:

"Who is there?"

"A friend."

The boyar's son set the door ajar.

"What is it you want?"

"Here is a cask of wine for the ataman."

"From the distillery?" asked Lazunka.

"It's a present from the clerks."

The man thrust the cask through the half-opened door.

"It is heavy. Please take it."

Not wishing to fling the door wide, Lazunka took the cask in both his hands. A shot rang out. The cask rolled down Lazunka's back to the floor. Without a sound Lazunka sank on to the slabs, his head on the farther side of the door. A man in a blue jacket, a scar on his forehead, two pistols thrust into his belt, wearing a low, black cap, stepped over the body. On his left cheek was a deep wound. He strode into the cathedral and looked round.

"I have killed the dog, but the ataman himself is not here. Damn it, how dark it is by the altar!"

The flagstones of the cathedral resounded under his feet. Then he came to a stop and raised his hand. Near the porch someone struck a kettledrum, and Chikmaz' voice called:

"Hello, guards! What are you about? Who dares fire off his arms in our father's proximity?"

"Well, Lavreich, 'twas not me that did it. Shpyn had better make himself scarce."

The man took the candles from Lazunka's table and extinguished them as he moved away from the voices, unseen, dragging his feet and tearing off the mica from a window-frame so as to squeeze his body through. Feet were trampling in the porch. A voice said:

"A body is lying in the porch."

"True, there is someone there. Bring lights."

"Search the stronghold, my lads. It seems that father has been murdered."

Chikmaz' voice rose above the others:

"Here, and surround the stronghold."

## 4

When, according to the ataman's instructions, the Cossacks and musketeers had cast lots for wives, Vaska Uss came there, too. Uss, having no intention to marry, did not partake in the casting of lots. The old boyars' wives were escorted to the convent by the priests. Two last surviving widows were taken by the Cossacks. Just then a young merchant woman in a head-dress adorned with gold, and a short silk coat and a sarafan embroidered with gold, came into the stronghold and made for the cathedral.

"Look, lads! Here comes a young woman of her own free will. She is ready to give herself up."

The merchant's wife, who had a sharp tongue, retorted:

"I'm not all that keen, young men. If fate decrees I'm not to marry, I shall do very nicely as a widow."

Vaska Uss drew nearer and caressed her back.

"Her flesh is firm, and the woman is like honey," said he.

"Well, swarthy man, I shall not refuse you if you ask me."

"You mean what you say? Let us get married then."

As the couple walked along to the widow's house he learned that her husband had been killed by Razin's men when he was endeavouring to save some of the merchandise from his shop.

"He was a miser and had a huge belly," she explained.

They spent the night together, and on the following morning washed in the bath-house. Then a priest married them and drank together with them all through the night, with the deacon and the sexton, too.

The woman had a large wooden house with a bow-shaped ground floor; the place was of solid structure. At the back a covered staircase led to the upper storey, the pillars of which were painted in gay colours. Built on a large scale, the woman found her new husband to her liking. She gave Vaska a blue velvet kaftan, a shirt, a blue satin cap embroidered with pearls and trimmed with sable. Vaska lived with her affectionately for a week, but then one night he drove her away from him:

"Begone, you shameless creature!"

"Vaska, dear, what's the matter? Don't you love me any more?"

The captain frowned, sitting on the nuptial bed. He struck his fist on the wall so that some cups standing on a table near by rattled:

"If I die of the plague, you may bury me."

"But why should you die, my darling? We have everything we need."

"Get away from me! Later, when trouble comes, you'll be glad enough!"

The woman wept quietly. Then she went to the market, found her warehouse and began to trade. She only came home when night fell. She slept behind the wall and listened to her new husband's nightmares.

In the cellar of Vaska Uss' new home, amid bundles of goods and a variety of lumber and bags of millet and rice on the earthen floor, Shpyn lay prone. On a crate opposite him sat Vaska Uss. A wax candle was stuck on a flat box. Its tiny flame flickered.

"Well, Fedor, am I the ataman, or is it Stenka?"

"I killed Lazunka only, but not the ataman."

"Why so surly? When I sent you to the cathedral, what did you notice? I forgot to ask."

"Lazunka loosed his pistol at me in Moscow. It was then that my tongue got twisted round in my mouth, my cheek burned, and I became deaf in my left ear. I lay where he shot me for a long time and could not speak. It's a miracle I did not die of hunger. My throat was so blocked up that I could swallow nothing but a little water. He, the devil, that same night made his way to Astrakhan."

"You are a cunning fellow as a rule, but that time you let yourself be caught like a hare in a trap."

"That's all over and done with. Had his shot struck a trifle higher I should be blind, but it was so dark he could not aim properly. Well, today I've settled his score, and his curls won't grow any more."

"Fedor, Lazunka was nothing better than a hawk. You did not reach the falcon."

"I had another shot ready for the ataman, but he was not in the church at that moment. Besides, no sooner had I fired than I heard the alarm sounding, and a search of the stronghold was instantly begun. I was hard put to it to escape. Luckily, Nicholas Gate was open, otherwise I should have met my end."

"But where is Razin?"

"The devil alone knows. There were lights near Lazunka, but all round the altar darkness and stillness reigned."

"You made a nice mess of things. As I told you, both should have been killed and the cathedral set on fire. Then the whole affair would have been hushed up, and people would have thought Lazunka and Razin had met their deaths in the conflagration, since they were drunk. Now you will have to go to Sinbirsk."

"I don't mind! I shall join the Tatars there, for I know their godless language, having dwelt long among them. You have merely to furnish me with a pass to them, and I shall go to the voivode."

"You shall have it. This slaying of the ataman's favourite is a useless business. You'll see when the ataman stops his debauch, and you had better be on your guard."

"Look you here. I've had no time to show you this before, but on my way to Astrakhan I slew a Ukrainian with my musket and found this sheet of paper in his hat. It seemed to me that you and I might make use of the document."

Shpyn drew from his shirt a document countersigned by clerks.

"Read what it says; I cannot."

Vaska Uss took the paper, drew nearer to the light, read what it contained and then remarked:

"Unfortunately, Fedor, your killing of the Ukrainian was a wanton act."

"A pity! But it seemed to me that the Ukrainian had been sent by Lazunka."

"It is from the ataman to the ex-ataman Serko, asking him for help in the form of men and arms. When the peasantry heard about the excommunication of Razin they forsook him. The Tatars are quarrelling among themselves. Erzh and Moksha are without boots and arms. The peasants' only weapons are axes."

"I cannot see why you hold that my killing of the Ukrainian was a useless act. Razin asked for help, but he will not get it. All the better for us!"

"Try to understand the situation. The Ukrainians were asked to come to Astrakhan. So far, I know not whether the tsar is going to grant me his pardon. Now were these Ukrainians here, I could fortify Astrakhan and make use of their armaments."

"You are not an easy man to understand."

"Do not bother your head, Fedor. We shall get this document to Zaporozhye, and it will appear as if it came from Razin."

"That proves that my crime was not without its uses. Another thing, Lavreich, how is my horse? Is he giving any trouble?"

"It's a good horse, but it seems to me that it has caught some sort of sickness."

"Lavreich, do not let the beast perish."

"This is how it happened. A Bashkir came to the city and tied his carrion to my fence near the porch. I was intending to ride your horse, it was already saddled for me, when this other came and stood alongside."

"The Bashkir stole the horse?"

"Have patience a moment, and I shall tell you everything. As I came down the steps the horses were playfully biting each other. The Bashkir's horse was obviously diseased, pus was dribbling from its nostrils. I slapped the Bashkir's face, saying: 'Why don't you look after your horse, you devil?' He merely grinned and muttered: 'It does not matter, he'll soon be all right, Cossack.

I wiped the pus from your horse with the tail of my kaftan and rode away. I sweated profusely, and when I reached home I took off the kaftan, washed my hands and had a meal. Don't be alarmed, but since then your horse has been off colour. It is streaming from the nose and has shivering attacks. I fetched a healer, who stated: 'Nothing to worry about; just a little chill; it will soon be well again.' I rubbed the horse with salt and watered it, pronouncing an incantation. Then, in little less than a week, I began to have attacks of fever, and sleep forsook me. I feel as though something were creeping over me—something resembling worms. When I take off my shirt I can find nothing. Since then I've got the idea that the black death is approaching. I have sent away my wife. But I know I shall die, and it is best to die alone. The plague is very contagious."

"Why think about death, Lavreich?"

"I am always trembling. I do not feel worms any more, but I've got boils all over my body; one burst yesterday, and pus streamed out of it. Also I feel that half my strength has oozed away."

"You'll soon be yourself again. But do heal my horse; do not neglect it. If he dies it will be the end of me. I won't find another like it."

"I'll cure it. I have money and am not sorry to spend it. Indeed, I have quite a lot. Take my horse—I have three—choose the best of them and go to Sinbirsk. . . . Razin is sending his men there and will soon be going himself. Get to the town before him, and we'll finish him off."

"I know how to finish with him. But how am I to get out of Astrakhan? Chikmaz is the very devil. He has placed guards at all the gates. I would leap from the wall, but it's more than twenty-four feet high. It's easy to fall and break one's neck."

"Do not set forth tonight. Sleep here. I shall see to it that you are provided with food. There's a lot of loot about, so take off your clothes and put on something else. It would be unsafe were you to wear Cossack dress. Attire yourself as an old man, and I shall find a sack for you. Also a false beard would be a good thing. Mingle with the people, go into the taverns. I can supply you with drink money. And come here, too; many beggars seek out my wife, and your presence will not be noticed. Neither Razin nor Chikmaz will be searching the houses. The ataman is probably drunk. Tomorrow he will collect his thoughts, and you will ride away early in the morning."

"Very well, I shall stay here. . . ."

## 5

Early on the morrow the ataman's voice could be heard roaring:

"Hi, captains, bring Lazunka's horse. I intend riding it to my friend's funeral."

The drums began to beat. At the call of the drums Dimitri Yaranets, Ivan Krasulin, Fedka Sheludiak and Chikmaz rallied on horseback. The last to arrivé at the gallop was Mishka Chernoshenko. Musketeers had already shouldered the coffin, draped in a black pall with gold tassels. Chikmaz was expecting the ataman's wrath to fall upon him because the cathedral had been badly guarded, so he did not sleep the whole night through, but ordered the coffin to

be made. Lazunka lay in the coffin in the clothes he had worn while in Moscow, a red-and-gold shirt, and his blue coat to cover him.

Musketeers carried the coffin through the city, passing by the Spaski monastery and out by the Voznesenski Gate to a hill in the suburb near the river Balda. The grave had already been dug. The carpenters were bringing on a bier a tombstone with an ikon. It was a gift from the clerks.

"Thus are people buried on the Don," said they. "The ataman will be pleased."

When the coffin had been placed by the graveside, two priests in black cassocks began to sing. Lazunka, whose eyes were wide open and even in death had preserved an expression of surprise, was getting his last salute. After dismounting, each of those present, headed by Razin, passed the coffin and imprinted a kiss on the dead captain's forehead. Razin set right the thick curls which covered the cheeks of his murdered friend, laid his Zaporozhian cap on Lazunka's forehead and kissed him.

"Lay my friend's sword on his chest and put his pistols beside him," ordered Razin.

When the grave had been filled in, the carpenters put a wooden monument over it in the form of a little house, and under its eaves they fastened the ikon of Saint Nicholas.

The officers were standing uncovered. Razin took off his cap, moved towards Lazunka's last resting-place, knelt on one knee and began to speak in trembling tones:

"Rest in peace, my friend. You loved me. I shall never forget you so long as I live. If I ever set hands on the man who did this deed, he will remember the day of our parting. And if despair or unbearable depression descends upon my soul and my hand makes the sign of the cross, remember this, my first prayer will be for you."

Chikmaz remarked when they were returning to the city:

"Father, we ought to search for Shpyn in the house of Vaska Uss, for I have the impression that his foul hand killed the captain."

"Where were the guards at that moment, Grigori?"

"The guards were present the whole time, father. They had only dispersed for a short while to divide up the booty."

"I, too, know that Shpyn is probably responsible. But this is neither the time nor the place to give him his deserts. Continue to do your duty, and if I see the necessity for a search I shall call you."

The captains went their several ways; only Chikmaz was detained by Razin:

"All the same, Grigori, I would like all those who were on guard to be intimately questioned,"

"I shall examine them and bring them to you, father."

Chikmaz now followed in the officers' footsteps, while Razin betook himself to the house of Vaska Uss. He dismounted here and tied Lazunka's white steed near the porch. The captain issued forth in a velvet kaftan, yellow boots, embroidered with silk, no hat on his head. He bowed, exclaiming:

"A guest—a very dear guest!"

"I was seized with the idea of visiting you, for you were not present at Lazunka's funeral, and I thought to call on you after the ceremony. It seemed to me strange you should be absent. All my officers were there save yourself, my brother."

"Yes, I know how it must have struck you. But, you see, I'm not well, and my illness is dangerous to others. That is why I did not attend when you were administering justice. Also I took a wife, who came of her own free will. I did not draw her by lot."

"What is your illness, Vasili?"

Vaska Uss guided Razin through passages and narrow stairways to a large room, where a table was spread with silver-gilt ware, mead, dishes of roast meat, grapes and melon in sugar. They sat down at the table. The captain began to speak as he poured mead into a cup:

"First, dear guest, drink, and then we'll discuss whatever needs to be discussed."

"I never drink unless my host does so too. Such is my habit."

"But you see, my leech has forbidden me to touch any liquor."

"In that case, neither shall I."

"Do you suspect me of treason?"

"It looks rather like that."

"Such being the case, I shall disobey the leech's instructions for this once and drink with you."

The captain poured himself out a cup of mead and drank it to the dregs after having clinked with Razin. The latter made no move, but sat staring at the other man's face. Uss replenished his cup from another jug and again drank the contents off after clinking with the ataman. Razin raised his cup and commanded:

"Pour from the third one and drink with me."

The captain obeyed, and they drank together.

"Your health, brother. Now tell me about your illness."

"I caught it from a horse, which was brought here by a Bashkir from the Ordinsk steppe. He tethered his mount next to mine. The poor beast was flowing with pus, and my steed got the same sickness. I rode my horse—and now I am covered with boils, and pus is pouring from them. You can see for yourself that a watery fluid is discharging from my nose, which is swollen. I have the leech to thank for staying the illness. He burns out my boils with a red-hot iron and makes me drink a concoction of quicksilver and antimony. Before I took this the phlegm would accumulate in my throat, and I spat and coughed so much that some of my teeth and part of my gums flew out of my mouth."

"Yours is a dreadful sickness. And now, if you please, Vasili, tell me who killed Lazunka."

"I think it must have been Shpyn, the dirty devil."

"But where is he hiding?"

"Are you suspecting me of giving shelter to a skunk such as he?"

"I have been thinking so, Vasili, because I fancied you were still vexed with me on account of the Persian princess. I looked on you as a traitor."

"There you are! Is my neck asking for the rope? Do you think, ataman, I would send assassins to slay my friends and sink the common cause as bad fishermen sink their old boats?"

"But what does it profit a man like Shpyn to kill Lazunka?"

"Profit, brother Stepan, is a small thing. A wild man needs no profit to lure him on to vile deeds. I heard that while he was in Moscow, Lazunka, your ambassador, was in hiding. Besides, Shpyn harboured bad thoughts

about you since the day you kicked him in your tent. He is a wicked man. At times he suffers from convulsions. Such as he are always wild, and their eyes are evil; they nurse a grudge for years."

"True, Vasili, I was drunk and certainly did strike him, for he offended me."

"Stepan Timofeievich, Shpyn has started on a wicked business. He is not afraid to ride even the clouds, and chooses such horses as the best riders would be afraid to mount. He fears neither journeys nor Tatars; the mountain folk know him. He went to Moscow—so some Tatars told me—so as to see the boyars and give them information. The tsar housed and fed him, but Lazunka met him and tried to make an end of him with his pistol, because he thought him a traitor to our cause. But it would appear that Lazunka's shot did not slay Shpyn, for Shpyn came back here and took his revenge."

"It is true, for Lazunka told me himself. But, of course, he could not give me the whole story. Oh, Lazunka, Lazunka! Come, let us drink."

"Have no fear, but drink as much as you like, and good health to you! I used to be your brother and shall always remain so."

"Vasili, give me your hand.'

"There it is, Stepan."

"You have lifted a heavy weight from my mind, Vasili. It was hard to think that my brother sat sharpening his knife against me on the sly. And now let me tell you that tomorrow or the day following I am setting forth from Astrakhan. The time has come! I shall leave you in charge, Vasili. All I beg of you is not to slay those whom I had mercy upon the day when I was meting out justice. Look after the welfare of prince Semeon Lvov and do not ruin him. Also the old metropolitan must not be killed. I cannot bring myself to raise a hand against men full of years. He's a grumbling old man, always whining about not having received sufficient honours from the tsar, and privileges, the right to trade, fisheries, and so forth. But he is not likely to last much longer, and so I'd wish him to die a natural death."

"I shall obey your orders, brother Stepan."

"Have you an idea, Vasili, where this man Shpyn can be?"

"Stepan Timofeievich, those same Tatars who came here and then went to Sinbirsk told me: 'A Cossack, named Shpyn, has promised to join us.' So I can only presume that he went to Sinbirsk. Tatars are like brothers to him; he can eat raw meat of horses as well as they. So you'd better look to your safety if you intend going to Sinbirsk."

"The Devil alone could find him among the Tatar encampments."

"Well, don't allow this particular devil to come near to you."

"Good-bye, Vasili. See that the leeches treat you well. I trust you will soon recover."

"Fare you well, Stepan Timofeievich, my little brother. God grant you a pleasant journey."

The ataman descended the stairway. Vaska Uss looked at his retreating figure from a window. His hands were clasped behind his back and, for a while, he paced up and down the chamber. Then he returned to the same window and gave vent to his mind:

"The memory of Zeineb is imperishable, and on this account, Stepan Timofeievich, I have ceased to be your servant and brother. My blood is still boiling."

A maid-servant entered the room with a lighted candle in one hand and an iron rod in the other.

"What are you doing in broad daylight with a lighted candle?"

The leech ordered that I should light a fire in the stove, Vasili Lavreich."

"Very well, do so and then summon the leech."

The fire crackled in the stove; behind the door the floor creaked, and a voice asked:

"May I see the master?"

"Come in, old man. I had just ordered the wench to call you."

The man who entered wore a straight, narrow beard, a black cap, a kaftan with long sleeves, and carried a big vermilion jug. He bowed low.

"What are you going to do?"

"I mean to cleanse your veins, father officer. But first of all you must drink from my vessel. I shall throw off my kaftan; I am wearing suitable clothing underneath. What is the meaning of these great pitchers of wine? Did I not impress on you to abstain from any form of alcoholic drink? The rotten blood within you must be expurgated, and liquor only serves to spread the rottenness all over the body, and the body begins to rot where it should not."

"I drank very little, old man. It was impossible to refuse, for the liquor settled an old feud. A guest came and would not drink unless I joined him."

"You must not invite such guests."

"I did not invite him, for I had no wish to see him; he came of his own accord."

"Do you mean to tell me he came unasked? Well, you cannot lock the door if the bolt has disappeared!"

The old man poured some brown liquid into a cup and muttered incantations as he did so.

"Field flowers are growing on the hills—they cleanse the blood, they drive away the sickness from the body; be it croaking toads or dancing devils inside this man, away, away! No pain or suffering must lurk in the bones of the slave Vasili; the illness, the rottenness must not cling to his clean body nor to his eager heart. Amen! Drink now, father."

Vaska Uss drank.

"I gave the girl who lighted the stove a small iron rod and told her to place it in the fire. It will be red by now. How is your physical strength today, my dear? I have to burn out your boils again."

"I should not even sigh were you to flay me alive."

"That's well, my poor Vasili. Do you feel any better?"

"Much better. I have fewer boils. But my flesh is beginning to torture me; I am craving for my wife."

"Once you have taken off your shirt I shall be able to tell you. So fling away your kaftan and your shirt and let me have a look at you." The old man muttered an incantation as Vasili was divesting himself: "His flesh is clean, his flesh is sweet. . . ."

The exceptionally broad-shouldered captain stood with his bronzed body exposed; under the armpits were two gaping ulcers with bluish borders; lower down was another in a shrivelled state.

"You see, Vasili, it has been frightened by the fire; we scorched it out and it has become smaller."

"It's much better, grandfather."

"Wait a moment; I shall wipe off the pus and burn it. Afterwards you will want all your fortitude."

"Very well."

The old leech, careful not to soil his hands, wiped the thick pus away with a rag. He drew on a pair of chamois leather gloves, taking them from the pockets of his kaftan, which he had flung on the bench. Then he pulled the red-hot iron from the fire and muttered:

"The shameless hussy! She has heated the wrong end of the iron rod, and it's so hot I can hardly hold it! The Lord have mercy!"

The singed flesh in the boils began to crackle.

"Crack, you devil! Fly out of the window! . . . Is it burning you too much, my dear? We'd better take a rest. The stove is a good one. I could make the iron hotter."

"Burn to your heart's content, father. I can bear it."

"You are strong, Vasili, God bless you! Your body is made, as it were, of stone. That is why we shall master the infection. Any other man would have been driven to the grave in a month; indeed, he could not have survived to see another month."

"Burn it! I feel it no more than if a fly were crawling over my body."

The flesh sizzled, and the ulcer became black.

"Now dress yourself, and if the fancy takes you to have some pleasure with your wife, you can do so without any fear. The lower part of your body is quite cleansed; the upper part is well on the way to being cured. But you must on no account indulge in alcohol. If you drink, my healing will be of no avail."

"Thank you, greybeard. My wife will pay you the fee."

"I must warn you not to kiss the woman; you must protect her from your saliva and the phlegm; nor must you fall asleep by her side, but perform your business and go right away. Before going in to her, wash your whole body with warm water and dry yourself with a clean towel. Then put on fresh linen."

"I shall do all you say."

"Well, good-bye!"

"Have a cup of mead, old man, before you go."

"Some of this intoxicating filth? No, my son, but thank you for your kind thought."

The leech thereupon took his departure.

As before, Vaska Uss calmly and deliberately paced the room, at times stopping near the table and squinting down at it. Then he grunted loudly, resolutely approached the table and, bending down, smelled the strong mead. He looked about him, took up a bowl, filled it to the brim and gulped the contents down.

"Except for the Devil, we all have to die!"

He poured himself another cup and drank that, too, with avidity. He walked for a while round the room and then poured out a third. He brought it to his lips, but his hand shook. The captain waved his hand, flung away the liquor and shouted:

"Hi, girl! Come and take away that which will ruin me."

## 6

The drums summoned all the officers to the stronghold. Everyone was present, even Vaska Uss. Razin was about to leave Astrakhan on Lazunka's horse. He had given his black steed to Chikmaz.

"Attention, captains! I appoint as ataman Vasili Lavreich Uss."

The captains, having taken off their caps, listened with close attention. Razin passed the mallet to Uss.

"Carry out justice and be fair, Vasili; do not oppress the poor with taxes; do not persecute those among the nobles, clerks and officers of musketeers who are on our side; do not besmirch my name with injustice."

"Stepan Timofeievich, I shall act according to the law."

The captains escorted Razin as far as the suburbs and then returned. Chikmaz alone accompanied him farther on his journey, and his long beard drooped even to the horse's mane.

"You have not acted wisely, father. I do not trust Vaska Uss. Under his rule no justice can be expected in Astrakhan."

Razin squeezed Chikmaz' hand.

"Keep your eye on him, Grigori, and let me know as often as you can how Lavreich rules. Good-bye!"

A week after his rule had begun Vaska Uss was standing in the voivode's courtyard. He was completely drunk and was dressed in a blue velvet kaftan, a Cossack hat, red boots, embroidered with gold and silk. A little farther on were musketeers in red kaftans and armed with halberds. To either side of him were drummers with the voivode's drums.

The voivode's courtyard was surrounded by a high wooden fence and looked like an island. On the outside the fence was earthed in half-way up the posts. A moat enclosed the whole. Vaska Uss placed two guards, armed with halberds and guns, at the gates.

The drummers began to beat their drums, and the officers gathered round the ataman. Vaska Uss raised his big hand, holding the mallet, and shouted:

"Hi, musketeers! Go to prince Semeon Lvov's place and drag him here. I shall have him put in irons and rack him. Has he not accumulated great wealth through plundering the people?"

The mallet fell as the ataman followed with his gipsy eyes the departing musketeers. Then he entered the voivode's house; the captains, with the exception of Chikmaz, followed him. He rubbed the mud from his boots against the steps and added:

"Next will come the turn of His Reverence." The metropolitan's head has a twist to the right—we'll make it turn to the left."

He ascended the steps. The captains silently followed him.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AT THE SAMARA BEND

#### I

HIGH above the Volga, on the Devichye Hills, the ataman's tent had been pitched among sparse fir trees. Steps of thick logs led from one terrace to the other. In the creek below the hill the ataman's war-boats lay moored. Fires

were burning on the craft, on the decks of which iron sheets had been laid down to protect them against fire. From the decks came the sound of drunken men talking and the twang of a domra. The voice of Frol, the ataman's brother, rose above the din; it was clear and penetrating. Frol Razin's face had grown round and black-bearded.

The ataman's tent was made of sails lined with rugs, and half the ground space was also covered with rugs. A fire burned near the entrance; it was replenished now and then by the old minstrel, Vologzhenin. At times a mountain wind soughed through the fir trees and shook the tent, but its walls stood firm. These gusts of wind stirred up the fire, sending handfuls of dying sparks on the rugs and lighting up the ataman's green boots. Razin's kaftan was lined with fox fur and trimmed with sable; from beneath there was a glint of red silk and the gleam of pistols. He lay on cushions, his elbow resting on a short log of wood, his gaze fixed on the opening of the tent, whence he could see the opposite bank of the river emerging from the mists in the light of a moon, which seemed to be white-hot in its effulgence. Razin was not drinking, but was plunged in thought. The old story-teller, thinking his own thoughts, did not venture to intrude upon the ataman's pensive mood. Razin noticed that the old bard had hidden his domra away from the blaze so as not to injure its strings.

"Why have you ceased to play, grandfather? Your songs do not disturb me."

"Your brother Frol is playing. Were we both to tune up at the same time, the noise would surely reach Samara."

"The devil take Frol and his playing! He'd better be playing with his sword! For an old man to play the domra is fitting, but for a Cossack in these days it's no sort of pastime. Now please tune up, grandfather."

The old bard drew forth his instrument and tuned it; then he extemporized to his own accompaniment:

"O Mother Stream with dome of deep blue sky!
Your stars are burning, blazing, and shed eternal light,
And to compete with these your stars
Our fires flicker 'mid cliffs and hoary stones.
And this fair place is named the Apple Drink,
And men have flocked to us from many distant lands
To warm themselves at these star-fires.
At the fires of Ersy-Mokshi are men with their comrades.
I hear the fires, the voices and the horses neighing shrill;
But many hear no sound, though to me they are clear.
The fires belong to Nogai, and Tatars are on the move
With men from the Bashkir cantonments.
Peasants come to Russian fires,
Russian with Russian joining.
And on their shoulders they have brought to these most sacred fires
The heads of boyars by the score, and spades
And axes, forks and scythes.
The Russian folk has now awakened and come without a pass.
Let burn the flame of serfdom's days, and bloody may it be!
With Stepan Razin have we come
To grant you freedom, everyone,

From taxes levied by voivodes,
The wicked, who have tortured you and beat you unto death;
From judges, clerks and all their kind,
Their velvet robes and wealth we'll take,
And broidered cloth and tissues rare,
To deck our wives withal.
And if you give not of your strength, oh, then, like dogs
Among the ruined homesteads you will wander with your children.
But from our peasant purse, if God be merciful,
You'll all be fed.
If we forgive you your misdeeds, then you'll be given alms;
But if obdurate you remain, then hunger will devour you."

"You are doing well, grandfather. I like a spice of boasting in a ballad."

"I am not boasting, dear ataman. Look at the countless fires around you and the many men of different nationalities who are gathered here in the valley and on the hills."

"I know, old man, how great a mustering we have. But listen! Suppose you were driving a cart, and your horse began to kick and then bolted? Would you not alight and drive that horse into a bog or a wall and give it a sound thrashing?"

"Certainly, father ataman. I should not allow a silly beast to break my neck. But supposing the horse were the people, and the rider a boyar or other great nobleman, and behind the boyar's back was another rider in a hat, adorned with pearls and a cross on top, and the rider were called the tsar?"

"So that's what you've brought an old man to! I marched forth with the people to repay evil with evil, to sing a requiem for the repose of the souls of my murdered father and brother and for the whole of Russia—poor, beaten Russia, trampled in the mud by the voivodes. I enjoy this work, my story-teller, as an eagle delights in pecking at raw meat. But I do not believe that the boyars are going abegging. The time is not yet ripe, though it will come some day."

"Oh, ataman, do you honestly think such a day will dawn?"

"I firmly believe that it will come. For the present, let the boyars retain their privileges. That is not important. But let them think: 'Our power is tottering; we shall not remain overlords for ever.' Who put the tsar on the people's neck? The boyars, so that they might sit there in his company. There they sit and support each other. They hold on to the hem of the tsar's kaftan, as much as to say: 'Now sit you there and support us.' The people are not yet strong enough to cut the old rope to which the boyars cling. No! Many years will have to pass, a hundred, maybe more. But when the time comes the people will rend this rope, will break the shafts, will smash the cart together with the tsar and his boyars. In those days to come the word 'anathema' will have no meaning and will not scare anyone. Now this word is having an effect on some of the peasants. It is a terrifying word, which the tsar's higher clergy have pronounced, and so the peasants are deserting us and abandoning our cause. We have behind us only those who are hopelessly ruined and who have nowhere to go for absolution; they are the poorest of the poor. I have travelled among the people, I have listened and understood; having understood the truth, I am holding the people with fairy-tales, just as the boyars and the patriarch are holding them by falsehoods and fairy-tales instead of the truth. You have seen my two ships, the

black one and the red. The black is supposed to carry the patriarch, the red one the tsarevich. And I shall take them along with me to Moscow; and I shall not tell the people that I intend to tear from the tsar and the patriarch not only their foul papers, but their vestments as well. I shall not tell the people that I intend to throw the throne and the tsar himself into the river, and that all the tsar's family will be destroyed, root and branch. And so it is that I summon people to my standard with fairy-tales. In my letters to the peasants and the Tatar khans I rouse their ire against the boyar traitors and not against the tsar."

"But, ataman . . ."

"Hold your tongue, story-teller! Who reigns over the boyars? The tsar. Who summons people to fight for their homes? The tsar. How could the tsar manage his affairs without the aid of boyars and voivodes? The tsar can do nothing and cannot even survive without them."

The ataman ceased speaking and covered his eyes with his hand. No longer afraid to disturb the ataman's thoughts, the old minstrel began to talk:

"Father Stepan Timofeievich, I see you are beginning to stoop. You have taken a heavy burden upon you."

"True enough, old man."

"Do not stir with such a weight upon you, but hold your peace and believe. A bad thing is always bad, and a good thing cannot lose its goodness. Stronger men than you have been driven to the grave before the appointed time by such a burden as you have taken upon you. Keep your falcon eyes clear, for if once they become dim the accurst weight will grip your heart as with red-hot pincers."

The ataman raised his head and sat up.

"Well, grandfather, here is what I have thought of. Discard your Cossack clothes, and I shall give you a sheepskin coat and good boots and money for the journey."

Razin handed him a leather bag filled with coins.

"Here you are! Take it."

"Father, what a lot of money! How have I deserved it?"

"Take it and no further talk on the matter. Try to make your way to Moscow as a beggar. If you reach the city, go to the musketeers' quarters and seek a house on a burned site. My unforgettable friend Lazunka told me that stone warehouses have been built there since my day. Behind these warehouses you will find a house buried almost up to the roof-top in earth. There you will find my wife. Her name is Irenetsa. My son is with her. Tell them that I have sent you, and they will receive you as though you were a relative. Should I myself ever come to Moscow, you will find out what to do."

"I understand, father. I do not need any boots, but a sheepskin coat, though not a new one, would be useful. I prefer to walk in bast shoes and cloth leggings."

"As you please, but go and sing songs wherever possible on your way. You are my last remaining pleasure, and I am loth to part from you. But the day of battles is approaching, and you can have no hand in that."

"Do you wish me to go at once?"

"Spend the night here. Maybe I shall wish you to play or tell one of your stories. In the morning the boats will sail upstream as far as a certain shoal, and there you will be dropped. Thence you start on your journey."

Razin got to his feet, and his voice roared over the hills and the river.

"Frolko, you devil, enough of your songs. I want you here!"

The echoes took up the sounds all round.

Down below a sound of stamping and talking was heard.

"Father!"

"Father!"

A greenish-blue spot began to climb the steps leading to the ataman's tent, where Razin lay as he had done before. The opening of the tent was obscured for a moment by a figure silhouetted against the sky, its Cossack coat catching reflections from the fire, which also illumined the round face.

"What does my brother ataman want?"

"Frolko, I want you to take fifty of the best men from Chernoshenko's and Fedka of Samara's companies and cross the river to the town. The new voivode was killed there, but his predecessor is still alive. The tsar wished him to go to Moscow to be judged, though meanwhile he was ordered to remain at his post. This Habarov will be judged now by our people's court, and his fat-bellied wife also. The citizens of Samara made complaint against him while I was passing through. They said: 'The new voivode has been killed, but the old one was a greater scoundrel than he and still lives unscathed in his suburban house.' Fedka of Samara's betrothed lives there, and I have promised him to find her. So give him a chance of seeking her out and tell him to take her to the Don, to Kagalnik. I intend going there myself so as to send Stepan Naumov, with a band of experienced Cossacks, to defend the poor. Hang up voivode Habarov by his legs to the nearest belfry, or on a hook in his ribs, and slaughter his wife."

"It shall be done, brother Stepan."

Frol disappeared behind the opening of the tent. The ataman then turned to the minstrel:

"Grandfather, please tell me something amusing. Great events are in the offing. Men are flocking to us in considerable numbers, but the voivodes are by no means slumbering, for their regiments arrived here before ours. In a few days there won't be any time to spare for stories. I have always liked your voice, and maybe I shall hear it no more—who can tell? You are a wise man."

"Why, then, little ataman, are you sending me away? If such were your will I should stay here and fight. It may be the end of me, but I have lived my span and shall have no regrets if I die at your side."

"No, you must not be with me. You must do what I told you to do. Now for your tale."

"Ah, you mean that fairy-tale! Once upon a time there lived a foolish priest with a wife as silly as himself. The priest devised, either out of his own pate or at a friend's suggestion, the idea of hatching a foal out of a water-melon . . ."

"You have an inventive brain!"

"Ay. 'Hens hatch chicks out of small eggs, and I from such a big thing will have to hatch out something big,' said the priest. So he got on to the stove shelf and sat on the melon. And his wife was very pleased, pondering: 'If my priestly husband can invent a thing like that, then we shall be able to breed horses. After he's had a try, I shall do likewise.' Thus the priest sat in his cassock one day, two days . . . he did not even leave the stove to relieve nature, lest the melon get cold. Nobody knows how many days he sat, but at last the stench in the room became unbearable. The wife bore it for a while, but in the end she became sick. She was no good at nagging, but when she acted she did so

quickly. She heated an iron hook in the stove and poked it at the priestly husband. 'You are a devil, not a priest,' says she. She turned the man out of the house with the red-hot hook. Then she opened the door to let in some fresh air. The priest wrapped his behind as well as the melon in his cassock and found a quiet place on the straw in the backyard. There he sat, looking very pleased with himself. 'It is beginning to stir,' he exclaimed. 'Soon the foal will neigh.' But the stirring came because the melon was rotting. The priest was so pleased that towards evening he began to doze. Just at that moment a young foal darted from round the corner and, having lost its mother, began to neigh. The priest jumped to his feet, thinking he had missed the hatching of the foal. 'It must have broken the skin of the melon with its little hoofs and run away from me.' As the custom is, the priest did not wear any pants under his cassock, which was lost among the straw. Since there was no time to waste, he started to run after the foal as fast as his legs could carry him, shouting: 'Ho, ho, ho, I am your mother and your father.' Peasants saw both the priest and the foal . . . And this is the origin of the old saw: 'A priest belongs to the equine species.' "

The ataman laughed and observed:

"I have no love to spare for priests. But one has to discriminate between a fat priest and a hungry one. The fat ones sit near the tsar and the boyars; the hungry one tills his land and pays taxes like a peasant. Priests who are of humble origin say: 'It matters little what you hold in your hand, be it axe or bible.' Such priests pray for us in their churches, they pray for a free people. Why, even today we captured a document from a voivode's messenger wherein it was stated: 'Oh, tsar, the worst instigators of riots are Cossacks, musketeers and priests with their congregations of townsmen.' There followed a list of such priests' names."

"I know of many priests who are treated by the voivodes exactly as if they were peasants."

"You speak nothing but the truth. I oppress none who follows me. Now you'd better take a nap. I shall stay awake a little longer. Perhaps when you are rested we shall celebrate together."

The old bard settled down by the fire, sheltered from the wind by the tent.

Razin brooded in silence.

Many hours passed; the moon had sailed more than half-way across the sky; the fire in the ataman's tent was nearly extinct; only the bigger brands still smouldered under the ashes. An intense stillness lay over the Volga. It was broken by someone in a boat, who began to whistle shrilly and stamp his feet in a dance, singing the while:

"Sin it is with the mother-in-law,
Sin it is with the daughter-in-law,
But with the brother's wife . . ."

Silence reigned once more. The ataman rose, his spurs glittered in the reflection of the fire. He stepped forward and stopped behind the tent near the steep slope.

The Volga swept round the Samara Bend in silvery ripples. In the tiny waves, which licked the rocks like white flames, the ataman seemed to see countless greedy eyes and open mouths.

"Mother Volga, for long hunger has gnawed at your belly; now I shall feed you on the choicest human flesh."

Hundreds of fires were burning among hills and cliffs as Razin turned his gaze down the river to the right. Men in shaggy clothes clustered round the fires with their axes, spears and boar knives, glittering in the moonlight. The horses neighed.

"There lies my force! Well, voivodes, you and I shall gain some experience. We are poor in arms, but rich in hate, and my troops will fall upon you like a massive wall."

Here and there could be seen boats which had stuck on the shoals, and there were yellow barges left behind by merchants. The sides had been smashed and now were filled with sand, brought down to them on the tide of a strong river. Two barges, splashing pearls around them, were speeding across the river; nodding horses' heads and the red caps of oarsmen could be seen above the bulwarks.

"Frol and his comrades have begun their journey!"

The ataman glanced at the grim, shaggy, uneven outline of the Devichye Hills, which, far away upstream, obscured the clear spaciousness of the landscape. He looked down the slope, and the stillness and the Volga's quiet expanse were broken by an awe-inspiring voice:

"Hello, my brave fighters! The ataman orders you to make merry."

Golden sparks flashed in the water; boots stamped in the boats.

"Father calls us!"

"Hey, don't stick your bottom out, and draw in your belly!"

"Smartly, lads! Get wine for Stepan Timofeievich."

Something splashed in the water. More and ever more little lights sprang up in the stream and mingled with the moon's reflection.

"Steady!"

Men began to climb the steps up the sleeping mountain.

The ataman, a blue reflection on a background of black, turned towards the tent, the steel semicircles of his boots shining. His massive frame, against the rugs with which the tent was hung, seemed like a shadow. In the light of the flickering flames his greying curls under the red cap glimmered like gold.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SINBIRSK

#### 1

THE town of Sinbirsk, with its stronghold on the top of the hill, looked down on the broad expanse of the Volga. Terraced slopes led to the river, and on these was a suburb stretching as far as the grain warehouses which stood on the bank. In autumn its roads were sticky. Between the fortress and the little old town the small river of Sinbirsk wound its way at the bottom of a ravine. The walls of this ravine were seventy feet high. Beyond the suburb, and nearer to the stronghold, stood the prison. The place was surrounded by a shallow moat and

a single row of palings half buried in the ground. Here the prisoners were housed, and there were also governmental offices, where, in autumn—so as to avoid having to climb the muddy and slippery road leading to the stronghold—business was transacted. At each corner stood a tower, and over the gateway was another, taller than the rest and built of brick.

Razin had transferred his men and horses from the Devichye Hill in two hundred boats so as not to tire them. He was drifting towards Sinbirsk.

The autumn sky hung low and gloomy. Heavy rain was falling. Now the wind tore at the rigging, now the greedy waves moaned over the wide expanse of water; playfully they washed the decks of the boats; masts groaned, and the buckets baling out the water which had been shipped screeched and clanked.

Sinbirsk can be seen from a great distance, and as soon as the ataman sighted the town he moved to the prow of his boat; he stretched out one of his long arms while the other he held akimbo. His terrible voice carried to every boat of the long line:

"Hi, you paupers of the Don! Listen! And all you that are oppressed, you peasants, townsfolk, workmen, who sweat your lives out in the shops and die of hunger—listen, every one of you! Take your revenge on those who torture you—on the boyars. The time has come! They have feathered their nests in Sinbirsk, in its stronghold. It is there that, scorched by your wrath and hate, they have fled from peasants, Cossacks, musketeers and working folk—from those who stand for freedom. I am leading you to crush the Volga nobility. Let us conquer the voivode! Let us set fire to Sinbirsk! Then freedom will be yours for ever; you will trade without the imposition of taxes; all the broad acres will be yours for the taking."

A roar of acclamation came from the two hundred boats:

"May your good work prosper, father ataman Stepan Timofeievich!"

Then the oars were plied again, and the songs resounded so loudly that the roar of the Volga was muffled.

Black and starless, the night covered the earth with its damp pall, thus concealing the enemy's town.

Having passed two miles beyond Sinbirsk, Razin came to a halt at Chuvinsk island. Here he formed his men into companies of one hundred men and landed them on the bank near the old town. Special platforms were lowered for the horsemen and infantry. But those who had mounts, and in particular the Tatars, plunged straight into the water, swam across and waded to the opposite shore. The Volga, becoming angry, flung up her heavy waves with their murky crests; and the waves, as they disappeared in the distant darkness, seemed to mutter and threaten. The ataman ordered that his tent be pitched and guards placed round the boats. Fires began to burn on the shores. The ataman was invisible, but his voice thundered out:

"Keep to your formations. Don't spread out."

In the darkness, broken only by the reflections from the Volga and the camp-fires, near the stronghold, loomed a moving wall of caps of cavalry and dragoons, the tips shining white like spikes. The wall moved forward, and let loose musket-fire among Razin's men.

"Forward the guns! Fire!"

In the darkness a flash of gun-fire burst near the caps. The caps on top of the black horses were seen to move.

"Musketeers! Fire at the horses!"

Volleys of Razin's arquebuses could be heard.

"Send out Tatars!"

Shaggy Tatars, their swords flashing, rushed after the retreating enemy.

"Chernoshenko, Haritonov, find the voivode's baggage train and cut it off!"

Two widening spots moved away from the faceless line of fighting men, one going to the right and the other to the left. Somewhere aloft in the silvery twilight the drums began to beat the retreat. Towards the stronghold, metal arms ringing, a motley crowd of horse and foot, a remnant of the voivode's forces, moved up the slopes. Then only did one hear the voice of the commanding voivode:

"Ivan Bogdanich, Ivashka! You —— They have deserted us. Hey, you dragoons, fight for your great tsar! The robbers cannot stand against our strength."

The voivode looked ludicrous with his round back and his long legs bent in the short stirrups, his belly hanging in the saddle-bow as he rode around cursing and spitting. Rain and saliva dripped from his spade-like beard. It dripped from his pipe, too, for the prince voivode Bariatinski was hardly ever without a pipe between his lips.

"Fight, you sons of bitches—fight, I tell you!"

A messenger in black, bestriding a grey horse, approached the voivode. The horse's hoofs churned up the muddy ground. He told the voivode something and floated away northward.

"What are they up to? Traitors! Deserters! Shepelev is a traitor as well as those German devils. I don't care if they do lose their heads." And the voivode continued to swear violently.

His mounted men were jumbled together, and if any fell from his horse he stuck in the mud and could not rise on account of his heavy armour. Yelling Tatars slashed at them and did not spare their horses.

"A devil of a man has brought this upon us. We acted on Ushka Dolgoruki's orders. I told them we should wait till daybreak."

Bariatinski swore louder than ever.

As it became lighter the prince voivode realized that he had been left with a mere handful of men. His mounted musketeers were still fighting the Tatars, who assailed them from three sides. Others thronged near the baggage train.

The voivode's baggage train was up to the axles in mud, and the horses were unharnessed and taken to safety. The Cossacks were silently placing their wounded in the voivode's carts, which were full of his belongings and provisions. The wounded, soiled with mud and blood, were dragging themselves through the mire towards the baggage carts.

"Retreat towards Kasanskaya. You —— Devil take them, the traitors, the cowards!"

The voivode saw that German commanders were taking their surviving cavalry towards the Kasan highway. His own force moved there too. He turned his black horse round and whipped it to a gallop so as to follow them; his pipe was still in his mouth.

From behind a carriage, just as the voivode was passing, a tall musketeer loomed up and shot point-blank at the voivode's steed. The horse jumped, and the voivode fell backwards into the mud. The horse galloped a few paces onwards, then reeled and fell to earth. The voivode, floundering in the mud, swore

stoutly. His beard and kaftan were filthy as he got to his feet. The musketeer who had killed the horse now bound the voivode's hands behind him and, with the self-same rope, tied him to his own cart; punching him in the chest, he bellowed at him:

"Give me your pipe, devil. You won't come to any harm without it."

So he wrenched the pipe from his prisoner's mouth, lit it and then went his way without looking back. He sought for a dry spot.

"This is a nice state I'm in," muttered the voivode to himself. "Oh, well, if one must die, one must. Petrushka Urusov, the scoundrel, has so far not put in an appearance, and neither have his men. Miloslavski skulked. A pity! Thieves at least know how to fight; boyars know, too, but they are not used to fighting. 'Tis much harder to fight than to loll about with women dead drunk. If I survive I shall have to solve the problem about the serfs. Who has to drive whom: the boyars the serfs, or the serfs the boyars? Here's a rascal coming, and, as usual, he is leading a spare horse. If he recognizes me he will kill me."

The voivode raised his eyes. In a nearby cart, on his own princely trunk, he saw a wounded Cossack sitting. The man was dozing, but nevertheless pressing the wound in his side with his gory hand.

"I hope he dies; there'll be one thief the less. That devil is sitting on my trunk, while the owner has to soak in the mud."

A stocky Tatar, leading two horses, approached the tied voivode. He glanced hastily round him, cut the rope by which the voivode was bound fast to the cart, dragged the prisoner on to one of his horses and said in a nasal voice:

"Come with me."

Throwing the reins over the horse's mane, he rode to the river bank behind the warehouses. The prince voivode realized that the rascal was directing his course to the Kasan road. When he had reached this the Tatar set the captive free.

"Take hold of the reins."

The voivode followed the Tatar in silence, and the Tatar was silent, too.

Razin settled himself comfortably in his tent, knowing that a part of the voivode's army had retreated to the stronghold. He sat considering:

"There is no more that I can do for the moment. This is no time for action. Officers and the khans with their Tatars will manage things."

He ordered wine and began to drink. A Cossack came to the ataman's tent.

"Father, many boyars are in the stronghold. The horsemen who were with the voivode have been killed, and those who were able to escape are on the road to Kazan. We've taken the voivode's baggage train, but we have, so far, not found the voivode himself, the devil. In all probability he took to his heels with the Germans."

"That's bad news. We shall have to start the siege with the approaches muddy and difficult to climb."

The Cossack, his horse's hoofs churning up the mud, rode away.

Chernoshenko chased all over the battlefield before discovering the voivode's baggage train. He came to a stop as he reached the cart containing the governor's trunks, and asked the wounded Cossack:

"Falcon, have you seen anything of the voivode?"

"I am dying, captain."

"You won't die. I'll send you a leech. Did you see anyone tied up? I've been told that a musketeer pinioned the voivode here."

"Someone was tied to the cart who looked like an officer of musketeers. A musketeer tied him to the cart and took his pipe out of his mouth."

"That must have been the voivode. Where is he now?"

"A Tatar took him away, tied up as he was, and put him on a horse."

"We shall have to make a search of the cantonments. Say naught of this to the ataman. One devil escaped to the stronghold, and another has been taken away by the Tatars."

"I shall not breathe a word. I am dying. Look, the others are already dead."

"A leech will be sent without delay. Just be patient a moment."

Chernoshenko whipped up his steed and vanished.

## 2

The voivode had compelled the suburban population to abandon their homes and retire to the stronghold, where life for the citizens was unbearable. Many people, as the weather was warm, hid in the woods to escape the siege. The huts within the stronghold were not provided with stoves; the few there were occasioned perpetual quarrels; there was much smashing of crockery owing to the overcrowding. Children, old men, sick and healthy persons, cattle—all were herded together. Thefts were common. Townsfolk were constantly being detailed by the soldiers to man the walls or ravines; no inquiries were ever made as to whether such guards had eaten or not, had slept or not. Those who refused to go were beaten with sticks or whipped.

When, at the call of the drum, the clerks, officers and musketeers left the government office of the stronghold for the inner citadel, the townsfolk sent their own scouts to verify whether there had been any outbreaks of fire in the suburb.

As soon as it became known that the suburb was intact, and that even the timber of the Uspenski monastery in the square had not been touched, the inhabitants went back to their homes. Some of them even visited the ataman in his tent, bowed to him and said:

"The thievish voivodes have gone. We've been expecting you, father, for a long time."

"Serve me," commented Razin. "I neither molest nor rob the poor; the only people I exterminate are the voivodes, noblemen and government officials. Carry on your trade; none will interfere with you."

Razin ordered the Cossacks and musketeers to occupy the stronghold, to transfer thither the captured transport of the voivode, to collect stocks of grain and food, to deepen the moats and raise the earthen ramparts round the pallisade. Further, to cleanse the wells so as to provide drinking water for man and beast in case they were besieged themselves.

In Tetiushy the long-shanked, pot-bellied prince dismounted at the gate of the government office. A thick-set Tatar waited on horseback.

"Dismount! Come into the house, infidel. So far you've served satisfactorily."

"I am not an infidel, prince voivode. I'm a Cossack—Fedka Shpyn by name."

"The fact that you are a Christian makes the situation simpler."

Inside the high, chimneyless room of the government office, where the windows were not glazed, but covered with bladder, and which reeked of sweat and dirty foot-wrappings, the voivode seated himself at the creaking table. Shpyn, in a black coat with the fur turned outside, a quiver of arrows slung on his back and a scimitar at his side, stood opposite the prince at the table.

"First of all, I want to know how you came to guess that it was I, and no other, who was bound to the cart. I was covered with mud from top to toe: my coat—well, I like to look shabby! Not everyone would have recognized me as the voivode. But why this impediment in your speech and those scars on your ugly face?"

"That's a long story which I have no fancy to tell."

"All right!"

"See here, prince and voivode, I'm out to kill the bandit Stenka Razin."

"Very good indeed! I have found a bold man. But still you've not answered my question as to how you recognized me."

"I observed you and decided to save you because the greater the number of Razin's enemies at large is all the better for me. I'm not the only one who is after his blood. Vaska Uss and I are working together on this."

"Say naught about Vaska Uss. So far the junior officials know nothing about him. But we voivodes know how he has been carrying on in Astrakhan. Now that you are one of us I can tell you. Vaska Uss condemned prince Semeon Lvov to be tortured and beaten to death in Prozorovski's courtyard. He is persecuting His Grace the metropolitan Jozef and threatening him with a similar fate. Yet you dare mention that brigand's name in my presence?"

"Prince voivode, Vaska Uss sent me to Moscow to see boyar Pushkin, and it was through this Pushkin that I became known to the tsar. I was the first to inform the tsar that Razin had captured Astrakhan, Tsaritzyn and other towns. By the tsar's favour I and my horse received food and shelter during my stay in Moscow. Vaska disguised me as a Tatar and ordered me to join the infidel followers of Razin. Thus I came to Sinbirsk."

"Tell me, does not Vaska Uss detest the bandit ataman for some special reason?"

"Yes, they were always quarrelling."

"I understand now, fellow. What is it you want?"

"To march with you as a Cossack against Stepan Razin. I'll cross over to them and slay him."

"You'll have to wait for that, Cossack. I also will have to tarry here."

"Prince voivode, Razin has lost his most valiant warriors. The boldest of his captains perished in the Persian affray: Serezhka the One-eyed, Serebriakov, Mokeyev. The last of that stalwart band, Lazunka, was finished off by me in Astrakhan."

"Well, you've become my friend by saving me from the bandits. Otherwise, Cossack, your place would be on the rack. Many are your crimes and you are a venturesome man. Our voivodes fear such as you, but since you've chanced on me—well, I love such men. Pray do not mention Vaska Uss any more, but serve the great tsar on your own initiative."

"An excellent suggestion! I shall go anywhere at your bidding and fear nothing."

"This very day I intend to dispatch you as my special messenger to the tsar in Moscow without referring the matter to the voivode of Kazan."

"At your service, prince voivode."

"Your mission in Moscow once accomplished, you are to return with all speed, not to Sinbirsk, but here to Tetiushy. In Moscow you are to deliver my letter to the secretaries of the Assessment Office and await a reply, if any."

"I know that office, prince."

"Hi, you there within! Bring paper and ink, quick, you lousy wretch!"

The door into the next room opened, admitting a foolish-looking, bearded clerk, whose long hair was oiled and well brushed and held in place by a leather band. The clerk had never before set eyes on a voivode seated at table in such a filthy coat and conversing peacefully with an infidel. He addressed the prince:

"We civil servants are accustomed to being asked to do things, not to being shouted at. You yourself must be lousy, I reckon."

The prince ignored the clerk. He was turning over in his mind what he should write to the tsar. The clerk placed on the table an inkwell with an iron lid and flaps so that, when necessary, it could be worn on a belt; he proffered one quill and clenched the other in his hand. He spread out a long scroll of paper, smoothed it to prevent it from curling up, bent his head and stood looking down at the voivode as he wrote. The prince held the quill in his coarsened fingers as if it were a nail; he pressed it hard and puffed out his cheeks; the quill squeaked and spluttered. Casting another look at the writer's coat and his sword, which hung by a dirty strap, the clerk leaned forward, saying:

"Here, soldier, let me write for you, I am used to it."

The prince flung the inky quill in the clerk's face and shouted:

"You dolt, I'll order the soldiers to put such writings on your rump as will make you scratch your bottom a year hence. Give me another quill, you evil."

By now the clerk had an inkling that something was amiss; he handed the quill and, passing his sleeve over his face, remained staring at the dirty, bearded, broad-shouldered individual as he bent to his task.

The prince scratched away clumsily.

"To the great sovereign and tsar . . . the voivode Yushka Bariatinski, your humble servant, reports: I, your humble servant, was stationed with the transport near Sinbirsk and the bandit Stenka Razin seized this baggage from your humble servant, together with all the horses and carts, and killed the transport men and purloined your humble servant's private clothes and goods and chattels. Command, sire, that I be given a boat with rowers to bring me, your humble servant, men and supplies. Prince Ivan Bogdanovich Miloslavski, sire, had not the strength to succour me; he retreated after that night's skirmish without defending us and shut himself up in the citadel. The men under his command, who are necessary for a defensive action, are unaccustomed to fighting, except for their commanders. These men are the nobles, sire, who fled from their estates when the peasants burned down their manors. The encounter proved unsuccessful, sire, through no fault of mine, your humble servant. I suggested that we should wait for daylight, but boyar prince Yuri Alexeievich Dolgoruki ordered us to open fire as soon as

the brigands came ashore. The mounted soldiers sit their horses heavily on account of their armour, and the soft mud made the going difficult. If a mounted soldier in armour falls into such soil he cannot pick himself up sire. The bandit Stenka Razin ordered the Tatars to attack. Tatar horse are light of foot and accustomed to the soil; moreover, the infidels have adapted themselves to night fighting. Rebellion is ripe around us, in Biely Yar, Kuzmodemiansk, Lyskovo, Sviyazhsk, Cherboksary, Tsivilesk Kurmysh, everywhere. The revolts are for the most part joined by the townsfolk, petty officials and men, who toil in the potash works at Arzamas The worst leaders of these revolts are the Cossacks, musketeers, workmen and priests. The voivodes are being assassinated: Turgeniev was slain in Tsaritzyn; Kozma Lutokhin in Saratov; in Samara, Ivan Efremov, together with his predecessor Harbarov, who were not able to escape, were both finished off. Today voivode Piotr Ivanovich Godunov was killed; he had abandoned his post and was making for Moscow when he was overtaken and slain by the robbers on the public highway. The brigands looted all his possessions.

"Furthermore, I, your humble servant, lodged a complaint with your envoy, Piotr Zamytski, sire, and now report specially through a Cossack who is my friend, against the voivode and cupbearer prince Piotr Semenovich Urussov. My complaint against him, sire, is as follows: we had made a pact that he should come to my assistance with his whole regiment but he did not move although he had received the necessary transport, and I, your humble servant, had told him to join me without delay. He shouted abusive and unseemly language at me, your humble servant, in the presence of many people, including some of my own subordinates, adding that he refused to obey me because he did not belong to my command. Henceforth, I, your humble servant, in view of such disobedience and dishonourable treatment, can no longer speak to him about matters pertaining to your, our great sovereign's, business. I pray you, sire, to command the prince Piotr Semeonovich Urussov send me reinforcements, and I, your humble servant, shall await an order from you, my great sovereign, concerning the said reinforcements.

"Your great sovereign's humble servant,
"voivode prince Yuri Bariatinski."

The letter was sealed, and the prince said to Shpyn:

"Feed your horse, Cossack, and rest awhile. Take the utmost care of the letter. On reaching Moscow, deliver it to the secretaries, and if there be an answer, wait for it: if none is forthcoming, do not tarry in the city, but return here. I wish you to stay by me. I have not mentioned you at all in the missive; later I shall send a report about the services you have rendered the tsar, and you will be honoured. I do not mean to kill Stepan Razin. He must be delivered alive to the authorities in Moscow. Go and find yourself a better abode. Should you be refused admittance, say: 'Wait till prince Yuri comes! He'll soon twist your head off.'"

With a bow Shpyn left the office, thinking:

"Uss and I agreed to kill Razin, and I intend to carry out the compact. I always keep my word. No honours can wipe away an insult."

3

With the coming of Razin life in the suburb returned to normal. There was more freedom; no one hauled the townsfolk to the stocks in front of the government office; no levies were made, nor were the judges and clerks bribed. The inhabitants of lower Sinbirsk rejoiced:

"A breathing-space at last!"

The elite among the suburban population at once flocked to pay their respects to Razin.

"Take up your quarters in our suburb, father; we shall house you, our deliverer, in the best apartments, and whatsoever you will order to be done, our wives and daughters will see to it that those things will be carried out."

"I prefer to remain in my tent, thank you all the same."

Razin assembled his captains, made a tour of the town, inspected the stronghold, ordered that the pallisade be consolidated, praised the newly dug moats. He rode into the inner citadel. Stepan Naumov resembled his chief in face and figure, and was, moreover, his most intimate friend among the captains with him.

"If you happen to take my place," remarked Razin, "wear a black coat like mine, a velvet cap, and hold your sword as I do; but do not let the people hear your voice; it is very unlike mine. Lead the men to battle as I have done. I know you have courage and are familiar with battle formations, Stepan."

Having examined the northern slope of the Sinbirsk mountain, he ordered:

"Dig entrenchments; raise up towers and fortifications, and fill them with earth to prevent them catching fire. Work at night; the boyars can never shoot straight in the dark. Zigzag entrenchments are what I need. If in a straight line, the enemy soon finds the range, and the men in them are in danger of being smashed by cannon-ball."

The peasants and Chuvash and Mordva tribesmen are no lazy people. So Stepan Naumov began to detail peasants for night work, to dig entrenchments, raise earthen ramparts and divert underground springs. Soon a small tower was erected about a hundred and fifty paces beyond the wall of the stronghold. From early morning and throughout the day, cannon in rotation fired upon Razin's structure, but were unable to destroy it on account of the earth, which had been firmly beaten down inside. The little stronghold had steps, so that the Cossacks in passing to and fro by the trenches started to snipe at the troops within the besieged town. Razin rode up to inspect his men's work and ordered them to dig a trench from the little fort right up to the town wall; also to deepen the moats and allow the water to run away downhill. During the night a new structure of logs was lugged to the moat, and a second little fort emerged, which was likewise filled with earth. The new fort was higher and wider than the first and was surrounded by a steep rampart. The gunners on the town walls were picked off by shots fired from the approaches of the second fort.

By the time the second fort was built Razin's Cossacks had discovered a number of widows in the suburbs and had married them; others dispensed with the marriage rites and paid for their amusement with the wenches. They abandoned sentry duty in order to visit the girls by night. Whenever Stepan Naumov in his black coat appeared upon the scene, everyone was back at his post, but one of the other captains, and especially the newly appointed ones, inspired any fear. Razin perceived that besieging a town without any fighting was beginning to demoralize his men. At such times he longed for vodka, but they had

run out of intoxicating beverages. The suburban dwellers made home-brew, but honey was scarce, and there was no sugar. The citizens brought gifts of home-brew to the ataman, but when he had tasted it he declared:

"Home-brew merely swells the belly."

The tsar's brewery and distillery stood idle; though the utensils were intact, there was no one to do the distilling. The publicans had fled and the distillers also.

## 4

The Uspenski monastery stood in the south-western part of the suburb; its cells were built of wood on stone foundations. Every structure, including the wooden fence, was old and rickety. One corner was occupied by a small house rather less dilapidated than the rest. It contained the cells of very old monks and the prior Ignati, an astute old man.

"A sycophant before those in high places," his fellow monks would remark about their superior.

The prior's cell was clean and spacious. He summoned his attendant to call the elders he wished to interview. Then he made his usual round of the monastery, peering into every cell in case he should find one of the monks idling. Returning to his own quarters, he met the brethren in the corridor. They bowed to him and kissed his hand.

"Your blessing, father abbot!"

He paused when he came to his own door, and his dim eyes assumed a particularly stern expression. He adjusted his black habit, struck his staff on the ground and, puckering his grey eyebrows beneath his cowl, asked a novice, who was standing near the entrance and who had not approached to kiss his superior's hand:

"Did the cellarer Savva post you here?"

"Yes, father."

"You must address me as 'father abbot', youth. I am not a lay priest."

"Father abbot."

The novice had the long fair hair and rosy face of a girl and wore a dark cherry-coloured habit.

"Are you a newcomer here?"

"Yes, father."

"Have you summoned the elders?"

"I have, and they are coming."

"Savva, indeed! He invariably chooses striplings, the bearded cur, the pedaerast!" Turning to the youth, the prior said:

"When the elders have entered the cell and are seated, you must keep a watch, and remember that if an alarm is raised you will knock on the door and recite a prayer."

"Which one, father?"

"Don't you know it yet? What a sin! Savva, Savva, you impious man, how long must I tolerate you? Young man, you must recite: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.' Then give a knock and you will be

answered by, 'Amen.' You will then enter the cell—that is if there is an alarm. Otherwise, do not enter, but wait until the elders leave the cell."

"I shall do so, father."

"Savva! Savva!"

Four elders, in black cowls and long, flowing robes like that the prior wore, followed him into the cell. The prior made the sign of the cross with a sweeping gesture and gave the elders a general blessing. Supporting himself with his staff, he sat down in a wooden armchair with an eiderdown cushion and a stool at his feet.

"Lord bless these Thy servants!"

"Lord bless us sinners so that our discourse may be peaceful."

"I have summoned you here, brethren, because I know and trust you. Father Kirill, Vonifati, Geronti and our brother Varsonofi, you understand what to say and how to keep silent on any matters. I shall now ask you elders: Who is now governing the glorious and famous city of Sinbirsk?"

"Boyars and princes, father abbot."

"Would that it were so! The godless rebel and apostate Stenka Razin now reigns over the city of Sinbirsk, which God has, so far, preserved. You must have heard that this man has been anathematized by numerous priests and His Holiness the patriarch."

The prior crossed himself; the greybeards nodded and crossed hands fiddled upon black habits.

"God's warriors, the princes and boyars, have been driven out and are besieged in the citadel. Yet you know that these God-fearing men find favour in the tsar's eyes and are necessary to him. It is the tsar who grants title deeds for fields, forests, apiaries and lands with peasants attached to them. All donations to priories come from princes and boyars. So I shall ask you, for whom do we offer prayers to the Lord? Do we pray for the rebels, who wish to overthrow those of noble birth? If their dark rule prevails, the apostate and bandit Stepan Razin will distribute the land among his followers, and God's houses will become landless. Who, then, will cultivate these lands? Furthermore, you elders, whom do you desire for a master?"

"Wherefore put such idle questions, father abbot?"

"You know that we pay allegiance to and pray the Lord solely for our great sovereign."

"We all know this. But we have given ourselves up to God's will, and we pray for the great sovereign, the princes, boyars and their friends and relations. In present circumstances prayer without deeds is futile."

"How can we, old and having renounced the world, perform acts which will serve the state?"

"How can we fight the rebels?"

"With the weapon of your wisdom, your age-long experience, brethren! Thus can you serve him."

"But in what way, father abbot? Teach us."

"Are you aware that the tsar's distillery is closed and deserted? All the elected state officials have fled."

"Do not incite us to sin, father Ignati."

"We know what you say about the monastic wine-makers."

"The Lord will forgive your sin, because its commission will be in defence of the Christian faith against its apostates. We are hoary with age, and the earth's

goodness is not for us. Yet if we abstain from committing this sin, the Lord's houses will be destroyed. So let us deliberate carefully, brethren. We alone guard the ancient faith and piety. Lay priests are seduced by drink and the attractions which rebellion afford. Surely it is not for them to have the custody of God's monasteries and churches?"

"I've been told that the tsar's taverns stand empty."

"And are you aware that the bandits are longing for wine?"

"How could such a thing have escaped our notice?"

"One further question shall I put to you and then we shall close the debate, which has been inspired by the Lord. Are you acquainted with a plant growing in the water-meadows of Sviaga? The herb has a white blossom and a dark stem. It is called tipsy-berry."

"I have known that plant from earliest youth."

"So have I."

"Well, brethren, I grant you the authority to direct the wine-making monks this very day to the distillery, there to produce wine. The monastery will also benefit. Our task is to serve God, not merely with prayers—for do we not know the parable of the talents buried in the ground? Let us strive to consolidate Russia, and the Lord will not forget our zeal. I shall instruct the novices how to dig up that plant. Its blossoms have now gone to seed, but that part of it is not needed. What we want are the stem and roots. These we will dry and pound into a powder, and get the monks who make the liquor to add this powder to the brew and thus produce a heady mead. The intoxicant will not be poisoned thereby, but merely be made more potent; it will deprive the partaker of the use of arms and legs. This powerful intoxicant will put a brake on the rebels' activities and give time for the great tsar to assemble the Lord's host and for the voivodes to organize a campaign against the apostate Razin."

"We shall carry out your orders, father Ignati."

"Let us hasten."

"Do not fail us, elders. Tell no one of our discussion."

"Surely, father, you do not mistrust us?"

"We are not children; we are known for the good service we have performed for the community."

"It is for this very reason that I summoned you rather than the other elders. The task is a sacred one. Forgive my doubts."

The elders rose from the benches and bowed. Four black figures with white beards and deadly waxen faces slowly regained their cells. The fifth sat on in his armchair, his head resting on the knob of his staff, dozing.

## 5

From Astrakhan to Sinbirsk the Volga was free from tsarist patrols. A messenger came with a missive for Razin from Astrakhan.

"This letter was given me, Stepan Timofeievich, by your captain Grigori Chikmaz."

Here is what Stenka read:

"To father ataman Stepan Timofeievich! Since your captain Grigori Chikmaz pledged his solemn word to let you know all that is happening in Astrakhan, he has to tell you the following:

"Vaska Uss has turned traitor, Stepan Timofeievich. From the very first days of his atamanship he has acted contrary to your orders. He seized prince Semeon Lvov's possessions and tortured the prince to death. He slew all those whose lives you have spared and whom you had ordered him not to molest in any way. But he has done you an even more grievous harm in that he seized the powder and other stores which the Zaporozhian ataman Serko was sending to your relief, together with about a thousand men armed with muskets and with full equipment in cannon, powder, lead and so forth. He sent the Ukrainians away in discontent to their homes, saying: 'The ataman no longer needs your assistance, but thanks you all the same for the supplies of war.' And when I remonstrated with him he clapped me into jail for three days and intended to place me in irons as a traitor. Ivashko Krasulin and Mitka Yaranets are hand in glove with him. But Fedka Sheludiak is planning secretly to escape to Sinbirsk with other men of Astrakhan to reinforce you. Vaska Uss is all the more incensed in that he has caught the black disease and is ravaged by it; worms and pieces of flesh drop off him from under his velvet clothes, and he goes about with his face swathed in a silk handkerchief; his speech has become indistinct, and when intoxicated he brags: 'I fear neither tsar nor boyars, and I shall kill Stenka Razin because he drowned my Persian princess. I am doomed to die soon, but I shall not die while Stenka is alive.' He intends to torture the old metropolitan Jozef of Astrakhan, but the captains and Cossacks have lodged a protest. So far as the metropolitan is concerned, such treatment would only serve him right. What is so bitter to me, father, is to hear that cur Vaska maligning you. That I cannot bear. He is always drunk nowadays.

"Your servant and well-wisher,
"Captain Grigori Chikmaz."

Razin questioned the messenger:

"Are you thinking of going back, fellow?"

"Yes, I think I had better, Stepan Timofeievich."

"When you reach Astrakahn, tell Chikmaz that father remembers and loves him and wishes him well. Say that I have sent no reply to his letter, but declared: 'Keep a vigilant eye on Vaska Uss and, if possible, escape without leaving a trace'; that as soon as I get respite from fighting I shall seek him out, wherever he may be, and rejoice in my friend."

This took place in the morning. By noon of this same day Razin visited the little advance fort near the city wall. He was in an angry mood. He ordered the cannon to be placed on a height and to keep up a continuous fire on the citadel. The vents of the guns became red-hot, but the gunners, glancing at the ataman, dared not inform him as to how matters stood: that after such intensive firing the cannon would become useless. The citadel caught fire in several places, part of the wall collapsed. As the men set about extinguishing the fires they were shot by Cossacks and musketeers, who had been placed at the approaches to the little fort. Many were the boyars and their men who paid

the ultimate penalty that day. Razin had ordered all dead horses not eaten by the Tatars, dead dogs and other carrion to be collected and thrown over the walls of the citadel in hampers. The besieged dared not open the gates of the citadel, and so the carrion rotted within. Night was coming on when Razin returned to his tent. The ataman decided:

"One more day, and then we shall see the last of them. We'll burn down the citadel with the boyars inside."

A monk was standing beside a cask at the opening of the ataman's tent.

"What do you want?"

"Well, father, the prior of the Uspenski monastery ordered me: 'Brother Irinarkh, you will receive a cask of wine at the distillery. Ask the musketeers to give you a helping hand. It is a gift to the ataman for his charity towards the house of the Lord. He has neither burned it, nor damaged the ikons, nor forbidden worshippers to pray for the salvation of their souls. We have no money, so we are distilling wine for him as a gift from the monastery.'"

"If the wine is good, I value it higher than any money. The only thing I fear is that you intend to poison me, blackbeetles of priests."

"Oh, father! I will myself sample it before your very eyes. I can assure you the wine is good. The people drink lots of it and approve of it."

The monk broached the cask, and the ataman handed him a goblet.

"Do as you said. Drink!"

The monk crossed himself and drank some of the wine. Still Razin was mistrustful. So he called two musketeers and a Cossack, who were on sentry duty:

"The monk has drunk; now you drink some, too."

Each of the soldiers drank a goblet full.

"How is the wine?"

"It tastes good, father."

"The tsar's was far worse."

The men went back to their duties. As the ataman dismissed the monk he said:

"Thank the prior from me. When I call on him I shall bring gifts for the monastery."

"Drink to your good health. We have now repaired the distillery, but will you, father, order that some of the drink money be paid into the monastery exchequer? Our buildings are so very dilapidated."

"I grant your demand. Take the money."

The monk returned to the monastery, and that same evening Razin began to drink. He ceased taking part in the assaults on the citadel. This became the task of his two captains, Stepan Naumov and Lazar Timofeiev. They took it in turn to direct the troops. Sometimes their places were taken by captain Mishka Haritonov. Mihail Chernoshenko was summoned by the ataman.

"Mihail, you are to sail down the Volga to Tsaritzyn. So assemble your men and be off. Buy a horse in the town, ride full speed to the Don and enlist volunteer rovers. Bring them here, but if any fighting should be needed on the way, do your duty."

Next morning Chernoshenko boarded a boat with his rowers.

6

From beyond the Sviyaga river and the Yaransk side of the Moscow road, the white caps, plated armour and helmets of the cavalry and dragoons stood out more and more clearly against the grey mist. Voivode Bariatinski was not among the young boyars and men of differing ranks, now clad in battle-dress; the cavalry was being led by German captains in dark blue uniform. The voivode rode behind with the mounted musketeers. He was attired in a threadbare musketeer coat and a grey cloth cap with a sheepskin crown.

The Tatars and Kalmucks were the first to espy the voivode's troops when the horses of the mounted men from the distance looked no bigger than cats.

Razin was lolling in his tent upon cushions covered with rugs. He wore a crimson half-length coat with a single pistol in his belt and was bareheaded. He drank in a recumbent position, served by a Tatar boy gaily attired in silk and soft moroccan boots. Razin spoke both Tatar and Kalmuck. In his tipsy dreams Razin saw himself at a feast at his godfather's, ataman Kornei's.

"So you think you've got your godson at last, Satan, and hope to deliver him up to the Moscovites? Ha, ha, ha! But lo, with a wave of my hand and a yell, all the poor of the land will arise and throw you into the water."

As he slept, he saw the veteran Cossacks, fully armed, arriving for the feast: Ossip Kaluzhenin, Mihail Samarenin the elder, and red-haired, cunning Login Semenov. With a clatter of swords they brought in iron fetters.

"That's fine, gallant atamans! Now let us fetter my godson! Hi, call in a blacksmith," Kornei shouted; his grey head with its white plait shook, and the silver ring, set with the emerald, jerked in the crafty old man's ear.

Razin smiled in his sleep, puckered his brows and blinked, then opened his eyes. His second-in-command, Stepan Naumov, stood beside him.

"Father, the voivode with his army is on the other side of the Sviyaga river."

"Mighty fine news, my lad! I've had a curious dream. I seemed to be back in the Don country; godfather Kornei was shouting and ordering the Cossacks to put me in irons."

"Such a thing will never come to pass, father. But have you heard what I said? The voivode is drawing nigh to the Sviyaga with a well-organized army."

"I am lazy, Stepan Naumov; I don't feel like rousing myself. Besides, it's not my turn, but yours. Marshal our men in readiness and order them to make preparations for a battle tomorrow. How far distant is the voivode?"

"Round about three miles."

"Have they halted, or are they pressing on to the fort?"

"They have come to a standstill and are not moving towards the river."

"That's good! The voivode won't venture to cross at night, and night is coming on. We've spoiled his taste for night fighting. Here, put on my cap and my black coat, take my horse and turn out the people, Stepan Naumov. Let the Chuvashi and Mordvi make a rampart round the town with outlets to allow our fighting men to pass through. Make the barriers of poles and iron pitchforks on staves so that they can easily be opened for our own men, but will serve as obstacles to the enemy. How many cannon have we?"

"Very few. The stone ones are cracked from overheating; the wooden ones have been burned by the foe in the citadel, and of the iron and brass ones only two are left intact; the vents of most of the others are twisted from the firing."

"What have you been about? Why have you not seen to repairs?"

"We have no armourers, and the suburban smiths are not much use. Further, I reckoned that the voivode could not possibly return within a month."

"Well, Stepan Naumov, for this mistake we may have to pay with our heads. I am not worried about mine. It was given to me for just such an emergency. But I am grieved about yours. In the absence of cannon we have lost half the battle without having measured forces."

The ataman looked thoughtful; the captain stood with downcast eyes. Then he remarked:

"I have been thinking, father, to burn the boyars out of the citadel and shut up the people in the upper part of the town. Thus we could manage without cannon. In the citadel there are cannon and plenty of ammunition."

Razin flung away the cup with a violent gesture. The Tatar boy caught it, filled it and waited for the call.

"So be it, tsar's Satan, we'll fight with swords; when swords run out we'll fight with our fists. We'll give the voivodes something to remember us by. You, Stepan, as long as daylight lasts, must pile the ramparts higher and have a ditch dug round the whole of the town, from the Sviyaga; make it deep and place strong stakes on top of the ramparts. During the night the barges on the Volga must be hauled into the Sviyaga. We'll ferry the foot soldiers across by way of the barges; the horsemen will have to swim; the Tatars and Kalmucks prefer to swim, anyway. Take Lazar to assist you. Further, if you are called upon to deploy and maintain the battle formations, the Tatars must be placed on the right flank, the Kalmucks on the left, and the Cossacks in the centre. The Cossacks must not be in too close formation; between every two horsemen there must be sufficient room for an infantryman to pass with his spear and carbine. The Kalmucks are idolators; the Tatars are Mohammedans; they are always quarrelling, and so must be kept apart, or there will be a dispute in the midst of the fray, and all will be lost. They are so savage and self-willed! Another thing to remember: if a man proves stubborn, be he peasant, townsman or Chuvash, and refuses to help build the ramparts, slay him with your sword."

"Father, I do beg of you not to drink any more. Our men have found that the monks add poisonous stuff to the wine. I myself saw how a number of peasants and Cheremissi killed each other in a drunken brawl. Men at work are overcome by sleep; they just drop to the ground, and nothing can waken them."

"You are speaking calumny against the monks. I drink a lot of their wine and am none the worse for it. The voivode will not reach the crossing today; tomorrow we fight—today I drink!"

The captain, posing as Razin, roused the people. Everybody rallied zealously to the job. During the night, at the foot of the hill to the west of Sinbirsk, there arose a high earthen rampart with narrow openings, protected by barriers of pitchforks and poles. On the Sinbirsk side of the Sviyaga river, fifty small and ten large barges were tossing on the water in readiness to ferry the troops across. The voivode had not advanced on the river, but had remained where he had bivouacked.

## 7

In the drizzle of a misty dawn Razin disembarked his troops on the opposite bank of the Sviyaga. His voice thundered:

"Brothers! I want you all to remember that you are fighting for freedom. Should the boyars come out of this struggle victorious, slavery, the whip and the cudgel will be your portion."

Thousands of voices answered:

"We shall resist to the end, father."

"And you, my Tatars! Fight with no thought of self. Once we have bested the boyars, your murzas will no longer be taken from you as hostages. No more tribute will be exacted. You will be free and allowed to pray as you wish."

This was spoken in Tatar. Then the ataman turned to the Kalmucks, whom he addressed also in their own tongue:

"You Kalmuck chiefs and men of all ranks, retrieve your free steppes and your forbears' liberty. Fight for all you are worth to gain this freedom; fight for your wives, your children, your settlements."

The voivode's troops stood motionless as a wall. The kettledrums struck up, and Razin's army hurled itself on the tsar's troops.

The voivode gave the command:

"You dolts! Centre, open ranks!"

"Hi, open ranks, my men! Kalmucks to the left! Tatars to the right!"

Both armies, in obedience to these commands, opened their centre ranks. The voivode's cannon boomed, but did little damage, since the balls merely fell into the river Sviyaga and made a splash and churned up the water.

"Force the centre, brothers!"

Hand-to-hand fighting took the place of ordered array. Razin seemed to be everywhere at once. Lazunka's mettlesome steed bore him swiftly from one end to the other; his red cap entwined with ropes of large pearls flashed across the battlefield. Lazar Timofeiev and Stepan Naumov, who were in command of the Cossacks, slashed to right and to left regardless of danger. Fresh warriors from both belligerents advanced over the corpses of men and horses: the one side aflame with hatred, the other bound by their oath of allegiance to the tsar. A rain of arrows from the Tatars and Kalmucks fell upon the enemy like swarms of locusts. Mounted soldiers, wounded in the face, galloped over the field on horses rendered frantic by the sting of arrows. Squint-eyed warriors in sheepskins, their skulls smashed in, sprawled on the ground still clutching their scimitars. The fog-laden air smelt more and more of blood. The wind wafted into the men's faces the stench of fresh dung from the ripped bellies of horses. Flocks of ravens, not scared by the fighting, swooped over the field like black clouds. The cannonade from the voivode's side continued unabated, blowing off men's heads and crippling the horses. The ataman's cannon—four all told—seldom responded; their roar was lost in the din, in the clank of swords against armour. Banners waved, kettledrums sounded from both belligerents. The banners dropped to the blood-drenched earth, trampled and sticky from the battle; then they were raised aloft, to fall once more and rise again above the heads of the men, the fabric flapping in their faces.

Fighting lasted till noon. A murky sun appeared out of the mist. The foe gave way, retreated from the Sviyaga and paused. But, with a wild yell, the Tatars hurled themselves on the dragoons; the scimitars of the Kalmucks flashed among the cavalry; there was a clatter of plated mail. . . . Sundry Cossacks, forsaking their dead mounts, fought with swords alongside the musketeers and in the *mêlée* gripped their adversaries by the throat; they were

trodden under the horses' hoofs, only to scramble to their feet and carry on the slaughter. The voivode, spluttering and cursing, had retired to an adjacent hillock; sweat and saliva trickled down his fair, greying beard. He removed his cap and wiped away the perspiration from his shaggy head, glancing sideways to the left as he did so. A huge musketeer in a russet coat, his shock of black hair flying, a short axe in the front of his belt, dropped to one knee and took aim. But the cord was damp, and the arquebus misfired. The voivode shouted:

"Musketeer, throw your cudgel to the dogs and listen."

"I am listening, prince voivode."

"I know you. It is you who are able to carry a gun-carriage on your shoulders. Your name is Semeon."

"Yes, I am Semeon, son of Stepan from Alatyr."

"You see that Cossack standing over there? Worm your way to him and tell him: 'The voivode orders you not to do what you intend doing.' The bandits fight well, but I know that we, the tsar's men, will overcome them; we'll drive them into the Sviyaga. The ataman must be captured alive."

"I hear, father prince; but the man is not a Cossack; he's an infidel."

"He's a Cossack, you fool. His name is Fedko."

"Permit me, father voivode, to tackle the ataman. I shall catch the bandit and carry him to you in my own arms."

"Don't boast, you booby. They'll chop your head off. But if you do this the great tsar will reward your service."

"I go without delay."

Throwing away his arquebus, the musketeer, while parrying blows with his axe, pushed his way towards the Cossack, whose head, after the fashion of the Kazan Tatars, was swathed in a turban over his cap. The Cossack was mounted on a steaming black horse. All around, men were fighting with swords, axes, or simply throttling one another; horses lay on their sides; steel clanked; but the Cossack remained motionless as if deaf to the din of battle. The musketeer touched his knee.

"Are you Fedor?"

"What is that to you?"

"The voivode's orders are: 'You are not to do what you are planning; the ataman must be taken alive!' This is the message I was told to bring."

"I don't care two figs for anyone when the battle is raging. Your voivode is not my father. Go and tell him so."

"Not I! It is too hot to turn back, and no sense in it; better to press on."

"Forge along, you oaf."

"You devil! You traitor to the voivode!"

Shpyn, having descried a passage, pricked up his mount and rode into the ranks of Razin's troops.

"Are you against your own people, infidel? Why the devil are you riding across our path?"

Shpyn disdained an answer, but adroitly defended himself with his scimitar against horseless riders who rose from the ground.

Razin's voice thundered from close by:

"Splendid, falcons! Hold on a trifle longer, and the day is ours."

The wall of groaning, grovelling, panting humanity shuddered at the sound of Razin's voice and heaved forward.

"Long live father Stepan!"

"*Nechai!*"

"*Ne-e-cha-i!*"

"For freedom, brothers!"

"Smash the devils!"

. . . On the summit of the hillock the voivode, with his legs screwed up in the stirrups, cursed profusely, for an arrow had pierced his cap.

"Don't give in, you louts! Don't retreat, tsar's men, fight on! Ivashka! There's a skunk for you. Instead of making a sortie from the rear, the coward sits like a chicken in its nest. The bandits are making headway! I'll have to back my horse. May their mothers be——"

The voivode descended from the hillock and advanced farther into the battle zone. The ranks of the mounted men became a mass of confusion, and they were beating a hasty retreat. Tatars yelled and thrashed the voivode's cavalry.

"Damned raw-flesh eaters! Sheepskin devils! Breeches and scimitars their only uniform! Horses the size of a dog! Yet what havoc they make! What havoc! Must we really retreat? You are not to fall back, you sons of bitches! Damnation to the robber's voice! Not for nothing do men believe in the thunder of the accursed fellow and follow it through fire. No falling back, you dolts! Anathema! We'll have to fall back. Death has no fears for me, but the battle will be lost. We'll be smashed to pieces!"

From the pile of killed in armour, kaftans and homespun coats a man rose with difficulty to his knees. He caught sight of a bright patch just in front of him, shot at it—he was a dead shot. Dropping his pistol, the man once more fell among the heap of dead. . . . The bullet had hit Razin in the leg; his mount, pierced by the same bullet, reared up. The horse screamed piteously. The ataman, in spite of his pain, released his boots from the stirrups and rolled off the frightened beast's back. The horse made convulsive efforts to rise. Stepan Razin, in his black velvet, raised himself . . . then, swift as lightning, a sword flashed above him; a red-hot steel seared the left side of his head. Razin fell. . . . A familiar voice shouted triumphantly:

"Ah, devil!"

A head, swathed in a turban, hurtled down beside the ataman, who, raising his eyes and scanning the well-known features, rapped out one word:

"Shpyn!"

As the cry left his lips an excruciating pain darted through Razin's head . . . he lost consciousness.

Semeon, son of Stepan from Alatyr, seeing what had gone on, thought:

"Now I'll make tracks to the voivode. Here's the man he needs."

He lifted the ataman's body easily by the legs. A bullet whizzed over the musketeer's head—the ataman's boot was ripped off, and a warm stream trickled down the musketeer's neck.

"Tsar's men! Don't shoot! I have captured the ataman for the voivode. Hi, don't slash at me! Make way!"

"You infernal devil!" cried a loud, clear voice.

Without letting the ataman fall from his grasp, the huge musketeer sank to the ground. Stepan Naumov had cloven him from top to chest. One more corpse was added to the mass of men and horses lying on the battlefield. The Tatars, whistling and yelling, drove the tsar's troops away from the spot where Razin lay. Stepan Naumov sprang from his horse, tore off his dark blue coat,

enveloped the inert ataman in its folds, swung him across the saddle, leapt into it himself and turned away from the battlefield towards the Sviyaga.

"Bad luck," he said as he passed Lazar Timofeiev, "Shpyn has wounded our father."

"Then we are lost! Shall I sound the retreat?"

"No, it will soon be dark and they'll withdraw of themselves."

Since there came no further commands from the ataman or his captains, Razin's army fell back and gave up fighting. The voivode was too busy rallying his own men to notice and pursue Razin's men, who thus could gain the barges and board them at their leisure, leaving the wounded, the colours and kettle-drums seized by Razin on the tsar's flotilla on the Ilovlya river. They also abandoned the four useless cannon. Razin was still unconscious when Stepan Naumov laid him in Lazar's barge. The captain went up to the Cossacks.

"Brothers! Moor the barges on the Sviyaga to the bank by Sinbirsk; later we shall take them to the Volga. You yourselves had better remain behind the ramparts; put up the barriers and place a guard at the openings. The voivode will not attempt to cross the river by night; we have battered him hard; besides, it is too dark."

## 8

The voivode scanned the approaches to the Sviyaga. Darkness was falling swiftly; all was black save for the glitter of a cast-away sword and the cannon, which were twisted on their battered gun-carriages.

"Devil take it, but we don't seem to be beaten after all! Something seems to have gone wrong with the bandits."

Bariatinski pushed on towards the Sviyaga on his stocky and jaded steed. All those who had escaped death ambled after him.

"Another day of hard fighting for the defence of the boyars' bellies! May their mothers be . . . You may break your head for them! Called up to fight for their homes they were, yet about a thousand of them, damnable cowards that they are, are sitting tight at home, the recreants. Hi, you, light fires on the bank of the Sviyaga. We'll spend the night here, sew buttons on our trousers and dress our wounds. Many a robber fortress had we to force on our way to the Sviyaga, and here we've had a threefold tougher nut to crack."

Musketeers and militia hauled trees to the river bank; axes struck on wood, flames sprang up, casting shadows on men, horses and gun-carriages. Wounded soldiers and followers of Razin's host, who had been made prisoners, stepped towards the fires. Here Bariatinski had nothing to fear from eavesdroppers; his soldiers loved him, and no one was likely to send in a report about him. He spluttered and swore loudly against Yuri Dolgoruki and Miloslavski, the tsar's kinsman.

"Tomorrow morning we shall cross the Sviyaga. The bandits will abandon the foot of the hill. One can do nothing behind a rampart if one has no cannon. Then Miloslavski will crawl out of his hen-coop and will expect all the honours of battle for himself, damn him. He'll send messengers after messengers with reports to the tsar. Whereas in truth they must have scorched their rumps sitting so snug and warm all this time. The tsar's secretaries wrote to me:

'You must report through the cupbearer in Kazan, and don't you poke your nose in anywhere.' May your mothers . . . Anathema!"

Prince Bariatinski sat down on a thick log by the fire, took off his cap and, pulling the Tatar arrow out of it, threw it to the flames.

"The infidel meant to strike an Orthodox Christian in the face, but he aimed too high."

Leisurely, the voivode stretched his long legs, clad in heavy boots, to the flames. His thighs, black from horse's sweat, looked as though they were made of sheepskin, so thickly were they covered with the moult from his charger. The captured Razin men were rounded up in a circle, but they were not guarded, since there was no means of escape; the river flowed in front, and behind them the tsar's troops sat or lay warming themselves at the bivouac fire. The prince's fierce, round, almost unblinking eyes stared into the gloom, where patches of men, horses and armament stood out faintly. He shouted:

"Has anyone here seen a Cossack wearing Tatar garb?"

A tall, thin dragoon in a battered helmet and limping on one foot, his knee bandaged with a rag, stepped forth.

"I saw such a one, prince."

"Tell me about him."

"At the moment when one of our men, who was not quite dead, fired a bullet into the ataman's leg—his horse's leg, too, was smashed by that bullet—and the ataman rolled off his horse—well, at that moment the Cossack in Tatar garb dealt him a blow on the head with his sword. The ataman fell prostrate, and the Cossack-Tatar was on the point of striking again, when a bandit captain slashed at this same Cossack and cut his head off."

"Cut his head off?"

"Yes, prince voivode."

"And what were you doing at the time, you dolt?"

"I was crawling from beneath the slain. A whole mound of our men were piled up on me. When I did manage to get out I felt nearly done for, the infidels having selected that spot to swarm over us and chase our men clean away."

"I am sorry about that Cossack. He was disobedient and not a servile lick-spittle, not a one to cast himself on your neck, nor was he afraid of fighting. Well, such was his fate! Summon a man who is fit to ride and tell him: 'The voivode has ordered the transport to be moved up to the camp fires, and the men and horses to be fed.' "

"If the bandits had had as many cannon as we there would be nothing for us to do now but wait. The Cossack is done for, but he has smashed the ataman. He is not likely to be fighting-fit for some time. When he has recovered his forces will have dispersed. Today we won a battle which I never expected to go in our favour. We've shaken off the firebrand which sets everything ablaze. As for the faceless mass—I shall crush them like lice."

The transport wheels creaked, there was a smell of bread and tar, borne down the breeze to the fires. Horses whinnied hungrily. The prince glanced askance at the nearest fire. Blue uniforms with yellow buttons, shining helmets, spikes, beardless men could be faintly discerned sitting round, smoking, drinking vodka and speaking an alien tongue.

"Devil take it, those are Germans warming their blackbeetle paws!" The voivode rose. "Hi, carpenters to the fore! Put up gallows near the river bank."

Axes gleamed and slammed. Whitish poles rose up in the darkness.

The voivode paced up and down, counting:

"Forty! We'll hang two on each one. Now then, string up the Cossack prisoners of war. We'll flog the musketeers. Lead 'em up."

Musketeers in the tsar's service began to push the men into the lighted space near the voivode: wounded musketeers, peasants and townsfolk, Chuvashi and Tatars. The voivode drew a blade of damask steel out of his old scabbard. Came a flash, and the head of one of Razin's men slipped from the shoulders and crackled in the flames.

"This cattle started to kick and they had not even proper equipment. One cannot kill with a bast shoe, see? No cannon—nothing but hunting-poles and pitchforks! Bring another. . . ."

Again a flash from Bariatinski's sword. The body of another of Razin's musketeers crumpled to the ground, the head sliding down the corpse to the voivode's feet. With a kick the voivode sent it spinning.

"Sinbirsk was built by Bogdanko Matveiev, the son of Hitrovo. You robbers thought to seize the citadel in the autumn from the base of the hill."

A third head fell off.

"Bogdanko built a nice trap for you."

A fourth head rolled to the ground.

"Only a drunkard would think of taking Sinbirsk from the foot of the hill. When he came to his senses he'd look up and take to his heels."

Off slipped a fifth head.

"You should have attacked from the west, robbers. From this waterway the Sviyaga flows higher than the Volga. Now for the next—my hands ache from inactivity."

Another musketeer was brought up to the voivode; his hands were tied behind his back. The voivode raised his sword, peered into the man's face and roared:

"Give me back my pipe, you devil!"

"Surely you've had your fill of human flesh? My hands are bound. How can I give it back to you?"

"Unbind him!"

The voivode's assistants cut the rope. The musketeer shook his right arm and shrugged his shoulders. Then he drew a pouch and pipe from his trousers pocket, filled it with tobacco, went to the fire, lit it, spat and, puffing smoke through his nostrils, remarked:

"Let me have a smoke, bearded son of hell. I'll return the compliment in kingdom come. Today I shall bequeath you the tobacco. Take the pouch."

The pipe made a tiny blaze between the musketeer's teeth. The voivode stepped back and raised his sword.

"You will finish it later."

The head with the gleaming pipe hurtled through the dark air and fell near by. Bariatinski stooped with a grunt, drew the pipe from between the severed head's clenched teeth, wiped the stem on his bloodstained coat and resumed his seat at the fireside. He stretched his legs wide so as to make room for his paunch and began to smoke. Staring at the flames with his unblinking eyes, he ordered without turning his head:

"Flog the musketeers; hang the Cossacks."

The newly-set-up gallows creaked; legs in dark blue trousers, with metal

heels shining, twirled and jerked in the fitful light. The faces were invisible. Close to the fires, the heads of Razin's men rolled in the dust. The executions lasted until past midnight.

9

Having crossed the river, his captains carried Razin to his tent near the shores of the Volga. They posted a guard. Then two of his companions, who had been loyal to him throughout life, lit all the candles they could find; thereafter, they washed the terrible gash on the ataman's head and his bloodstained face; he was as clean as they could make him, though small stains still remained in the pock-marks on his sunken cheeks. They filled the head wound with sifted sugar and bound it up. His legs, riddled with bullets, were still bleeding, but with the aid of pincers the captains drew forth the fragments of cloth and then bound them tightly. The ataman opened his eyes, tried to sit up, but fell back on the rugs.

"Lie still, little father."

Glancing anxiously round the tent, Razin asked in a feeble voice:

"Is this my own tent? How goes the battle?"

"The Devil take the battle!" exclaimed Stepan Naumov. Tears clouded his eyes, and the pipe dropped from his mouth. Presently he continued:

"We've picked up the living and abandoned the dead. Men still fighting-fit are here in Sinbirsk behind the ramparts, others are consolidating the little fort. We shall have to fight tomorrow. It was Shpyn, the damned traitor, who cut you down, but I slew him. The voivode is setting up gallows for our wounded on the farther side of the Sviyaga."

"Now I recollect how Shpyn struck me on the head. It was a dishonourable thing to do, but I smote him with my hand and he retaliated with his sword."

"How many times have I told you, father, always to wear an Egyptian helmet and armour, or, if you did not see your way to doing this, at least to keep out of the thick of the fight?"

"I have always believed I bear a charmed life, and that neither bullet nor sword could harm me."

"You've been finely paid for your belief, and it's a heavy price to pay. Sinbirsk and everything is lost."

"Nothing of the sort! Put on my kaftan and my cap, Naumov; take my sword and save the people. I cannot sit a horse for the moment."

Then Lazar had his say:

"Father, this very night I shall carry you to one of our canoes, and take along half a score of trustworthy Cossacks as rowers. We'll make a dash for the Volga and Tsaritzyn. There you will recover. A leech is sure to be found. Then off to the Don!"

"The Don means death for me, Lazar. That dream I had seemed real to me; the veterans put me in chains, and the worst enemy of all was my godfather Kornei. The dream is bound to come true. Why, my whole arm is so numb that I could not hold a sword even if I tried. . . . Why, to go to the Don . . . a sick man—it's out of the question."

"But are you so certain your dream will come true, Stepan Timofeievich?

I have fortified Kagalnik, made some fine dug-outs there. Increasing numbers of rovers will rally to you, and we shall hold out."

"Alas, my falcons! the boyars will now strangle the people. My head, my head—the legs don't matter. Even without legs I could sit a horse and fight the boyars. But my head . . . I said too little . . . too little. . . ."

Razin relapsed into unconsciousness, murmuring in his delirium.

"I will do as you say, father."

Stepan Naumov kissed Razin, rose, put on one of his black coats, found a red cap with tassel and pearls, wound a white kerchief round his head over the cap and vowed:

"I shall save as many of our men as it is in my power to do."

Lazar Timofeiev embraced his friend and added:

"Mark me, brother! My task is to summon Cossacks and prepare the boat so that father may be saved. We shall reach Devichye Hill before dawn."

"Farewell, Lazar!"

The captains embraced each other once more, and as they came out of the tent Naumov said:

"I must move the boats from the Sviyaga to the Volga."

"You are right! The task should be accomplished before dawn."

The two black figures separated, one going eastwards and the other to the west.

The blue-black Volga gently rocked a canoe, at the bottom of which her daring foster-son lay motionless on a pile of rugs. He was covered with kaftans. His head wound still gaped; his hands were palsied and unable to hold a sword; his voice had forsaken him together with his strength.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MOSCOW FOR THE LAST TIME

#### 1

All the bells of Moscow ceased ringing as if by command. The voice of the crowd then became more audible.

"Have you heard, Orthodox folk? The bandits are being brought here from the Don."

"Razin is among them."

The watchmen in the Arbat flung the iron gates wide open and removed the barriers. They posted themselves aside the stone pillars to keep order. The throng was a medley of coloured kaftans, summer homespun peasants' coats, tarred goatskin or morocco-leather boots, bast shoes, bare feet, coifs, kerchiefs, and felt caps. The crowd was making all speed to the Tverskaya Gate. Mingling with the throng were sellers of kvass with pitchers on their shoulders and wearing aprons; greasy piemen balanced on their heads trays covered with fresh bast mats. Many coaches rumbled past. They were filled with boyars' wives and daughters. The boyars themselves were mounted. The kettledrums attached to their saddles cleared a way for them through the crowd.

"Where can so many boyars be going to?"

"Whither? Why, to see their bogey, Razin, with their own eyes."

"Oh, but his eyes are terrible! They would haunt you in your sleep."

Dust rose beyond the Tverskaya Gate; there was a great shouting as the throng made its way to the Hodynka Field through the new suburb with its gaily painted little houses. Tatterdemalions, who for the sake of getting drink were carrying ladders stolen from the fire brigade or the taverns and distilleries, ran in front offering their goods for sale.

"How much for the ladders?"

"For hire or to buy?"

"For hire: just to get a better view."

"Three kopeks, rye-beard, three kopeks."

"Why so costly?"

"It's cheaper to look from the ground."

"Prop it up against the house. Here's the money."

People clambered to the roofs and up drainpipes; after a general survey they would call to those beneath:

"They are coming from the Hodynka river. I can see them."

"They've halted, I say."

"What for?"

"They'll be waiting for the wagon of shame, I reckon."

"It went by long ago, gallows and all, with chains clanking."

"Where's the woman?"

"The musketeers, lads, devil take 'em!"

Musketeers, their faces angry and sweating, brandished their shining halberds and strutted so that the skirts and sleeves of their dark blue or white uniforms flapped about them. They forced back the crowd.

"Don't block the road; press to one side!"

"We are service men. . . ."

"There's an old woman from the almshouse who's been that pressed she'll never be able to walk home again."

Those on the roofs and ladders were not molested.

"Hi, long-beard, you've looked more than three-kopeks' worth! Give me some more."

"Catch the coin, damn you, and hold your tongue."

"All right."

Merchants and their wives whose houses boasted the fashionable balconies opened their windows and climbed out to see the show. The crowd jeered at the stout men and women wriggling on to the balconies.

"Hi, you, trader, give your wife a push. It won't hurt her."

"It would be a help."

"That's none of your business."

"But it is! See, the woman's all of a stew from climbing."

"Hot meat pies with carrots!"

"No time to eat."

"If you fill your belly, your eyes will be better able to see when the time comes. They are bound to come this way."

"'Tis said that the brigands in the wagon were dressed in silk and velvet."

"Who are those others on horseback?"

"Atamans of the Don Force."

"Captains?"

"Nay, the captains wear plainer uniforms."

"Here's the wagon of shame! They've met it."

"It has an escort of executioners and musketeers."

"What's the matter with you, auntie? I know you're hiding a coif in your shawl."

"How should you know anything of the sort?"

"I happen to know you've robbed your dead sister; took her coif from her as she lay dead. Yet you are afraid to wear it."

"See, the executioners are pulling off the robbers' velvet clothes so as to have them for themselves."

"They are tearing off Stenka's clothes, but they won't touch Frol."

"Which of them is Frol?"

"He is narrower in the shoulder and not as tall."

"Ah, the round-faced one with the small black beard."

"Ay, that's he. They'll be taken to the *Zemski Prikaz*."

"Whatever for? Such matters are dealt with at the Criminal Office; I heard it from the clerks."

"To the Criminal Office!"

"You'll see where they're taken to all in good time."

"At the *Zemski Prikaz* the confessions in the torture chamber can be heard in the courtyard, and there's a big crowd there."

"Eavesdroppers would themselves be tortured. Besides, everyone is turned out of the courtyard before the torture begins."

"Look, look, the Razinites' horses are being led along. They are caparisoned in cloth-of-gold."

"He sets out as a king, and comes back on a string."

"I wonder what's going to happen to them?"

"Alas, you valiant man! If only you had been able to ride in as a tsar! You were always kind to the poor and oppressed, so I've been told."

"Now sacristan Troshka, you should be at the *Zemski Prikaz* scoring up the dead, not loitering about here."

"Fancy saying such things with all these boyars' ears on the alert!"

"Nevertheless, I shall say it, for I am seeking truth, folks. There are many who mourn for the ataman."

"Do hold your tongue, I say! You'll be seized and we'll get dragged into the business as well. Go to the *Zemski Prikaz* and see for yourself."

The black-cassocked little sacristan fidgeted on his ladder.

"Indeed, it's time I went. Will they be brought to us?"

"Yes, to you at the *Zemski Prikaz*. I heard it with my own ears from one of the clerks."

"See, Stenka is in tatters. The other one's clothes are just a bit torn."

"The smiths are forging irons."

"Hot pies with onion and ox liver!"

"I'll have some. It's a long time to wait."

A bearded citizen with a slight paunch came up to the pieman.

"This man needs a tubful of grub; a basin is not enough for him."

"Charge him more, fellow."

"A poor man does not need more food than a rich one. What stuffing would you fancy?"

"Meat."

"What are they stuffed with? You people sell rotten stuff."

"Not worse than your wife's cooking."

"This man's a glutton; one can see that by his belly."

"Our daughter-in-law gobbles up everything, even the honey. Damned bitch."

"Kvass! Iced! Have some to cool you."

"Reckon he's merely brewed some mead."

"Sevenfold-diluted raspberry syrup, probably. If you drink it you are sure to feel sick."

"The rascal."

"Look! They've put up the gallows in the wagon and chained Stenka to it."

"They've fixed up the block; the executioner's driven his axe into it."

"So that's the end of the ataman. He'll be roasted alive."

"Sh! The musketeers! Silence, folk."

"Hi, you people, we shall take you to the Criminal Office and beat you."

"Yes, seize and beat all those who speak well of the tsar's enemies."

"Come on, lads, let's be going to the *Zemski Prikaz*."

"They won't allow us in."

"Then we'll stand at the gate."

"Come along!"

"I'll go with you."

"And I too."

"Me for the Criminal Office."

"That's not far off; there's only a wall between the *Zemski Prikaz* and the Criminal Office."

"Come on, then. The wagon of shame has been turned about."

"They're waiting for something."

"Frol is being chained to a shaft."

"Come on!"

## 2

Had you climbed the slope leading from the Moska river to the Cathedral of the Intercession, or Vasili Blazhenni, opposite the row of shops belonging to the cloth guild, you would have reached the buildings which went to form the *Zemski Prikaz*. They were surrounded by a wall. The gates were wide with tall posts without a transversal beam. The gates stood open day and night. In the centre of the spacious courtyard was a squat and gloomy building with annexes made out of thick logs. The base was of yellow brick. The roof was flat, made of three layers of turf overgrown with moss, out of which came a smoke vent about six feet in height. On the roof were two cast-iron cannon fixed to transverse blocks of oak. The roof was intentionally made from turves so as to deaden any undesirable sounds which might otherwise have issued from the building. At the base of a spacious porch with three steps were two other, still older, cannon, corroded with rust. Before the Church of Vasili Blazhenni was built, these two latter cannon used to stand on its site with their muzzles pointing towards the river. Hundreds of courageous men had been led from here to the place of

execution, and a very small proportion of those who had been inside escaped without their ribs being broken by the executioner's prong. By decree of the tsar, every three years saddlers had to deliver to this office of the tsar cartloads of strappadoes and other leathern gear for the torture chamber. As in all other houses without chimneys, the windows were built horizontally along the beam, which narrowed at the top and had neither mica nor glass. The apertures were closed by shutters. During the summer the shutters were pushed back and the inquisitive were chased away with sticks. In many parts of Moscow the houses were surrounded by gardens and orchards. But the accursed courtyard of the *Zemski Prikaz* with its stench of decaying corpses had not a single tree.

Half-way up the pallisade surrounding the courtyard was an earthen slope, and hereupon each morning the corpses of the tortured or of drunken persons were laid out by the inmates of the almshouses. Unknown dead were also brought from the suburbs for identification and were placed in a sitting position against the fence. Headless bodies were likewise laid there. The voivodes of the *Zemski Prikaz*, though themselves frequently changed, always retained the old order:

"The relatives must commit to the earth the bodies of their identified people."

It was a fine day, but the sun was obscured by a single big cloud, moving slowly, as though presaging rain. After matins a motley crowd of almshouse dwellers—old men and women, bastards, homeless, defectives—assembled in the courtyard of the *Zemski Prikaz*. They laid out the corpses as usual against the fencing, fearing to cast so much as a look at the building. Flies crawled over the purple, blackened, greyish-green faces of the dead and buzzed in swarms overhead. Crows perched on the pallisade and croaked as they peered greedily down on the carrion. The almshouse people chased them away.

"Don't drop him on the ground."

"Why not?"

"He'll crumble to pieces."

"Good riddance! He's rotten anyhow."

"If no kinsman comes to claim him he'll have to await Trinity before he is clothed and buried."

"He can't wait all that long. The weather is so warm and there's such a mort of flies. He'll fall to pieces before then."

"Don't worry! He'll keep till then and have a Christian burial."

A secretary in a dark blue pointed cap and unbuttoned summer nankeen coat crossed the courtyard and looked round severely. He paused, but did not venture near the beggars.

"Hi, you worm-eaten old men! People have given you shelter for the sake of God's mercy, yet you show no zeal in carrying out the work allotted you by your benefactors."

"What do we do amiss, secretary?"

"Idiots! Shoving the headless trunks with their shoulders against the wall! How are you to fit the heads to them? It'll take you a day to find them! They're rolling about under the bridge or behind some box, probably.

"But, benefactor, if the dogs don't get them, we'll find them sooner or later."

"You'd better find them. It's not for you to decide; the rule is that trunks must be placed with the feet towards the wall, not the shoulders."

"Secretary, 'twas the bell-ringer, who keeps a tally of the dead, bade us put them so."

"He said that the cross must not drop to the feet. You see, some of them have no heads, but the cross still clings to the collar."

"The old rule is—the cross at the feet. Talking to a fool is like pouring water into a sieve. A pox on the lot of you."

The secretary, furrowing the sand with his staff, withdrew to his office.

"At least he's not too proud to have a word or two with us."

"I guess some kin of his must have been killed."

"Such a lot of that sort have come here today, boyars, secretaries, executioners and the like. I wonder why?"

"Hold your tongue, or you'll be turned out. The bandit, Stepan Razin, is being brought here today."

"It is a pity all the dead have not been collected yet. We might have gone too. The whole town's packed to the Tverskaya Gate to see the procession."

"If you went there you'd only get crushed; the crowd's as thick as a bee-swarm."

"Are they bringing the robber here to the torture chamber?"

"What an innocent you are!"

"Fool! May you burn in those chambers yourself!"

"What's the matter with you, woman?"

"Well, you've frightened Stepanida. Inside the chambers, you lout, they give people a feast, but outside the executioner treats you to leather twisted buns."

"I forgot about that, grandfather."

"Go and listen under the windows. You'll remember all right then!"

"Mercy on me!"

A man wearing a black cassock and cap, and carrying a register in his hand, came up to where they stood.

"Trofimushko, you might be a secretary by the looks of you."

"Yes, you ought to be dressed in a nankeen coat and have a staff."

"You wretched paupers, how dare you laugh? For shame! How many dead have you brought?"

"Oh, father, 'tis that long since we collected them in the suburbs and beneath the torture-chamber wall . . ."

"I have asked you for the number."

"We are working on the fifty-third."

"How is the body clothed?"

"In rough homespuns."

"A townsman?"

"No, he looks more like a ploughman."

"Is his head intact?"

"Yes; he's fair-haired and his nose has a bump on it and is swollen."

"Was he slain? Any signs of mutilation?"

"No sign of being killed, father."

"I'll write: 'Fair-haired, with a touch of grey, nose nubbly, looks like a tippler drunk himself to death.' Is he blue in the face?"

"A trifle, father."

"Then presumably he's been poisoned with drink."

Every morning between matins and Mass on holy days the sacristan compiled the register of the dead laid out in the enclosure. At the same time he made note of the conversations and laments of the victim's relatives, scraps of

conversation gleaned from boyars and secretaries going to the office across the courtyard. Also, and in spite of strict prohibition, he frequently listened in fear and trembling at the window of the room where the executioner tortured the prisoners; he wrote down all that was said; indeed, he took a special interest in doing this, so great was the resentment displayed by boyars, secretaries and judges against the doomed men. The sacristan often asked himself: "Is there any truth to be found on earth?" He delivered the lists of the dead to the town criers, who announced the rates and taxes and other governmental orders. But he did not give them to the criers who proclaimed the special decrees from the tsar in the Chinatown district. When they had read the current business the criers would announce:

> "Oyez, oyez, oyez! Some who have been slain in the city of Moscow are now on view at the *Zemski Prikaz* for the purpose of identification."

The scribe was known as "Troshka the Ringer". He became yet more zealous in his self-appointed task of registering the nameless dead after being praised for it by the tsar's confessor, in whose church he acted as bell-ringer. Troshka was well acquainted with the procedure at the *Zemski Prikaz*, and by watching the kind of preparations afoot could guess whether the malefactor to be tortured was an important personage or not. Now, after listening to the chance remarks made by the crowds of almshouse inmates and the townsfolk who were bewailing their dead, he retired. In the courtyard he saw a patrol of musketeers in flesh-coloured coats, men of Fedor Alexandrov's command, swinging in with a fine jingle of arms. The patrol evicted the almshouse beggars and townsfolk, but took no notice of the sacristan, deeming him to be a member of the clergy who had been summoned with his cross to attend at the *Zemski Prikaz*.

A curtain of dust rose behind the Cathedral of the Intercession.

"They're co-o-oming!"

"It's Stenka!"

"The terrible one. Lord Jesus!"

A roomy cart, drawn by a team of three different-coloured horses, rolled into the square. On it was a black gallows specially constructed for the occasion. A leather collar spiked with nails had been fastened round Razin's neck; from the cross-beam of the gallows hung a chain, which was fastened by an iron ring to the collar. The ataman's arms were stretched wide apart and chained to the gallows posts. His legs were encased in ragged trousers; on his feet were tattered shoes put on him at the city gates. In the middle of the cart was a black scaffold, with a whetted axe stuck in its fore-part. To the right side of the cart, fastened to the shaft by a chain fixed to his iron collar, was Razin's brother Frol. He was clad in an old yellow silk Cossack coat and trotted alongside the cart, stumbling and raising the dust with his feet. Frol had not been undressed like his brother; the executioners had merely torn off for their own benefit his dark blue velvet coat. As he trotted along he tried to keep pace with the horses and twisted his head in an endeavour to avoid the pressure of the collar. At times his face grew by turns purple and deathly white. Clutching at the shaft to save himself from falling, he cried out from time to time:

"Oh, my brother, we are done for! This is terrible!

The ataman's head was bowed, the brow and face hidden by the thick, greying locks. A long red scar ran down his right cheek.

"Alas, all is lost!"

"Shut up, you old woman! Can't you see that we Cossacks are being driven in state as guests of the tsar? Is not that a great honour? Yet you can do nothing but whine. Besides, are we not tsars ourselves? All Moscow is out to see us pass. This is honour indeed! So don't demean yourself by whining."

"Woe to us, brother!"

"We have had our day. The boyars became jealous and envious of all the honours bestowed upon us. We do not fear death. What is bad is that we are not being taken to the Kremlin, where our brother Ivan met his end, but to the *Zemski Prikaz* in the Red Square."

To right and left of the ataman were a couple of musketeers, in their red uniforms, with unsheathed swords. They shouted to Razin:

"That's enough."

"Shut your mouth."

Razin spat.

"I am not speaking to the people. They no longer need me. I was talking to my brother."

"Silence."

As he turned away from the building the sacristan perceived that one of the imbeciles from the almshouse was lingering behind, pottering around the dead and chasing away the carrion crows. He was a wild-eyed, ruddy-complexioned fellow wearing a tattered woman's coat with long sleeves.

"Away with you, away with you! May the wolves gobble ye up."

The idiot turned towards the gate and caught sight of the cart containing Razin with Frol trotting alongside. He started to clap his hands, to dance and sing:

"The robbers they're bringing,
From the gallows they'll be swinging
When the rack, rack, rack,
Has made their bones crack, crack,
Their flesh will be roasted
And in pastry be toasted."

"The fool's afraid of nothing."

The sacristan approached the imbecile, shook him by his fair, curly locks and, fixing a pair of inquisitive black eyes on the fellow's perspiring face, asked severely:

"What are you laughing at, madman? Tears befit such a sight better. Weep, Filka, weep!"

"Oh, uncle Trofim, may one weep for robbers?"

"You should weep. Have no fear; weep."

The young man's expression altered completely; he began to howl, and rushed to meet the wagon of shame, crying loudly:

"You poor creatures, so grief-stricken. Poor little robbers, all chained up. . . ."

The musketeers on sentry duty caught him up and evicted him from the courtyard with a kick.

"So much for you, fool."

The fool fell in the gateway, dropped his shoes, which were too large for him, and ran away, crying loudly:

"Poor things in chains! Oh, mother, mother!"

"If only one were like this idiot by nature, one could speak one's mind freely and tell the truth," reflected the sacristan.

The horrible vehicle raised a dust as it rolled across the courtyard and, turning aside, stopped before the office porch. Musketeers were on guard around the cart. Two executioners in black half-length coats, with whips twisted round their waists instead of belts, approached. Smiths emerged from the office door, knocked off Frol's chain, and the musketeers led him inside. The head blacksmith, in his leather apron and holding a short hammer and pincers, climbed, puffing and wheezing, into the cart and struck off Razin's chains.

"Hi, thick-beard, you've taken off my bells—what shall I have to ring with?"

"Others will ring for you," answered the smith.

The musketeers shouted:

"Silence!"

As the ataman clambered off the cart the musketeers stepped up to him, but he waved them aside, frowning.

"Take those paws of yours off me. I know my way—and I know yours."

The wide door of the office slammed to, and the clanking bar was put in its place. The sacristan crept warily along the walls, peering round him cautiously. He was making for the torture chambers. He came to a halt not far from the windows, where he waited. He could hear Frol's moans and prayers. He had begun to write, when suddenly Razin's voice broke in menacingly. The little man heard bones cracking and the sound of the lash.

"He's been hoisted on the rack. God preserve us!"

The sacristan counted the strokes up to one hundred. Then there burst upon him the terrifying voice of the voivode prince Odoyevski. Razin answered calmly and abusively. With trembling hands the sacristan wrote down Razin's words; he slipped the sheet which was already filled into his bosom and pulled another from his cap. He glanced fearfully round the courtyard. The musketeers on duty had followed Razin, the smiths busied themselves with the cart, unharnessed and led away the horses. There was no one else in the yard. Again the sacristan leaned towards the window. He could no longer distinguish the words nor hear the sizzling of human flesh. Razin's breath was laboured and he spat and cursed. Then came the voivode's voice raised in anger, and he was swearing, too:

"Will you tell something, be it never so little, robber?"

"I have nothing to tell you, devil. You know all. Well now, listen. . . ."

The ataman began to speak. Trembling all over, Troshka wrote down his words.

"Executioner, beat his legs," screamed the voivode.

The cracking of bones became louder than on the rack. The sacristan understood what was in progress.

"They are using the cudgel on his legs."

"Get on with the job, damn you! Help the executioner, there'll be less work to do on the scaffold. You'll have to carry me there legless."

"Have you anything more to confess?"

"Go to hell!"

The sacristan crossed himself and moved slowly away from the window, trying not to make a noise and thus get away unnoticed. His heels touched a cannon and he sat down on it; then rose to go, but stood petrified.

The voivode himself stood on the porch. Opening the skirts of his scarlet kaftan, his fingers fumbled with the buttons of his silk trousers. He muttered:

"A plague on it all! It's like a steam bath. He is not a man, but a werewolf. Cannot get a word out of him; nothing but a bark. The minutes will have to be burned. Impossible to show them to the authorities."

His eyes fell upon the sacristan's black figure, and, without observing any of the decencies, he bawled:

"What are you doing here, you bastard?"

The little sacristan felt himself shrinking to the size of a fly. Trembling, he crouched on the ground and, pulling off his cap, whimpered:

"Your pardon, prince voivode, but I've been delayed here on the business of registering the dead."

As the sacristan pulled off his cap a paper dropped out.

"I shall forgive you if you confess your sins all at once. Who are you?"

"Benefactor, I am the sacristan and bell-ringer at the church of Grigori Neocaesarea, the tsar's confessor."

"Andrei Savinovich?"

"Yes, prince benefactor."

"It would not be seemly to drag the archpriest into this, so you'd better be off as quick as possible, you rascal. Were it not for Andrei, I'd teach you not to prick up your ears too near the torture chambers."

The sacristan had no idea which way his legs took him from this place of terror. He came to his senses in his cell beneath the refectory. With some old clothes he hastily obscured the windows. He lit two candles at the flame from an oil-lamp. His hands and legs were still trembling and he collapsed on a bench, groaning:

"Oh, my God! Have I really escaped whole? Well, Troshka, you must not sit idle here. Get on with your job. Oh, Lord!"

The sacristan threw away his cap, jumped to his feet, perched himself on the edge of the bench, pulled out a sheaf of papers from a locker, and muttered:

"Torture one. Another torture, yes. But where is the order to burn a pregnant woman alive? Where can it have got to? Have I dropped it? I'm afraid I must have."

The sacristan turned cold and shuddered; then, recalling suddenly, he cried:

"In the breast of my coat! Thank God, here it is! I felt for a moment that I was being stretched on the rack. Lord have mercy on me."

With his ice-cold hand he drew some crumpled sheets of paper from the folds of his coat.

"Burn them, burn them! But maybe there'll be time later?"

He looked at the door and shot the bolt. Then he smoothed out the scroll and began to read Razin's evidence under torture.

"Ha, you want my treasure? That treasure is not underground, but above, for it is the Russian people themselves. You can hack me to pieces and I shall not quake. My joy is not your joy. You will never be able to quench the conflagration in Russia, either by water or by blood, and sooner or later, you tsar's devils, you will be consumed by it. Every story told, every song sung on the Volga, will proclaim that I have lived and that I shall come again. I shall come

and put an end to all the tsar's unjust deeds, to give the poor folk their freedom, and twist your heads off, you pot-bellied devils. I shall throw these heads of yours into the Moskva river, you minions."

The sacristan crossed himself after the perusal of these words.

"Burn it? Perhaps they will not come to search. Oh, Troshka, you'll be burned for having such documents in your possession."

The churchwarden passed on his round and called through the window:

"Asleep, I reckon, since your blinds are down. It'll soon be time to ring the bells, Troshka."

"I hear you, Yegorushko."

The sacristan hastily gathered his papers together and thrust them into the ikon shelf behind the image of St. Nicholas.

"Perhaps I'll burn 'em later."

Putting on his cap, Troshka went out into the churchyard and climbed the belfry steps. The higher he went, the lighter he felt; the air was different and he was safe from men. As he stood on his favourite platform beneath the bells he mused:

"I shall have to be more cautious, but go on keeping a record of the tortures. The truth must be known and told to the right people. If I hadn't fallen in with that fat brute I shouldn't have had such a scare."

He gazed down from his eerie on to the Moskva river, the Kremlin, the golden domes of the cathedrals sparkling in a bluish mist. The sun was dropping slowly below the western horizon.

"Well, Ivan the Great, you'll be rung first."

Alongside this bell shone the cupolas and gilt chains on the crosses of the Voskresenskaya church. To the south of the Kremlin, in the Ivanov Square, rose the many-hued church of the Chernigov martyrs, Mihail and Feodor, its white walls gleaming under the gold cupolas and green roofs. Beyond this could be seen the narrow pillar of a belfry which strained upwards towards the gold of the others; it was the church of Christopher the Martyr.

"God forgive me! Though you're a saint with a dog's face, please ring."

But the Kremlin bells remained silent. Silent, too, were those of the Uspenski and Arkhangelski cathedrals; silent, Nikola Gostunski and the Chudov monastery.

"Seems, Yegorushko, you called me too early."

Troshka gazed for a long time at the river below him with its russet gold from the sunset and its curve beyond the Kremlin, which shimmered coppery and grey in the evening light. The reflection of the Kremlin cupolas made splashes of gold on the water. Opposite the Kremlin, on Troshka's own side, and almost at the foot of the belfry, the croaking of carrion crows and the noise of carpenters' axes filled the air. Not far from the river bank, the white coats of the musketeers of Poltov's command were digging a hole and driving stakes into it. Planed logs were brought to form a platform for the execution. Two rotting bodies of executed men lay in their unsightly blackness; near by, in pits specially dug for the purpose, were the heads and skulls of other victims. Carrion crows were busy picking at them.

"There's truth for you, bell-ringer!" reflected the sacristan as he watched the work of the carpenters and musketeers.

"Look, how they were brought to their punishment! Chained like wild beasts 'in the name of the tsar'. What has he done? Has he freed the people

from bondage? Has he hanged the boyars? Yes, I did eavesdrop at the window of the torture chamber, and was nearly caught myself as a malefactor for so doing. But that's the way things are nowadays; a man is tortured for the sake of truth. Why, then, should it be so dangerous to show this truth to the people? Once you get frightened, then you commit injustice, violate laws, and exterminate people who do not agree with you."

The sacristan thoughtfully listened.

"The Kremlin is silent. Here's to you, boyars! I shall toll a requiem in honour of Ataman Stenka Razin! Ring out my bells; sob out your lament! Tell the people how cruel is the fate of those who stand up for them. Ah me! This time the archpriest will certainly dismiss me from my post as bell-ringer."

Long did the bells weep and sob above the little patch of green beyond the Moskva river.

Passers-by crossed themselves, saying:

"Someone has passed away this day."

The Kremlin bells had by now joined in the chorus. Solemnly and majestically they rang out their praises to the power of the tsar.

As Troshka descended from the tower he no longer heard the strokes of the hatchets. Razin's execution block on the Kozye-boloto was ready.

## 3

The arched audience chamber of the palace was decorated with paintings against an old-gold background. Here the tsar was receiving the atamans of the Don Force. The sovereign was not attired in his full panoply of state, but he wore the celebrated cap of Monomakh with its bejewelled cross. Moreover, he was not seated on his throne, but in an armchair. His fleshy face wore an affable expression and there was a merry twinkle in his eyes.

The boyars were seated on benches round the walls. Secretaries were in attendance.

Throwing off their caps in the vestibule, the Cossacks entered and bowed low, scraping the floor with their staffs. Kornei Yakovlev led them. Mihail Samarenin walked on one side of him and Login Semenov on the other. Four captains followed, and in their wake came a secretary. When the preliminary ceremonial was concluded, ataman Kornei tossed his head and, thrusting aside the other Cossacks, turned to his secretary, saying:

"Step forward, lad, and read to the great sovereign our epistle in the name of the entire Don region."

The secretary clicked his heels and read loudly and distinctly:

> "By the Grace of God to the great sovereign, tsar and grand prince Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of all Great, Little and White Russia, from the senior Cossacks Assembly and the entire Don Force, Salutations!"

"Leave out all the frills, fellow. Our great sovereign must not be wearied by our lengthy salutations," whispered Mihail Samarenin.

Pretending not to hear, the secretary read on:

"In obedience to your command and your epistles, sire, your humble servants marched to Kagalnik against the robber and traitor, Stenka Razin, and his brother Frol. And by the Grace of God, sire, and with the assistance of ataman Kornei Yakovlev, we captured the said Stepan Razin and his brother Frol in Kagalnik and also captured from the same bandit three dapple-grey Kabarda stallions and three carpets woven of gold. And the men who had been on the Volga with the said robber Stenka, upon being questioned by us, your humble servants, gave evidence that these stallions and carpets came from Persia in a river caravan and were intended to be a gift to you, sire, from some merchants. And these same stallions and carpets, together with Stepan Razin and his brother Frol, have been conveyed to you, sire, by our veteran Cossack atamans, Kornei Yakovlev, Mihail Samarenin, Login Semenov, and the captains."

"Enough, scribe! The carpets, sire, were delivered by me personally to the secretaries of the Secret Office; the stallions, by order of ataman Semenov, have been handed over, under receipt, to the Imperial stables. The bandits were delivered to the musketeers attached to the *Zemski Prikaz*," concluded Kornei.

The tsar replied:

"I know whom and what you have brought, gallant atamans."

Fixing his eyes on Kornei Yakovlev, he added:

"Now, old man, I am going to give you a public reproof."

He spoke without altering the merry expression on his face; he felt overjoyed at having seen with his own eyes from the Kremlin wall the terrible ataman conveyed across the Red Square.

"Let your abuse fall on my head alone, sire," said Kornei, bowing low.

"Before reproving you, I intend to question you. Is there any truth in the reports which have reached me from my informers that you spent whole nights carousing with my state enemy, the traitor Stenka, and accepted gifts from him such as a lynx fur coat, a sable cap, and a Persian scimitar?"

"Indeed, sire, this is the truth. I feasted with Stenka more than once and accepted gifts from him. But I would ask those who reported against me: 'What else could I do?' When he turned back for a short while from the Samara hills, not having conquered Sinbirsk, the veteran Cossacks took fright. He wielded great power. He had but to sound the call, and the Lower Don would have ceased to exist. While at home, he raided the veteran Cossacks and plunged sundry into the water, and I was the foremost to be thus threatened. 'I'll duck Kornei in the water,' said he. A small church was in building, but he forbade any continuance of the work and sent the priests away. 'Moscow imposes her priests on us; next thing she'll do is to place a voivode over us armed with a rack. Nothing of this sort has ever happened on the free Don,' were his very words. He established his own order among the youth, and we remained silent, sire. He reproached us, saying we had converted our daughters into boyar maids, shutting them up in their own rooms to grow blind with fine sewing and embroideries. He wanted all the young ones to marry his Cossacks as they did in Astrakhan, indiscriminately, whether he be a regular Cossack or a ne'er-do-well. And he married them, sire, without priests, as was the custom among us in bygone days, in the public place and by agreement. I feasted with him to safeguard the tsar's peace and order, and he gave me presents, sire. And after

your voivodes, sire, beat him at Sinbirsk and annihilated the Cossack rovers, he did not return to us, but went to Kagalnik."

Here Kornei paused as though thinking over what to say next.

"Speak, ataman, I am listening."

"Then harken, great sovereign! I went to him as a guest and he received me. I made thorough examination of Kagalnik, and what was my surprise when I found that its fortifications were built in such a way that one could stand there a year with nothing but bare earth to set on fire! All around were dug-outs; the structures above the ground were flimsy, just a row of mean shops, but below them was a little town. I could judge by the jingle of arms that a goodly number of men had assembled, and it seemed that Guliai Plain had no small muster of traitors. So once again, sire, I caroused with the traitor and found how badly he had been mauled. He could not hold a sword in his right hand. As he became more and more intoxicated I admitted the veteran Cossacks and issued a secret order that the troops stationed at Cherkassi should be brought up. I had to persuade them with tears to be loyal to you, great tsar. Stenka and I feasted together and walked about with our arms round each other's necks. He fondly called me godfather. But all the time I had it in mind to seize and cut down, root and branch, the traitor Stenka and his kin."

"You did what was right, ataman. Thus Hovrin, my favourite boyar, acted many years ago."

A boyar rose, bowed to the tsar, and corrected him:

"Pafnuti Kivrin, sire."

Ataman Kornei also put in his word:

"Yes, great sovereign, his name was Kivrin. In those days he stayed in my house."

"I know what I am saying, boyar, and you, ataman. For reasons unknown to me, boyar Hovrin had requested my father to permit him to change his surname to that of Kivrin."

The voyar bowed and sat down. The ataman continued his tale:

"The veteran Cossacks then broke their agreement with me and summoned the loyal troops to Kagalnik and fighting started too soon. Stenka's wife, Oliona, with her two sons—one was already a fully fledged Cossack and the other a promising stripling—hid in the dug-outs and started to fire at us, thereby killing a fair number of veteran Cossacks. I ordered breaches to be made in their dug-out habitations and to set them on fire. Thus the robber's kin were exterminated and cannot appear before your judgment seat, sire. We bound the traitors, brought them to Cherkassi, and levelled Kagalnik to the ground. We also took the carpets and stallions mentioned by the Cossacks in their letter. Seize them we certainly did, but I heard a commotion on Guliai Plain. Although your men, sire, came to our assistance at my request, nevertheless I felt there would be much bloodshed and in the turmoil the traitor might be kidnapped. So I gave him shelter and again we caroused together and he sprawled in my house, dead drunk. I bided my time. The veterans branded me as a traitor to you, sire. But I patiently bore with everything. Then I persuaded Razin to come to Moscow with me and Frol so as to pay homage and beg forgiveness for our crimes against our sovereign. He was dubious at first, but nevertheless he went to his rovers and bade them not to fight, saying: 'We shall settle all this when I get back from Moscow.' For the edification of the veterans, I dressed Frol up in his brother's clothes and placed him in irons in the porch at Cherkassi. When

night came, I released him. Thus, sire, did I convey the traitors attired in silks and velvet, and avoided the menacing tumult on the Don. Yes, great tsar, I did feast with him; none can gainsay that. I was on friendly terms with the traitor."

The tsar rose from his armchair.

"Approach, ataman Kornei Yakovlev, that I may embrace you for your services and intelligence."

Dropping his staff, the old man stepped up to the tsar, who kissed his head; and the wily old man, after kissing the tsar's hand, prostrated himself at his sovereign's feet.

"The free Don has quieted down by now, great tsar. Once the head has been chopped off, the limbs will disintegrate! All will submit to your sovereign will."

"Thank you, old man. I have gifts prepared for you; for I knew you would prove to be in the right."

"Most gracious sovereign, I never twist the truth."

"I thank you all, gallant atamans, captains, and Cossacks. I wish you to dispatch to Moscow those who joined the traitor Stenka on the Volga."

"The robber captain, Lazar Timofeiev, has been tracked to the Don, sire," said Kornei. "And him we shall deliver separately."

"I trust you and shall expect him. From now on I order you never to admit or enlist as Cossacks on the Don runaway serfs from Moscow or elsewhere, and to see that order is maintained in your midst I have appointed Kossogov as voivode to the Don and am sending him there with troops."

The atamans and captains prostrated themselves before the tsar.

A secretary now emerged from an adjacent room bearing rolls of a rich material of a deep red colour. The first piece he presented to ataman Kornei, proclaiming solemnly:

"The great sovereign tsar and grand prince Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of all Great, Little and White Russia, honours you with this length of fine red cloth for a kaftan."

Kornei, bowing low, received the gift. Addressing each in turn and by name, the secretary handed Samarenin and Semenov a similar gift. No speeches were made to the captains, but they were presented with rolls of cloth to make into kaftans of a quality and colour suitable to their rank. The tsar then went to a table, where he picked up a velvet purse with gold tassels and, beckoning Kornei, said:

"In addition, ataman Kornei Yakovlev, I am favouring you with a gift of one hundred gold pieces from my privy purse."

Without waiting for further thanks, he said:

"Treason has outlived itself. I shall convey my pleasure for services rendered by the atamans, captains, and rank-and-file Cossacks in a special edict to the Don. Meanwhile, I invite you, veteran Cossacks, to partake of my fare with me and my boyars."

With a gesture of his hand he turned to the senior secretary and ordered:

"Take the captains to the dining-hall and see that they are given a good feast and that they have plenty wherewith to drink our health."

## 4

An old man in a grey homespun coat, a grey sheepskin cap drawn well down over his short-sighted eyes, sat leaning against a dilapidated fence, his feet planted

in the bottom of a dry ditch overgrown with weeds. It was at the crossing of a narrow, dusty street bordered with similar fences and ditches and filled with the stench of rotting carcases of skinned goats, dogs and cats. The old man fingered his domra and crooned softly:

"A falcon towered up at the break of the day,
His pinions were dappled with azure and grey;
Lord of the morning, he vaulted the world—
Beneath him the river, wide river unfurled.
In Volga's gold waters he swooped in his pride
At Saratov, Tsaritzyn, Sviyaga, he cried:
'Rejoice, sweet mother; ah, why dost thou weep?
Thy yellow sands heave in the river bed deep.'
'My child, I am heavy, the hills are afraid,
For matchless in beauty there cometh a maid,
Doom is her portion, a stranger from far.'
The mighty stream moaned, and pale as a star
The maiden rose up in a silvery gloom;
Wan were her cheeks, her locks dark as the tomb;
Her breasts were like ice and her hands were like snow.
Far from the sun in the river below
She had lain till her body was white as a bone.
Dreadful her look as she spake low and soft,
'Falcon, bright falcon, who soar up aloft,
The warrior, the champion, how sad are you grown!
Say, is it for love of a maiden you moan?
Your glory will fade and your pinions wax weak,
You will fall to the fowler, grown feeble and meek.
To cage you vile enemies gather around:
You strike them to earth—they litter the ground!
Scatter the foe, cleave again the bright air;
But lose not a lock of your hyacinth hair
Or else you will perish, my darling, my own,
My wild one, and fall as dead as a stone. . . .'

From the vegetable plots in the musketeers' quarters came the smell of baking bread, for in summer, as a caution against fires, the common people were forbidden to kindle their stoves indoors.

The old man ceased singing and began to tune the instrument which was almost as ancient as himself. Behind him a person squatting in front of a dug-in stove was speaking loudly and airing his grievances.

"A kinsman of mine came to Moscow on account of a lawsuit. So we went to the Kremlin to look at the cathedral. When we reached the church of Christopher the Martyr I lagged behind. Then suddenly my kinsman began to shout so he could be heard all over the Ivanov Square: 'Why, kinsman, how is it that your Moscow ikon-painters have painted a dog in place of a saint?'

"More fool he! Christopher is always pictured with a dog's face."

"I motioned to him to hold his tongue. I was in a pretty panic. We might both have been hauled off to the patriarch's office."

"Where does your kindsman come from that he cannot recognize the saints?"

Having tuned his domra, the old man began to sing the same song. A crowd of homeward-bound townsfolk, after witnessing Razin's execution, began to pour into the side streets and clustered round the minstrel. A tall, broad-shouldered youth stood among them. He had been standing there before, but now drew nearer. His face was rather thin and there was a down on his lip; dark locks fell on his forehead from under a white felt hat with an embroidered border. His crimson coat was unbuttoned. He leant on a stick, listening silently to the minstrel's song.

The crowd swayed and moved apart. A stocky, broad-shouldered man of the merchant type pushed his way to the ditch. He was followed by his assistants in grey aprons and felt conical hats. Spreading farther and farther over the city was the clang of the Kremlin bells. From the nearby fields came the toll of the bells of St. Gregory, the mournful toll for the dead insinuating itself into the solemn grandeur of the Kremlin chimes. The merchant, who, like most around him, was crossing himself, spoke:

"It surprises me to find that for some days past the bell-ringer Troshka has been ringing in a most unseemly fashion. There, do you hear?"

"How can one help hearing, tradesman? He tolls as though for a bishop's funeral."

"And what's more, when this morning the robber Stenka was being driven from the prison at the Varvarka cross-roads to the place of execution, he tolled in exactly the same way. Yet no other bells gave so much as a clang. His were the only ones."

"A man should not play pranks against the regulations."

"What is the archpriest thinking about to allow him to do it?"

"The tsar's confessor went some days ago to Troitsa."

"To see Sergei?"

"What else should he go for? Anyway, he went to Troitsa."

"Well, it seems to me that the ringer can do what he likes in the belfry."

"There you are wrong, Orthodox folks. The case ought to be brought before the patriarch to settle."

"Yes, the patriarch's officials will see to it."

"And if anyone reports, those officials certainly will see to it."

"I think Troshka should be reported. And if any reporting is to be done, surely this old man, with his unseemly songs—in vespers time too—ought to be reported as well, Orthodox Christians."

"You slander the old man. He is playing so mournful a dirge. The only fault is that he played during vespers."

"And have you not heard whom he is singing about?"

"The Volga."

"And some wench or other."

"What's this about a falcon? It seems to me he is referring to the robber Stenka, who has just been quartered alive by order of the tsar. Listen, Orthodox Christians, he is mentioning him."

"You lie and slander the old man, you pot-belly."

"I may be pot-bellied, but I'm rich and not a beggar."

"Each man hoards his money for himself. Some beggars are wealthier than merchants."

"Hear him, Orthodox Christians. He sings that 'he bowed not his head to rulers' and 'foes will assail you, you will lose your head'."

"It does look suspicious."

"Besides, the Volga, Tsaritzyn, the cliffs and hills of Samara, and the Sviyaga are not to be mentioned now. Rebellion is rife there. You know, Orthodox Christians, that playing and singing are prohibited by decree."

"Well, what of it?"

"This and maybe that!"

"Whether it be this or that, Orthodox folk, I for one intend to make a beginning. I came here today with the express purpose of dragging this old man who sings seditious songs during vespers to the Criminal Office. Hi, fellows, seize him!"

"Prov Mikitich, of course we can help, but . . ."

"What do you mean by 'but'?"

"We'll help as far as the entrance to the Kremlin. But we won't go to the Criminal Office. You can deal with the secretaries yourself."

"Haul him along! I'll settle everything. Now then, shaggy cap, come with us and bring your instrument."

The merchant, assisted by his henchmen, dragged the minstrel out of the ditch into the road.

"But what is your purpose, God's people? You can see for yourselves that I am very old and poor. I play and sing for a living. Could not someone throw me a copper?"

"You'll get coffin rubles there all right. Now then, come on, you fellows."

"Come, grandad."

"Why do you worry an old man?"

"Make way."

The youth flung away his stick and pushed back his hat.

The crowd did not disperse. The old man was being dragged slowly along, for the street was densely packed.

"Why don't you make way, Orthodox people?"

"Take him; we don't care."

"It's wrong to take so old a man."

A lad in the crowd touched the youth's elbow.

"Vasia, your guest . . . the ancient minstrel . . ."

"Wait a while, Kuzemka. Let 'em take a proper grip. Where are the boys?"

"Here among the people."

"Get them together."

Parting the crowd, he rolled his wide sleeves to the elbow. The crowd receded. The shop assistants looked round and released the old man. The merchant shouted:

"What's this, you fellows?"

"Can't you see for yourself, Prov Mikitich?"

"See what?"

"The people have backed out of the thing and the champion boxer has intervened."

"Who's he? Haul the old man away."

" 'Tis Vaska, Irenetsa's son. Don't you know him?"

"Hi, Orthodox folk, help my fellows."

"Our ribs have been accounted for as it is."

The crowd was gradually dispersing. Somebody remarked:

"Tackle him yourself, pot-belly."

"You've looked your fill at the execution and are now ready to pounce on anyone you find."

"As for us, we avoid the Criminal Office as much as we can."

"How the devil is a man to serve the tsar with such rotten people as you are?"

"It's not the tsar you're serving, but your own interests."

"You scum!"

Whether in a fit of temper or from fear of the crowd, the merchant withdrew. The shop assistants hung back and then took off their caps, bowed to the old man and said:

"Pray forgive us, grandfather."

"We are dependent on him, so we have to obey his orders."

"It costs nothing to take everything from an old man."

"Well, you see, he's trying to get into the merchants' guild."

"That's not for the likes of him. We know his little shops. Just a petty trader."

"The Devil's guild is all he's fit for."

"He's trying to ingratiate himself with the authorities by sniffing around for treason."

Chatting among themselves, the crowd dispersed.

The youth drew near the old man.

"Come back to my mother, grandfather. I reckon she's feeling lonesome without us."

"Fancy their turning on me like that!"

"I saw at once he was out for no good purpose, and so I waited for him to act and for the townsmen to help him. Then I meant to sing out to our lads. I do love a fight!"

Moscow, with her streets and lanes, was filled with the clang of church bells. The deep boom of copper filled the air above the low houses, and in the midst of that merry clang there penetrated the mournful, funereal tolling of one other bell.

"Where are you making for, grandad?"

"Child, I have to call at the Arkhangelski church house to see the monks. Some of them are my countrymen and others have just arrived from Solovki. There's Azari the cellarer, and the priest Levonti . . ."

"What do you want to see them about?"

"You see, Vasiliushko, I've been staying at your house because father sent me. Now he's been executed it is time for me to go."

"You mean the robber, Stenka?"

"Speak not thus, child. He was never a robber. Do not speak so about him. I have lived in good and plenty in your house, God be praised. Now I must discuss what I have to do with the monks. Perhaps the Solovki folk may still do something to the glory of the ataman. They are already trying. . . ."

"Do come back to our house. You'll be caught again if you don't. There are many such paunchy fellows sneaking about Moscow and arresting people."

"God helping, they'll never seize me. The city barriers will not be closed for some time yet. It is light, so I'll roam about a few more hours."

"Where shall I look for you?"

"No need, Vasiliushko! I'll come of my own accord."

5

Irenetsa lay on her bed, her emaciated arms clasped behind her head. Her son entered, sat down on the bench, and threw his hat beside him without undressing. Candles were lighted in a three-pronged candelabrum. Two of them were nearly burnt out; the third, a tall one, was flaming brightly and guttering. Vasili got up, took two fresh candles from the table drawer, lit them and replaced the gutted ones. He did all this quietly without making a sound.

Irenetsa whispered without opening her eyes:

"Where have you been flying, my dearest?"

"Oh, mother, I did not expect you would hear me. I thought you were asleep. I went and saw such doings!"

"Tell me all about it, my son."

"Well, not far from here, on the Kozye-boloto, the bandit Stenka Razin was cut to pieces. First of all, the executioner cut off his right arm, then his left leg. His brother was led forth, but was not executed. This Frol was chained merely to give him a fright. But Frol was so horrified at his brother's fate that he called in a loud voice and with tears: 'I can tell you what you want to know!' Then Stenka, mutilated as he was, and with blood gushing from his truncated arm and leg, bellowed with all his remaining strength at Frol: 'Quiet, you cur! May you go to the devil with what you know and all.' The executioner bashed him on his shorn head and cut it off straightway, and then . . . What's the matter, mother?"

Irenetsa, trembling in every limb, sat up. Her greying hair fell over her eyes. Throwing them back with her thin hand, she screamed so loudly that her son started:

"Oh, my child, please don't!"

"Don't what, mother?"

Irenetsa fell back on the bed and said softly:

"I must pray, and so must you. He was your father, Stepan Timofeievich."

"My father? But how was I to know that? He was always a bandit to me, and now suddenly he has become my father. Oh, that I was fated to see him in such a place! My father!"

"Truly he was your father. I am to blame for not telling you before. You see, I begat you by him without the law. I said nothing lest you blame me and cease to love me."

"Why should I blame you, mother? So that's who my father was? Our guest, Lazunka, did not speak idly when he told me to be like my father and taught me to shoot and handle a sword."

"My child, as I lay sick I thought that if only I could have one glimpse of him . . . I started on my way, but my legs gave out. For four days I stood at the door and then I heard the people shouting: 'They're coming!' I felt faint and crawled back here to the feather bed. Now they have executed my falcon. For me, too, the time has come to die. These are my last words to you. . . ."

"Why should that be, mother? I'll fetch a leech and we'll cure you."

"Nay, Vasiliushko, search neither for a leech nor a sorcerer. My heart is worn out and I have nothing to live for. This heart of mine was kept flickering with the hope of once more seeing my falcon Stepanushko. Now . . ."

Without opening her eyes or altering the expression of her countenance, Irenetsa wept.

"Oh, mother mine, I've upset you by speaking as I did in ignorance. Do not weep. If you wish for anything, or want me to go anywhere, you have merely to say so and I'll go. But do not weep. Tell me what I must do."

"There is one task I shall impose on you, my darling. Go and find a friend of yours who is bold and fearless. I've heard you have such companions. I shall give him as much money or jewels as he desires. Nothing shall I grudge him, if only he will creep to the place of execution and bring me Stepanushka's head, cut off by those curs the boyars."

"I understand, mother. Is it to be brought here?"

"Yes, but not by yourself, my own. I shall cut the locks off that head and lay them under my pillow."

"But, mother, his head was shorn."

"Then I will only take leave of it, my child. It will be a relief to me. Go, my son; find the bold lad to do this."

"I will, mother. But you must not grieve, my darling mother. Why, oh, why was I not told this earlier? My father!"

Vasili hastily picked up his hat, tightened the sash round his waist, and searched for something in the vestibule.

Irenetsa slowly sat up in bed, smoothed her face with her hands, shook her head gently at first and then more energetically as she came to a decision.

"You lazy woman," she commented. "'Tis time to start on a journey, and you are still languishing and dreaming."

She tried to stand, but swayed and, with a stubborn expression, clutched the edge of the heavy table for support.

"Pull yourself together! There is much to do. I must put on my best finery and make up my face and eyebrows. What a feckless woman you are!"

Holding to the wall, she went to the cupboard, opened it, and passed through to the annexe. There was in this basement a clock hanging on the wall, and Vasili levered up the pendulum every morning. But in the excitement of the last two days he had forgotten to do so, and consequently the clock had stopped. Irenetsa took no notice, but sorted out some sarafans. She dressed herself in a white satin sarafan embroidered with gold and with pearl shoulder-straps. She changed her silk shift for one of fine white linen; chose a light coif without bandeau and put it on. While dressing, she thought:

"This is for my sweetheart, Stepanushko . . . in white . . . not black. . . . O God, give me strength!"

With an effort she managed to get into the vestibule, where she found a cup containing wine. She sipped some from the brim, but choked, and, recovering her breath, ate some white bread.

"Time to start on your way, woman. Time to start. Keep your strength . . . eat . . ."

On her return from the vestibule she began to tidy the room. She took a crimson velvet cloth from the locker and spread it over the oak table. Placed fresh candles in the second candelabrum. Trimmed and lighted the lamps before

the ikons. Crossed herself, but did not prostrate herself for fear she would not be able to rise again.

A resolute step sounded in the vestibule. Her son entered and placed a sack on the bench.

"I've brought it, mother."

"You? You did it yourself?"

"Who did you think I could ask for help?"

"Oh, my son, my son, my darling! I am frightened. What if you, too, are snatched from me by those devils?"

"There's no one to snatch me. He's been executed and the job is done. No watchmen have been placed there. In the pit are many heads. On the big stake I stuck one rather like father's. The crows are at work on the heads, so nobody will be any the wiser."

Irenetsa, swaying as she walked, approached the bench and whispered:

"Are you sure it is the right one, dearest?"

"Most certainly it is, mother. Why do you doubt me?"

"Oh, dear boy, I'm not doubting you, but . . ."

Before removing the head from the sack, Irenetsa enfolded her son in her arms.

"My dearest Vasiliushka, I must kiss you and bless you, my little falcon. Forgive me, a sinful woman."

"What is there to forgive? And why bless me? Let me take out the head and carry it to where you want it. It is heavy."

"No, I'll do it myself—I myself! You, my son, go and bring back our guest the old minstrel."

"He said he would come of his own accord. Merchant Redkin, who has his booths near the bridge, with the help of his assistants, nearly dragged him off to the Criminal Office."

"No, my dear, you must find him yourself. You have told me that he was very nearly kidnapped. He used to be with you father, so do find him. I shall rest a little while and perhaps get a wink of sleep."

"Yes, sleep and try to get well. It is good to see that you are able to walk again, mother, as you did when Lazunka was here. One thing makes me sad."

"What's that, my little son? And why are you sad?"

"I don't quite know myself. I am looking at you all dressed up as if for a wedding, yet your eyes . . ."

"What's wrong with my eyes, Vasili?"

"They look as if you'd been weeping."

"Oh, my dear one—oh, my little one! God grant that your way through life may be a smooth one and that you grow strong and powerful."

Once more Irenetsa clasped her son in her arms; the lad responded to her caress with a hasty embrace. At the door he struck his cap against his coat.

"I hate having to leave you, mother, but I won't be long."

"Go, my dear and may God be with you. You must find the old man, but don't be long about it. He cannot be far away from here."

"He said, 'I'll find my way.' It's getting dark. He's sure to come. I'd better be getting along."

Irenetsa, tall and flat-breasted, stood over the sack in the yellow light shed

by the candles. Wisps of greying hair, caught in the beam of light, straggled from beneath her coif. Her emaciated hand touched the sack, then recoiled.

"No, it isn't that! No, not that . . . something else . . . I must . . ."

She went to the coffer behind the stove, opened the trap leading into the secret chamber. The everlasting lamp was burning dimly before the image. Swaying, but resolute, she approached the portrait of an old man, felt with her fingers to the right of the frame, and pressed the spring. The portrait swung sideways towards her. Inside was a safe containing shimmering vessels of chased gold and silver studded with gems. With teeth clenched in a final effort, Irenetsa drew from the top shelf a large silver dish, bordered with diamonds. The dish struck her legs and she sank to the floor. But she was afraid to sit too long, and struggled to her feet again. She did not close the secret safe, but, dragging the dish behind her, she reached the upper storey and locked the entrance.

She removed the three-pronged candlesticks from the table and put the dish in their place. After regaining her breath she pushed her hands under the sack and carried it carefully to the table. As she stooped to deposit it on the floor, memories of her short-lived but happy days with all their sorrows overwhelmed her like a torrent, obliterating all sense of reality, and as one in a dream she began to sing a lullaby. Her voice faltered, sinking at times to a mere whisper:

"Old woman, rock the cradle,
Fair maidens, sing a song,
Sleep, Christ be with you always,
Sleep until the morn!
Then we shall awake you,
And you shall chase the foe
From our lovely home. . . ."

She bent down, folded back the sides of the sack, and lifted the gory head with its blue lips and closed eyes. The lips were swollen; dark blood had coagulated on the beard and moustache. The skull was closely cropped and a deep suppurating furrow ran along the left side. Irenetsa placed the head on the dish and, still crooning, or imagining that she sang, whispered:

"Sleep paces on the bench;
Death stalks about the house . . .
Sleep says: 'I want to doze.'
Death says: 'I need a scythe.' "

Suddenly she knelt beside the table and sobbed convulsively.

"Oh, my beloved Stepanushka! We have met once more, and you, my falcon, said we should never meet again. But woman, remember, you've made your preparations for a journey, and yet you keep wailing. It's no use now. You sluggard, start on your job. I shall take your dear head, falcon, and carry it across Moscow. I will hide it and swathe it in a silken tablecloth. I am holding something which is precious and beloved and I shall not allow anyone to take it from me. Let me be tried along with him. Bury me in the cruel pit. Weep no more, sad eyes."

Clutching at the table, she went into the annexe and brought forth a silver

pitcher of water and a towel. She bathed the ataman's head and blood-smeared beard. She scolded herself and wept uncontrollably.

"Woman, what an old ninny you are! Always ready to cry! Yes . . . my dove, my beloved. I shall wash your dear face with water. I went to the market and heard that the informers were hunting for the musketeers who dragged me out of the hole. They searched the whole of Moscow, but found nothing. The chief ordered the search, the pot-bellied chief. My falcon, if they find you, I'll go to the rack with you. . . . Oh, please open your dear eyes."

She washed his face and beard, his forehead and the horrible scar Shpyn's sword had made, and she opened Razin's eyes. These sightless orbs looked forth, but the stern brows were still.

"Ah, if you could but utter a single word, my darling! Won't you say just something to an unhappy woman? No! All is past and gone, life is over. Come, you poor wretch, and sing. Sing, or you'll drop and never start on that journey. I shall never give you up, my falcon, not even were she a queen. Your head will be wreathed in pearls. I shall bind your heart to my bed with golden chains. I shall sing you lullabys. Sleep, sleep! I must sing now:

"Upon those fires so bright
Cauldrons boil. Good night,
Hush-a-bye my little one.
And now arise my knight.
Your sword of steel don tight,
Strike your foes with might,
Hush-a-bye my little one.
The tempest full of spite
And woes will take to flight . . ."

The pitcher clanged to the floor. Irenetsa, with staring eyes, recoiled towards the bed.

"Killed? Oh, he is killed! Nothing will ever take to flight. . . . They have torn him to pieces. They and their tsar are foul beyond words. Cruel, cruel . . . wait, woman. Oh, my heart, my heart . . . !"

She fell backwards on the bed; her tears dried up; her eyes glazed as she stared at the dead head with its own stark eyes staring at the wall. Irenetsa whispered:

"Sleep on the bench . . . sleep . . . sleep . . . the time will come . . . we shall wake . . . shall wake . . ."

She stretched herself at full length, throwing back her head, one arm extended along her body while the other lay folded on her breast.

"Mother dear, I've found our guest. He's coming presently. Are you asleep?"

As he came into the cellar dwelling the boy spoke more and more softly and sat down on the bench. He looked round the room as though for the first time. So she spread a cloth on the table? Fetched a pitcher of water? Washed the dead? The ataman's head lay on the dish which sparkled with diamonds, and his eyes seemed to be gazing upon the gentle slumbers of Irenetsa.

"How quiet it is! I feel frightened. Oh, I forgot to wind the clock. I must do it now."

Vasili rose and went to the door. Someone was fumbling in the vestibule.

The door was pushed open and, stooping low, the old man in a grey sheepskin cap and carrying a domra crept into the cellar. The youth waved to him.

"Mother is asleep."

The old man took off his cap, crossed himself before the ikon, stepped up softly to the table in his bast shoes, examined the lifeless head, and asked in a whisper:

"Was it you brought father's head here?"

"Yes, grandad."

"In case they miss it and come to search the house and seize you, we had better bury it."

"But will mother ever give up father's head? She's asleep now. Hadn't we better wait and see what she has to say later?"

"My hostess does not seem to be lying naturally. I'll have a look at her."

The old man walked over to Irenetsa and looked down at her. His cap and domra dropped to the floor as he hastily crossed himself.

"Pray to the Lord, lad; your mother is dead."

"Dead!"

Vasili pushed back his cap and walked round the table to fling himself on Irenetsa's breast. The old man, observing him with his dim eyes, thought:

"He pushes his cap back with the same gesture as did his father."

The son did not weep for his dead parents, neither did he remove his cap.

"She is dead, grandfather. What must I do with her body?"

"Is it possible, lad, that you are not grieved at your mother's death? If that is so, then you are hard-hearted indeed."

"I do grieve, but I am not a woman to shed useless tears. She often spoke of death. Once I thought she was dead already. She sent me to look for you, and before I went she put her arms round me and blessed me. The question now is, what are we to do?"

"Fetch a priest, my lad, and take him a small jewel or some money. They are greedy for worldly goods; not all of them, but far too many. The priest will tell you what to do. Go, my boy. As for me, I shall go whithersoever the spirit leads me and shall commit father's head to the earth. The priest must not see it. I shall also go to the marsh and stick another head on that stake——"

"In place of father's? I have already done so, and you need not trouble to go to the Kozye marsh."

"Did she tell you that Razin was your father, child?"

"She did, grandad."

"I am glad, for it hurt me to hear you call him 'robber ataman'."

"Why wasn't I told earlier?"

"Go and fetch the priest, my lad. I shall sit here and try to recall the bold adventures I had with our beloved ataman and recite a prayer."

"Well, I'm going."

"But what about the jewel?"

"I'll promise him one. We have enough to give."

"Stay, child. Prostrate yourself before your father's head. There are few such fathers as he in this world, and it will be long ere another such as he arises."

The son took off his cap and bowed to the ground, saying:

"Forgive me, father, for that I poured abuse upon you in my ignorance."

"That's right, my lad, that's right."

"From now on I shall think upon freedom and speak of it to others and work for it. . . ."

"You are a wise boy; may God preserve you. Bury your mother with due honour. She was a good woman, a good housewife, and grudged you nothing. Clever people taught you many things. You'll find out for yourself how to get on in the world."

The young man drew himself up to his full height and replaced his cap. The old man sat on the bench.

"I am now going to fetch a priest, grandad. Tomorrow we shall bury my mother with every honour, and you must be with me."

"Stop a moment, lad, or I might forget. Where is that sack; my eyes are dim with age and I cannot see it; also where can I find a spade for the digging?"

"The sack is under the bench you are sitting on. The spade is in the vestibule to the right of the door."

"Ah, I can feel the sack. I shall come back to spend the night here; it is not right that you should be alone with the dead. We shall bury her, and I shall follow her to her grave. Then we must part company—I to roam the wide world singing about the terrible ataman, Stepan Timofeievich, and you to take your way to the Don. Who knows but that a time will come when you will be called upon to test how much of your father's strength resides in you? Go now, my boy."

The youth went out. The old man remained seated with his head drooping in sad meditation. He stroked the cleanly washed head of the ataman. Then he turned towards the dim light before the ikon and prostrated himself as he prayed. On rising to his feet he kissed the blue lips of the lifeless head and kissed Irenetsa also. He placed Razin's head in the sack, shouldered his burden, picked up the spade in the vestibule, and ambled slowly away into the night.

"I am used to a wanderer's life," he murmured, "and it is necessary to do what I am setting out to do."

That same night of June 6-7, 1671, Troshka, the bell-ringer of the church of St. Gregory, crept to the spot where the ataman had been executed and approached a pole stuck securely in a hole. To impress and intimidate the population, a long sheet of paper containing the sentence passed upon Stepan Razin and his brother Frol had been nailed. At the very moment when the little sacristan stretched forth his hand to tear down the scroll, he heard the soft pad of feet behind him. He started violently. He snatched at a corner of the paper, tore it off, shoved it with his customary gesture into his cassock and started to run away.

"I'll make a copy and then burn the original sheet," he thought; "they'll never find it."

Retreating to a safe distance, he looked back. Near the pit, from which protruded the arms and legs of executed persons and a blackened, shaven head stuck on a long pole, walked an old man in a kaftan, bast shoes and a sheepskin cap. He was bent and his eyes were fixed on the ground as though he were looking for something.

Back in his room beneath the refectory the sacristan darkened the windows, lit the ends of some candles, sharpened a quill and, drawing the inkwell towards him, began to copy the part of the sentence which he had torn off. As he did so he reflected:

"I must tear away the remnants from the stake and copy that, too."
He wrote:

"You robbers, traitors, perjurers, and murderers of Christian souls, together with your comrades, who have been bested near Sinbirsk and at other places, by order of the great sovereign, tsar and grand prince, Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of all Great, Little and White Russia, and through the services rendered by the ataman Kornei Yakovlev of the Don Cossack Force and the men under his command, have now been captured and delivered to the great tsar in Moscow, and, upon examination and under torture, have confessed your crimes: therefore, in punishment for your evil and abhorred deeds before God Almighty, and your treason to the great sovereign, tsar and grand prince, Alexei Mihailovich, autocrat of All Russia, and for bringing ruin to the whole Moscovite state, by decree of the great sovereign, the boyars have sentenced you to be put to death by quartering. . . ."

THE END

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Aleksei Pavlovich
Cedar. Mrs Eden