Data Tutashkhia

Original title: Data Tutashkhia.

First Published 1974 in Georgia by Merani.

Translated by Antonina W. Bouis.

Illustration by Levan Tsomaia © 1974.

Book Design by Kutsna Amiredjibi.

ISBN 99528-52-67-4

Chabua Amiredjibi

Data Tutashkhia

Novel

Contents

Chapter One — 9

1. Count Segedi — 9
2. Count Segedi — 14
3. Tigva Zazua — 15
4. Count Segedi — 22
5. Alexei Snegir — 23
6. Count Segedi — 31
7. Nikifore Bubuteishvili — 32
8. Count Segedi — 37
9. Mose Zamtaradze — 37
10. Count Segedi — 48
11. Qudji Toria — 57

Chapter Two — 80

13. Count Segedi — 82
14. Gigo Tatishvili — 82
15. Count Segedi — 93
16. Irakli Khurtsidze — 112
    The White Notebook — 116
    The Blue Notebook — 126
    The Pink Notebook — 144
    The Yellow Notebook — 160
17. Nikandro Kilia — 167
18. Beglar Gvalia — 169
19. Nikandro Kilia — 174

Chapter Three — 180

20. Count Segedi — 181
21. Tochi Mikashavria — 184
22. Count Segedi — 186
23. Bekar Djeiranashvili — 190
24. Count Segedi — 197
25. Bekar Djeiranashvili — 201
26. Count Segedi — 208
27. Dimitri Kodashvili — 212
28. Count Segedi — 216

29. Mistress Tiko O-Ni — 223
30. Count Segedi — 233
31. Shalva Zarandia — 238
32. Count Segedi — 242
33. Salome Bazierashvili-Odisharia — 247
34. Count Segedi — 252
35. Shalva Zarandia — 257
36. Count Segedi — 261

Chapter Four — 269

37. Robert P. Khaplani — 270
38. Alexei Snegir — 285
39. Count Segedi — 294
40. Shalva Tukhareli — 299
41. Count Segedi — 308
42. Shalva Tukhareli — 317
43. Count Segedi — 329
44. Vano Natoprishvili — 334
45. Count Segedi — 336
46. Vaso Goderdzishvili — 339
47. Count Segedi — 350

Annotations — 370

...And man was given:

Conscience, so that he could expose his own faults; Strength, so that he could overcome them; Intelligence and Kindness, for his own good and the good of those close to him, for only that is good that benefits others; Woman, so that his kind would multiply and flourish; Friend, so that he would learn the extent of his goodness and sacrifice in the name of his neighbor; Homeland, so that he would have something to serve and lay down his life for; Fields, so that he would earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, as the Lord had commanded; Vineyards, Orchards, Herds and other goods, so that he would have gifts for his neighbors; and the whole World, so that there would be a place to do all this and raise up something worthy of that great love that was his god. And as it is said here, so it was. The law and faith of their fathers filled man's flesh and spirit with love. And judge of the people and its ruler was Tutashkha, a beautiful and splendid youth. Not a human in his flesh, he was, however, the human spirit which dwelt in the depths of the soul and entered all its components.

And that faith gave rise to reason, wisdom, and comprehension of the essence of things. From wild grass of the desert man grew grain, and that grass became his daily bread. He bent the steppe ox's neck under a yoke, and the ox docilely carried its heavy burden. And man created the wheel and connected cities and villages with roads, so that the human race would become united. And looking at the sky, he calculated the paths of the stars and understood their laws. And when it was about to rain or snow, he said to his neighbor, "Bad weather coming." And he drew the face of the Earth and then he could see where to walk and where to sail, and where there were mountains and where bottomless seas had spread. He invented writing, so that he could tell his grandchildren about himself and preserve his experience for them. He grew the grape vine and turned it into a gift for the creator of this wisdom. And his people beheld him, who dwelt in the temple but was like man and ruled. And they obeyed his commandments like the laws of nature.

I spent my childhood and youth in Sololaki, in a four-story Tbilisi mansion with a large, rather dark courtyard, enclosed on all sides by the wings of our house and the blank wall of the neighboring one.

Count Segedi had a room and storeroom in the semi-basement of this building. Once, long long ago, he had been head of the gendarmerie of the Caucasus. At the beginning of the century he retired, and forgotten by everyone, he lived out his life all alone. They said that he had been of service to the revolution and our government had forgiven him his past.

I knew very little about him when I was six or seven. He rarely left his basement. Children older than I and totally unknown to me were taken to him to be taught French and German.

He was a tall and very thin old man with marvelous bearing and a face lined with wrinkles. No matter the weather or season, he wore a black beaver coat and bowler. His image was completed by a pince-nez in a metal frame and a walking stick with which he never parted. He walked unhurriedly and lightly, his head always bent, and for a long time I did not know what color his eyes were.

I was a polite lad, and always greeted people first, but I avoided Segedi until I became his pupil. I was afraid of him—he reminded me of a black tombstone.

But the time came, and with trembling heart I knocked on his door:

"Please come in," I heard in response.

I entered hesitantly and froze on the doorstep. Segedi rose from his desk and, smiling, came toward me.

"Sit down, please. I must ask your forgiveness, but I must leave you for a bit." He pointed to an uncompleted wax figurine standing on his desk. "A small hobby, rather, my weakness," he explained. "I like to sculpt to kill time. Don't be bored, I'll be right back."

Segedi headed for the storeroom. His excessively polite tone confused me, I couldn't tell whether he was serious or not.

In one corner of the room, from ceiling to floor, stood bookcase covered with wax figurines, about forty centimeters each. I don't know how many there were, but they depicted people of various ages, strata, and wealth. Merry and miserable, pathetic and proud, given to vice and noble, wicked and kind, it seemed that they were about to come to life, to talk, to turn the place upside down. They were extremely lifelike.

And at the same time the whole bookcase looked like a mummy leaned against the wall.

Segedi returned and the lesson began. For seven years he taught me German and he never lost his refined politeness and attractive courtesy. Our times have done away with social distinctions, but I cannot recall a single instance when Segedi's name was used without the "count". The cause was not his origin, but his behavior, his way of treating people.

Segedi died a very old man. He fell asleep and never woke up. Despite his age, he retained a sound mind and clear memory to the end. No one beside his pupils visited him; and they were the first to learn of his death. A commission of tenants from our building discovered that he had left some money. There was just enough for a funeral. They listed his property: a bed, three changes of linen, the clothing he wore every day, a walking stick with a curved handle, some chinaware, a collection of wax figures, and a lengthy manuscript. This was all that former gendarme general Count Segedi had left behind.

The basement was sealed up. Endless haggling began over "Segedi's apartment". I don't remember, and it doesn't really matter, who sued whom, who was in the right, and who finally moved into the basement. What is important is that while justice moved to its fair decision, the omnipresent boys turned the basement into the site of their romantic games and naturally ignored the fact that the deceased's property had been scrupulously noted in some official document. The wax figurines found new owners. Paper planes made from manuscript pages hovered over our courtyard. The janitor swore, but no one paid any attention until the boys started a fire in the basement and firemen with pumps appeared on the scene. I don't know why, but it was only after that incident that I dared enter the apartment of my late teacher and then understood for the first time the meaning of the word "pogrom".

The first thing that struck me were sheets of manuscript scattered all over the room. Some of them had miraculously survived, some were charred at the edges, some soaked This was a fifth or sixth part of his notes. I gathered them up and put the pages in order at home. In those days I didn't know enough Russian to make out my teacher's flowing hand. Besides, I wasn't old enough to grasp the meaning of the notes. But I figured one thing out—this was the story of the life of an abrag, and even the little that I read and understood was lodged in my memory forever.

Years llater, as I once again, after many times, went through the pages of the manuscript, it dawned on me that the count's collection represented the characters of his notes. I tried to find the figures, at least a few, but in vain. And then I returned to his work, found the people mentioned in it or their family, recorded what they told me, and together with the excerpts that survived of Segedi's notes, I offer them to the reader.

Chapter One

Scouts from the tribe worshiping Mammon crept in and sowed seeds of temptation everywhere. The evil seed fell into the soil and grew luxuriantly, for its root penetrated into the Gehenna and fed on its poison. And a beautiful flower grew that decayed the flesh of him who sniffed it, for its odor was noxious. And the people looked and reveled in its beauty, grew intoxicated by its smell, and did not think of their future.

Locks and bars fell from prisons where were incarcerated the enemies of reason and the human soul, and the road was laid open for the Scorpions, and the thirst for acquisition flared up People envied the prosperity of others, grew to hate one another, and their minds were clouded. Man raised sword against his neighbor, covered himself with a shield against his friends, and the people were no more. And then Tutashkha entered into combat with the defects and flaws of the world: he helped the poor, destroyed the rich, passed fair judgment on the unjust and uplifted the downtrodden, brought peace into the hearts of those at war and banished evil from the souls of men.

But there increased betrayal among brothers, adultery among spouses, ingratitude among those receiving charity, haughtiness among the powerful, hypocrisy among the subordinates, treachery among scholars, heresy among the ignorant, and lies among the bookish.

And Tutashkha was confused, for he did not know how to bring peace and calm into their hearts. And he said in bewilderment:

"I know not what I do, whether it is evil or good. I will fold my arms across my chest and bring my strength to inactivity."

And he turned from his people, stopped paying heed to their groans. For he was not a god

COUNT SEGEDI

One meets people who are gifted in the highest degree but who do not know how to use their talents wisely. An innate gift is one thing, knowing how to control it is another. Two men equally gifted may be quite different morally and each may use the gifts granted him in his own way. The value of any accomplishment is determined by the morality of the doer. For me it is indisputable that at all times society has offered a wide field to the eagle, vulture, and sparrow, and the path of each was laid in accordance with its moral inclinations.

Many years of service as chief of the Caucasian gendarmerie, and after retirement, a certain closeness to those circles, permitted me to follow from beginning to end a story that vividly illustrates my point. This is the story of the life and relationship of two strong personalities—the abrag Data Tutashkhia and his cousin, Mushni Zarandia. Providence endowed them with equal talent, but their life creeds led them to different paths.

I will begin my tale with the thought that even though the Lord God made beauty the source of goodness and purity, this rule has its exceptions. This time beauty gave rise to misfortune: the beauty of the young Georgian girl Ele Tutashkhia made retired Lieutenant Andrievsky commit a rash step, dictated by emotions. Her brother, Data Tutashkhia, mortally wounded the lieutenant and became an abrag. This occurred in 1885, when Data Tutashkhia was nineteen.

I personally questioned Ele Tutashkhia twice, and I swear on my honor that the creature born of sea foam undoubtedly resembled Ele Tutashkhia.

From the Archives of the Caucasian Gendarmerie.
The diaries of Lt. Andrievsky.

April 9,1884.

...I have one scribe in my office. And an enormous amount of work that has to be done. My attempts to find a decent, sufficiently educated man for full time service led to naught, and I came to an agreement with a certain Mushni Zarandia, an excise clerk, for ten rubles a month. He comes three times a week in the evenings when he is free of his own work. Mushni Zarandia is a young man with a gymnasium education, however, in his broad knowledge he is equal to anyone with a university degree. He has an inclination for scholarship, particularly for law. He even reveals a talent for it. Usually Zarandia sits in the room of the chief clerk. One of the doors of my office opens on it, and I often leave it ajar, to be able to call him when necessary.

Once at the end of the day, when everyone was gone, I stayed to wait for Zarandia—to compose and copy some papers. He came, as usual, on time and took my dictation. After a while, reaching for his handkerchief, Zarandia dropped a ten-ruble coin from his pocket. The coin rolled across the floor with a ringing sound. Zarandia looked at it and asked if it were mine. I shook my head and said that I saw the gold piece fall from his pocket. Zarandia was extremely surprised, since, he said, he had not taken any money from home.

The coin glistened on the floor. Zarandia looked at it, as if wondering how it could have got into his pocket. Suddenly recalling something, he bent over and placed the coin on the desk. We resumed the dictation. Zarandia was obviously nervous, he squirmed, and as soon as I finished. he requested permission to leave, promising to return in a half hour and copy over the documents. I asked about the cause of his agitation and rush. It turned out that during the day he had audited a minor craftsman, found goods concealed to avoid taxation, and wrote out a complaint. He was convinced that the craftsman, not daring openly to offer him a bribe, had slipped the coin into his pocket, since the money could not have come from anywhere else. Zarandia said that he had to return it immediately. He poured all this out in one breath, gathered the papers from the desk, left them in the office, and went out.

A while later, having bade the chief clerk farewell, I headed for home myself. I returned around eight, and came into my room through the back entrance. My return, apparently, went unnoticed by the clerk, who had stayed later than usual that day, and Zarandia, who had come back by then. A little later I heard the voice of the chief clerk:

"And so, did he take the money or did he refuse?"

"He took it. lie was embarrassed," Zarandia replied.

"Hm! Embarrassed! Not embarrassed, I'll wager, but puzzled. He probably thought that you considered the sum too trifling and that was why you returned it."

"I don't know. That may be."

"You shouldn't have returned it."

"How else?" Zarandia asked with unfeigned surprise.

"You just shouldn't have returned it."

"Impossible."

"But the treasury paying you a pauper's salary—that's possible? Is it enough for you?" The chief clerk began coughing in anticipation of the reply.

"There is no salary that is enough. One must balance one's expenditure with one's income. No matter how much you get, you want more. There are no small or large salaries. Only small and large appetites."

Apparently, the chief clerk could not come up with a response immediately. After a long pause he said:

"But your appetite, sir, is three times larger than your salary!"

"How's that? I haven't thought about it, actually, what makes you think so?"

"The fact that your salary is not enough and for ten rubles a month you scribble with your pen here three evenings a week."

Zarandia laughed heartily.

"I don't work for the ten rubles. I have free time, it has to be used."

"To listen to you—you don't work for the money. You'd do this for five rubles, too?"

"No. For five, I wouldn't."

"What would you do?"

"Look for a ten-ruble job."

"What, is ten a sacred sum?"

"Not at all. My basic pay and the additional ten make an income that allows me to use the remaining free time—four evenings and Sunday—for myself. On the other hand, the time I spend on the additional work is worth exactly ten, and not five rubles."

"An amazing theory, by God! Will you share the source of that wisdom, kind sir?"

"Some other time."

"Why put it off?"

"All right, then. Old Georgian secular literature and some religious works."

The conversation broke off here.

I would like to know if Zarandia is really like that or if he is merely playing a role.

November 14,1884.

Yesterday Data Tutashkhia and I went into town in Kankava's Droshky cab. The horse went at a trot. It was drizzling. We passed a woman of advanced years. She could barely drag her feet, she was drenched to the skin and shivering. Tutashkhia suggested giving her the cab, saying that it was not far to town and that he even felt like walking. I, naturally, agreed...

In town we first took care of my affairs in the stationary store, and then the hardware store, where both he and I had purchases to make. It was Sunday, a market day, and there were many customers, several dozen people crowded at the counter. But we did not have to wait long. The clerk was already spreading several rolls of fabrics in front of us, when the wife of Shaphatava flitted into the store. The teacher Shaphatava is a young man, and his wife is young and pretty, but rather light-headed. Pushing people aside unceremoniously, she headed straight for the counter. She tried pushing Tutashkhia aside, too. My traveling companion turned, looked her up and down, and curtly blocked the path. The teacher's wife did not give up, but Tutashkhia would not budge, and a woman's strength was not enough to move him from his place.

The clerk wrapped our purchases and we paid. Data asked me to wait a minute, turned to a woman who stood closer than the others, inquired if she planned to buy anything, and left his position only after the clerk brought her some wares.

I was surprised by Tutashkhia's behavior. His attitude toward the weaker sex had always been, I would say, particularly respectful. Just recall that that same day he had walked several versts in the mud for the sake of an unknown woman, and these parts are notorious for their mud. His attitude toward the ill-bred, but young and attractive Madam Shaphatava seemed strange to me.

"I acted that way for her own good," Data replied.

Such altruism seemed dubious to me, and Data explained:

"People are not born impudent but become so through our own fault. Our nobility often makes us forgive fools, like Shaphatava's wife, their brazenness, which they at first allow themselves through sheer lack of thought. But then they become more and more confirmed in it. He may be a fool, but he will realize that it's easier to live when you're brazen, and he'll remain like that to the end of his days. But let us imagine, however, that the fool was not forgiven and he was shamed in his audacity. A man was found to teach him a lesson. And then, no matter how limited the fool may be, he will sooner or later renounce his ugly ways and it may yet be that he will live his life as a decent person."

Of course, this conviction of Data Tutashkhia's is not quite usual. The lot of an audacious person is audacity. However I find some truth in it, and I am attracted by his active attitude toward life.

Transcript of the interrogation
City of Poti, Military Hospital.

March II, 1885.

Interrogator—Evtikhi Agafonovich Ievlev, major of the gendarmerie of Kutaisi Province.

Victim—Sergei Romanovich Andrievsky, noble of Moscow Province, retired lieutenant.

Question: Doctor, does the patient's condition allow questioning and will the transcript of the interrogation have the force of a legal juridical document?

Answer: Mister Andrievsky was wounded in the upper part of the liver, which you know from the conclusions of the medical expert. At the present, Mister Andrievsky has a low fever, his psychic state is normal, and he can give a statement without harm to his health. As for the juridical legality of the document—it is not within my competence to confirm or deny it.

Q: Lieutenant, I ask you to explain the reasons for your retirement and the choice of the free profession of artist.

A: The question has no bearing on the case and I refuse to answer it.

Q: The chief of the gendarmerie has asked you to answer this question.

A: Convey my deepest regrets to the count that my health does not permit me to fulfil his request, and besides, I am not disposed to chat on that subject right now.

Q: Who gave you the wound you are treating in the military hospital of the city of Poti?

A: A resident of the Zugdidi district, Kutaisi Province, Data Tutashkhia.

Q: What proof can you offer of this?

A: Data Tutashkhia will confirm this. Also his sister Ele Tutashkhia and my servant Fedor Nikishov. I must note, how ever, that we shot at each other by mutual consent.

Q: Are you saying that a duel transpired between you?

A: No, we did not discuss terms and shot without seconds. which, as you know, cannot be considered a duel.

Q: Do you wish to press charges against Data Tutashkhia?

A: Not under any circumstances. I must add that I am firmly against anyone else doing so.

Investigator's Explanation: The investigation has at its disposal the objective aspect of the crime, that is, the fact: a retired officer, a man of a free profession, a hereditary noble has been heavily wounded. The gendarme department on the basis of the law must begin criminal proceedings against the person who inflicted the wound. The subjective aspect of the crime. that is, its motive, will be determined by the court and at the time of sentencing it will take into account mitigating circumstances, if there are any. At the present time the criminal Data Tutashkhia is avoiding arrest. Charges have been made and a search for him is being conducted.

Question by the Victim: What punishment awaits Data Tutashkhia?

Investigator's Explanation: If the crime has no political or class motive, that is, if it is not a crime that the law can consider a terrorist act, it will be classified as a premeditated but unsuccessful murder or wounding with grave consequences. As for the sanctions, that is, the severity of punishment, that will be determined by the court.

Question by the Victim: Will my written request to cease the criminal proceedings against Data Tutashkhia be heeded?

Investigator's Explanation: You may appeal with such a request to the court, to which we are obligated to turn over the case.

Investigator's Question: The investigation requires your complete statement regarding the event. Do you prefer to give a chronological account or will you answer questions?

A: Ask away.

Q: Did you know Data Tutashkhia before the incident, and if so, when and under what circumstances did you become acquainted?

A: Data Tutashkhia is a herdsman. For the winter he rents the coastal pastures of Prince Anchabadze and grazes his cattle there. The rental is almost constant, therefore Tutashkhia has his own patskha on the land, in which he spends the winter with his sister, Ele. The coast is lull of cliffs there, and for me, a landscape artist, it is very attractive. I liked the area, and I applied to the renter with a request to set up a tent. As I have told you, the renter was Data Tutashkhia. He allowed me to pitch my tent, and helped me and my servant set it up. This happened last year, 1884, in October. Five months ago.

Q: Describe Tutashkhia, are there any special characteristics about him?

A: Taller than average, solidly built. Blue eyes, hooked nose, legs slightly bowed from constant horseback riding. Dresses elegantly and becomingly, likes wearing a black Chokha-coat. Often changes

horses. And each horse is better than the last. Basically, he differs in almost nothing from his compatriots of aristocratic background.

Q: Ele Tutashkhia?

A: I don't think that this question has any bearing on the case.

Q: What do you know of Data Tutashkhia's close relatives?

A: Data and Ele are brother and sister. They were orphaned at an early age. As far as I know, they have an aunt on the father's side, her husband, and cousins.

Q: What was Tutashkhia's education?

A: He did not attend the gymnasium, nevertheless he is a sufficiently enlightened person. The orphans were brought up by their aunt and her husband, a village deacon. They brought them up with their own children. They taught them to read and write, gave them religious instruction, familiarized them with works of literature. Data Tutashkhia is fluent in conversational Russian, better than I am in Georgian. But where and how he ever learned it, I don't know. He has a lively, clear mind. He is a profoundly decent and just young man.

Q: What tied you to and what relationship did you have with Data Tutashkhia?

A: We were very close friends. Despite this incident I still have the greatest respect for Data Tutashkhia and his sister Ele.

Q: People so close decided to cause each other's death? Probably there were serious reasons for this? What caused the argument?

A: Data Tutashkhia found Ele and myself alone. I consider it my duty to state that if there was any feeling between us, I did not in any way betray the trust of either my friend or his sister.

Q: What happened then?

Doctor: Major, the patient is tired. If the interrogation is continued it will have adverse effects on his health. Mister Andrievsky must rest.

Investigator: I do not dare to object you. I hope that in a few days Mister Andrievsky will be feeling much better and we will have the opportunity to continue the questioning.

My statement has been correctly recorded.

Signatures.

Report by L D. Shvangiradze

March 27,1885

...In accordance with your orders I have been following the persons who visited retired Lieutenant S. R. Andrievsky in the hospital and the people who were seen with the personnel of the hospital and who later visited the grave of the deceased lieutenant. I report that before the death of S. R. Andrievsky there was no information as to the presence of criminal Tutashkhia or anyone acting on his be half in the city of Poti and, in particular, of their appearance at the hospital. On the ninth day after the funeral, that is, March 26 of this year, at 11 a.m. the hospital guard S. Tabagua was visited by his drinking companion, the wharf stevedore J. Bibileishvili. As though in passing, Bibileishvili asked about the health of Mister Andrievsky. Learning of his death, Bibileishvili asked where the lieutenant was buried. Tabagua described the grave in detail, after which, having stayed a bit longer for appearance's sake, Bibileishvili left. Tabagua immediately reported to me.

Of late the name of Tutashkhia is frequently mentioned in the Poti dukhans and we have been able to take note of the persons who maintain that they know Tutashkhia or have a close relationship with him. Among such is the above-mentioned Bibileishvili. After his visit to Tabagua, I immediately gave orders to have him followed and set two ambushes at the military cemetery. The surveillance of Bibileishvili brought no results. As it turned out, Tutashkhia managed to meet with him before we were able to start the surveillance. Bibileishvili, at present under arrest, completely denies the fact of his meeting with Tutashkhia, as well as any acquaintance with him. However, the fact that Tutashkhia came to the cemetery and easily found Mister Andrievsky's grave is indubitably the result of the information given him by Bibileishvili and exposes the latter in lying.

The criminal D. Tutashkhia appeared near the cemetery toward evening. He walked being on the alert. In ambush, to the left of the grave, were Sergeant Stropilin and district policeman Makhatadze. On the other side were Sergeant-Major Ivanitsky and policeman Sharia.

District policeman Turnava and I watched the operation from behind the bushes.

The criminal did not notice the ambush and headed straight for the grave of Mister Andrievsky. By the burial mound he stopped for a second. It was obvious that he was trying to memorize the spot. Sergeant Stropilin rose and, suggesting that the criminal give himself up, aimed at him. So did Makhatadze, who was behind Tutashkhia. Sergeant-Major Ivanitsky shot into the air and with policeman Sharia started toward the criminal. Tutashkhia lay down on the ground and pulled two Mausers from under his belt. He was protected from Stropilin and Makhatadze by the burial mound, and paying little heed to them, he aimed at Ivanitsky and Sharia. Ivanitsky shot from his second weapon, but missed. In response came shots from the other side. Sharia screamed and, limping, ran away. More shots followed. The criminal was crawling between the burial mounds and shooting, Ivanitsky was heavily wounded. District policeman Turnava and I attempted to intercept the criminal at the right time, but were caught under the fire of Stropilin and Makhatadze and lay back. Tutashkhia disappeared during the mêlée.

I bring to your attention one more circumstance: policeman Sharia maintains that he was wounded by policeman Makhatadze. This cannot be checked because the bullet passed through Sharia's leg. I am convinced that he was wounded by Tutashkhia. As for Sergeant-Major Ivanitsky—a Mauser bullet was extracted from his wound.

The search for criminal D. Tutashkhia continues. All spots where he is likely to appear are under surveillance.

COUNT SEGEDI

Avoidance of responsibility for one crime leads with time to a chain of new crimes, and the more they add up, the more important it becomes to isolate the criminal. Like the life of a cocotte, the life of an abrag consists of what he has done and what has become known to the institutions whose function is surveillance on persons suspected of wrongdoing. And of what he has not done but legend has attributed to him. And finally, of what he has done but which has never come to light. Tutashkhia's dossier grew rapidly and was filled with such contradictory and at times highly dubious information that, aside from our duty, we were motivated by professional curiosity—what had Tutashkhia actually done and what had merely been attributed to him? I wanted to meet Tutashkhia face to face, eye to eye, to divine this phenomenon.

In the first four years of his life as an abrag—this can be stated with almost complete certainty—Tutashkhia did not leave the borders of Georgia, and this gave us the opportunity not to lose sight of him and the hope that sooner or later he would fall into one of our traps. This sort of relationship with the police and gendarmerie apparently suited Tutashkhia. This may be explained in part by the fact that his every success, no matter how small, was extolled by the people, his fame grew, and this flattered his pride. There is an inexorable law: the fate of the abrag in the end is either the noose, or a pursuer's bullet, or a traitor's knife or poison. But Tutashkhia was apparently a favorite of fortune, and his life was not subject to any laws. In the four years of his stay in Georgia the detecting agencies recruited about twenty people of those whom he trusted and at whose houses he often stayed. We can assume that half of them warned Tutashkhia of danger; the rest—there is no doubt—he unmasked and stopped using their services. More than once we had occasion to learn where and when he was to appear. In five of six cases he did not show up and the police forces waited for him in vain. There was a case when he escaped after being surrounded, taking away eight horses from the police stables. He sold them in Ozurgeti to some Turks.

In 1889 Data Tutashkhia disappeared without a trace. Many rumors circulated among the people about this, but there was nothing convincing. I think he found us weak, unworthy opponents. His interest in us had waned. He grew tired of the game...

TIGVA ZAZUA

Did I know him? To say that I knew him would be nothing. You see, I'm blind on one eye? All because of him. Yes, yes, because of him, because of Data Tutashkhia. And that's why I'm stuck being a sexton, because I'm half blind. Otherwise, with my dexterity, I'd have found a better place for myself. Sometimes I'd go off in search of a job, and I wouldn't come back with less than forty or fifty ten-ruble pieces. You see my oda? All made of chestnut. And I bought a lot of field land from Jijikhia with the same money... What's my trade? I cut staves. I got two kopecks for each one. It was good money, and the work was just right. Out in the woods—sheer pleasure. You go up to a beech—clean, without a single twig, reaching up to the skies like a string. When you've got a sharp eye you can tell right away whether a tree will cut or whether it's full of knots that will drive you crazy. First I chop off kindling a span and a half long and three fingers thick. Just touch it with an ax and it will tell you whether the wood will go for staves or not. You can't do it alone, you need a partner. It's good if you came with a buddy, otherwise you have to find an assistant. You have to saw together. It's better, of course, with a pal—more profit in it.

In the fall I gathered the harvest, sold what was to be sold, put away what was to be put away, and headed for the Kuban. I knew a large village in the Kuban, in the mountains. It was called Barakaevka. This side of Barakaevka, closer to our parts, is solid beech woods; that's where you get staves. There are small villages all around, and woodcutters and stavecutters lodge there. So many people come from all parts and nations that you can't count them. I knew all the long-time residents—that wasn't my first year there. The foreman was always happy to see me—I really knew my stuff.

So I got there and found myself a companion, a Cossack. He was a first-rate master and an even better man. But we didn't work together for long. The poor fellow was taken by typhus and he died. That year the disease was terrible. Many were taken away, especially of the outsiders. The locals had the right kind of houses, and their granaries were filled to the brim, and they had their own cattle. Sickness has trouble finding the full-bellied. I was left alone. I couldn't find a worker, many of the people had died. The locals wouldn't work for you: they work in whole families felling trees by the hundreds, and hauling in huge amounts of money. They'd be happy to hire you themselves.

Well, I had traveled that far—I wasn't going back. I began puttering about on my own. I sweated and exhausted myself to pieces. I was ready to throw in the towel and head for home. And then suddenly, in the woods, I came across Data Tutashkhia. One time I saw someone scrambling up a hill. Not only at a distance but even up close I barely recognized him. What had happened to Tutashkhia's elegant clothes and thoroughbred horses! You won't believe this, he was traveling on foot, wearing thirty-kopeck worn boots on his feet.

"Trouble's found you, Data," I thought, but he comes up to me and smiles. "I can tell you're in no mood for laughing," I say. "What's happened to you?"

"Nothing special," he says. "I have to find a place to stay in for a while."

He was wearing rags, I tell you, but he still looked like a prince among the local rabble. He was handsome, I'll give you that. Women, their eyes would pop out and they couldn't take them off him. Well, anyway, that's not what I'm telling you about.

I brought Data to the foreman. Here, I said, here's my mate. They gave us a room for two and we began working. Data didn't know anything about staves, but he was good with an ax. He learned the trade quickly, and most important, he was assiduous.

The first day we didn't fell a tree—I had one chopped, so we started sawing it into hoops. Next to us Poklonsky and his son were chopping down a tree. What a big tree it was—three men couldn't put their arms around it! They had been chopping it since yesterday. Data kept looking over in their direction, trying to estimate its height and thickness. What did he want with it—hadn't he ever seen a tree go

down? But no, those other trees, you see, were different and they fell differently, and he was curious. Well, finally the Poklonskys managed their beech. It began scraping and crackling. Data heard the crackling, dropped his saw, turned to them, and, remaining on his knees, watched as though hypnotized. The beech lurched and collapsed to the ground. I saw that Data was pale as death, sweat pouring down, but he didn't stir. I thought he would jump up, and I would never see him again. I really didn't think that he would stay. He stood on his knees a long time, very quiet, then he wiped the sweat from his face with his sleeve and picked up the saw.

I thought he'd get used to the woods, to our work, that his heart would stop aching, but I started noticing something weird about him: we'd pick a tree, take it with two axes, large chips sprinkling the earth like rain. We'd chop three quarters of the way through. Data'd step aside and watch. Watching really is interesting: the beech crackles, as though its spine were broken, but still stands ... and then it turns, leans backwards, and starts falling, crashing everything in its path; the leaves swish and scream, the branches groan, break, crack unbelievably. There's noise everywhere, as if Amirani were letting out his last breath. The tree hits the ground with such a hollow thump, like a giant banging his chest with his fist. But much louder. The earth trembles, dancing, and quiets down. And it seems that you've gone deaf. The tree lies there as pathetic as can be. The leaves curl up instantly. The silence is deathly. Data stands and stares. And it was always like that—whenever a tree was being felled nearby, he'd drop his work and hurry there. How many times I heard him say:

"Tigva, brother, upon my word, a tree is like a man, and understands everything even better than he does; it's more beautiful than a man, and meets its death more nobly, and it lives a much better life!"

Data Tutashkhia used to like to say that and he believed what he was saying.

But I'm sidetracked, I'm getting old, forgetting things. Sometime after that, a retired soldier and wife joined us. I later learned that she never left his side while he was in the service, she was always with him. They were childless, poor as a church mouse, they didn't even have anything to sleep on. Only God knows how fate brought them here! I certainly don't know—inscrutable are the ways of the Lord. Would he have come here alone? All the people who lived in that settlement had come from somewhere, the down-and-outs, but then they settled down and got rich.

So the newcomers arrived. The foreman asked the soldier if he knew how to fell trees. "No," says the soldier, "I'm a man of the steppes. I can chop wood, but I don't know anything about forestry." But the foreman took him on anyway—he needed people. He asked Data and me to take them on as assistants, to teach them the trade. Damn that day. All our trouble started with it. And how the trouble went, I'll tell you in order.

The soldier was called Budara and his wife Budarikha. We never learned who they were and where they came from. They did speak Russian, but I never heard such speech before, only from them. Budara's vision had spoiled in the service. But even with bad eyesight he was a fair worker. Budarikha, though a woman, worked no worse, and maybe even better than her Budara.

Data watched them for a day or two and then he says to me:

"It's not good to keep them on fifty kopecks, I'm sorry for them. Let's pay them a ruble each."

There you go! The pay for workers that year was forty kopecks. Why should we pay the Budaras a ruble?! Data held his own, and we finally settled on paying them seventy-five kopecks each. The Budaras were very happy, and they tried even harder. With time they learned how to pick out a tree, fell it, saw it up, chop it and plane it... They were so hard-working, oh my Lord! Take the midges, for instance. They swarm in the forest. So wherever you work, first you have to light some rotted wood and make it smoke to chase away the midges, or they'll eat you to the bone. The Budaras didn't need the smoke, the midges were nothing to them. Once they started working in the early morning, they didn't unbend their backs until twilight. And they were both extremely polite. Always with a smile, always respectful to everyone. Used the formal "you" with chickens, as they say. When they said hello, they bowed to the ground. They prayed morning and night—a monk would envy them. Once I happened to mention that the water in the pitcher wasn't quite fresh. Budara heard me, grabbed the pitcher from my hand and rushed

down the mountain. I called him back, I shouted... No use! He went down to the stream, one verst down the steep slope and a verst back the same way. Brought water.

The Budaras spent a month with us, learned the trade, and began working independently. They were still with us when they began building their house. We helped them as best we could—making beams, rafters, frames, doors... That month the Budaras earned forty rubles. The poor things sated their hunger and got some clothes.

The walls were up already when they dropped work on the house and started the cattle-shed. They knocked it together in two weeks. It was a large one—five cows and their offspring would have fit just right. They had come here, I realized, to feather their nest and settle forever. Data was so pleased by their persistence, it was as if they were struggling for his sake.

I remember Data and I were resting one afternoon, eating lunch. The Budaras came. We invited them to take pot luck. The four of us sat and talked about this and that. Then Budarikha says: "We still don't know your trade too well, we barely make a ruble a day, no more, and our expenses, as you know, are high: we have to finish the house, buy things for it. Now the first thing we want is a cow, but we don't have enough money. Lend us fifteen rubles, and this Sunday we'll go into Barakaevka to buy a cow. We'll pay back the loan in labor or money, as you like."

Before I had time to open my mouth, Data gave Budarikha fifteen rubles. For people like you, nothing is too good, may God help you, he said. They thanked us once, and again, and I don't know how many more times, sat for a bit, and then went to their beech tree.

To tell the truth, I didn't like their request or the fact that Data gave them the money. Not out of greed, as God is my witness. I didn't keep it secret from Data. "Why not?" He was surprised. "Can you tell me?"

"I can," I said. "I feel that no good will come of it. You'll see I'm right."

That Sunday the Budaras left before dawn to hurry to the bazaar. In the village by then young and old, local and outsider—everyone had learned that they were off to buy a cow. Things were troubled, not as usual; the men were silent, the women angry. I had noticed that already in the morning. What's up, I thought? I'm talking about the locals now. There was almost no one there of the outsiders, they were gone somewhere.

Our settlement lay on a slope, and from the top, where the folks always gathered, you could see the road; it winded its way along the slope, and coming from Barakaevka you had to go uphill, there was no other road. When noon had passed, everyone came out into the street, whole families, settled on their porches, on benches, on logs, and stared at the road. They sat there quietly, there was hardly any talking. They stared like vultures, waiting for someone's funeral. I had an idea what they were waiting for, but just in case, I listened—yes, they were waiting for the Budaras. If someone in a village buys a cow and his neighbors run over for a look at it—that's normal. But these crazy folks had at least five cows each, and pigs, and goats, and more chickens, ducks, and geese than you could count. That's why I couldn't understand why they were wasting so much time over Budara's cow. They all came here hungry and barefoot, and they all got extremely rich. They planted tons of potatoes. The harvest in those parts is unbelievable. The potatoes are select, have blue skin. The small ones are the size of your fist, the big ones like a cabbage head. A sackful of seed yielded twenty sackfuls of harvest. They took their potatoes to the market in the springtime when the prices were higher. And then they had so much land covered with wheat and corn, and the forest brought them profit, too. Add it up. There were no authorities in that backwoods, no one to collect taxes. They were rich, very rich. So why were they waiting for Budara's cow—all tense, hackles up. I told Data. He was doing something with an ax. He dropped the ax and we joined the locals on a bench.

The Budaras and their cow were running late. Everyone was silent, they were as tense as could be. "I guess their cow was stolen," one said. The laughter that rose up made it seem that he had cracked a great joke. The jokester livened up and added:

"Probably the Budaras were knifed to death, too!"

More laughter.

The fellow pulled out all the stops—and they laughed even harder. Then they got tired of laughing, and shut up. The jokester started

the buffoonery again but in vain. They were gloomy again and silent. A half hour passed.

The Budaras appeared in the distance. They were walking slowly. Budara in front leading the cow by a rope tied to its horns, behind a cow, Budarikha with a switch. They came closer and closer.

"The Budaras bought a goat! A goat!" someone said. Everyone laughed, but softly, to themselves, so that the Budaras wouldn't hear.

But it wasn't a goat, it was a cow. A good mountain breed, and they, the fools, didn't understand anything in that breed. She wouldn't give as much milk, of course, as all of theirs, but her milk yielded twice as much butter, maybe three times as much. They didn't know that and gloated—the cow was small and you couldn't drown in her milk.

The Budaras came up the slope and when they were only twenty paces or so away from us, someone said:

"They bought a tailless cow, take a look, people, a tailless beast!"

The tip of the cow's tail was in fact chopped off three inches or so. In forest areas the longer the cow's tail, the better—it's easier to chase away flies and midges. A short-tailed animal will soon be exhausted, the flies will drive it crazy, and stop the milk. They saw the chopped tail and calmed down—Budara's cow has nothing on ours. And left..

"Did you see that?" Data said. "What were they gloating about, the fools. A rich neighbor is help in trouble and support in need! But what sort of people these folk are, I don't know..."

And he really did not understand them, and all because he didn't know them. But I did. They were ready to eat each other alive, other people's riches made their eyes sore; they weren't human, they were envy incarnate. Envy wore them out. When paupers prosper, they always get that way. And that settlement was made up of paupers turned into fat cats. They were a bad lot. Evil. You don't believe me? I'll tell you something now that will make your hair stand on end.

The Budaras chased their tailless cow into the shed, as spacious as a city mansion. And what do you think? You couldn't find such a good milch cow in the entire settlement. No one wanted to believe it when that dock-tailed little cow began giving more milk than the others. And Budarikha, the bitch, managed to get a glass vessel somewhere, and she'd carry it empty to the shed, bring it out full and walk back to her hut in front of the entire village. She knew, that damned woman, that the neighbors were peeking from behind their curtains, dying of envy. And she walked with such self-importance, you'd think she was a wet-nurse carrying not a jar of milk but a prince's child.

She upset the whole village, the clever hussy.

The time came, and closer to calving Budarikha's cow started trying up. She went with the herd for a month or so and then disappeared completely. Rumors and gossip traveled across the village—Budarikha's cow ran off, and that was that. The people had turned vicious—they ran from house to house, wagging their tongues: that nanny-goat had an overyield of milk for only three weeks.

Everyone knows—some cattle run off for calving.

The Budaras searched for the cow and didn't find her. And Data and I crawled over every hollow, every tiny ravine—no use, it was as if the earth had swallowed her up. Once we were coming home toward dark and we heard someone wailing. We hurried there and saw the Budaras' cow lying with its throat slit and next to it a red calf with a smashed skull. The stake was right there on the ground, too. Budarikha was kneeling, bareheaded, wailing loudly. You've probably heard women keening over a body, she sounded even more pitiful. And around her were some eight people, all of whom couldn't stand Budarikha's dock-tailed cow. And they stood there with faces like neither they nor their grandfathers had ever seen anything as tragic as this, but of course they had nothing to do with it, naturally.

"Just take a look at these fiends, Tigva, brother! What have they done, the bastards!" Data whispered to me. "It's one of them, I'd stake my life on it!"

Data was angry, shaking all over. He grabbed the stick, and attacked the mourners with it. They scattered like cockroaches. And so fast—by the time I thought to stop him, there was no one around.

The foreman immediately sent a man over to Barakaevka. In the morning a police-officer with a mustache arrived, his name was Skirda. He looked at the killed cattle, and asked people some questions. Those bastards complained about Data, but they were too stingy to bribe the

police-officer. I gave Skirda a fiver. He asked me what had happened with the stake. I told him everything—he almost burst with laughter. "Serves you right," he told the victims, "you didn't get beaten hard enough." Skirda stuffed his face and went back where he came from. Our Whippers got nothing for their trouble. I called them Whippers because of their religion, that's what they were called. I'll tell you later what that religion was.

Three days passed. The Whippers went to work warily, as though afraid of something. Data was awfully angry when he up the stake, but he didn't hit anyone too hard, I was there, I saw how it was.

Once one of the men waited for me to be alone and came up to me. He talked about this and that, about what my comrade was thinking, what his intentions were. It was clear that they were afraid that Data would beat them to death one at a time for denouncing him to the police-officer. I knew what Data's thoughts were—he was sorry that he had lost his temper, he thought maybe the guilty one wasn't among them at all. You see what was tormenting him! I knew about it, but it would be the last thing to reveal it to the Whippers! So I said: "Don't tempt fate, don't let him see you, keep away from him, just in case."

"How can we live that way," the Whipper asked, "how long do we lie low, maybe he's not even mad at us at all."

"Come back tomorrow," I told him, "I'll find out everything." He came back the next day. "Help us for Christ's sake," he begged. "Don't bother God," I said, "but chip in for a fiver for me, and then we'll talk." He left, told the rest about our talk, and they asked their Christ for advice. They have their own Christ, a living man, a chipper, like the others. Their Christ suggested they lay out the five rubles and satisfy Data Tutashkhia. They brought it and paid it out. I pocketed the money, I got everything back I had given the policeman, and I told the Whippers they could go to work without worry. I guaranteed it, sort of.

The Budaras were still bemoaning their loss, but enough about them. The problem was that Data was very depressed. I never thought that he could suffer so; he was as glum as a storm cloud and for more than a day or two.

Suddenly he perked up. It was like a stone had fallen off my chest, but I sensed that he was up to another trick. I asked him, but he kept silent. He was silent until Saturday. On Saturday he tells me: "I lent the Budaras some money, we're going into Barakaevka, we intend to buy a cow and a horse, too."

"Why are you doing this?" I asked. "I'd like to know."

"I can, so I am," he replied. "Why shouldn't I?"

They left before daybreak; they returned by evening, bringing along two cows with calves and a marvelous horse. Data, naturally, chose cattle without error. Not a single living soul was out to meet them, everyone stayed home, peeking out unobtrusively from their windows.

The Budaras hired workers, broke up land for wheat, for potatoes, bought seed, plowed the field, planted and harrowed it. They finished the hut, got themselves a pig, and poultry.

I couldn't resist, once I asked Data how much money he had given the Budaras so that they could set themselves up that way.

Data stared at me for a long time, turned away, and took up his stave. He then said:

"Tigva, are you any poorer for their well-being?"

"Why should I get any poorer?" I replied. "But you're mistaken if you think that the Budaras will help you when you're in need, lay down their lives for you."

"I don't need their help," Data said. "They'll get rich, and a good deed comes easily to the rich. Some poor wretch will come their way and just as I helped them, they'll help him. As for my need, even if I were the godson of the governor, nothing would help."

"All right," I said, "don't count your chickens before they're hatched." Back when Budarikha carried the milk from the shed in a glass pitcher, I understood what kind of characters they were... "How much did you give them, though?"

"Two hundred rubles. They didn't ask me, I offered it. As a loan. I could have made it a gift, but a gift is no help, it's always wasted, you have to earn wealth with your own sweat!"

Spring came and I went home, sowed, put things in order. Summer, you know, is the peasant's time. In the fall I went back to the Kuban. Data greeted me gloomily, he wasn't his own self. Something was bothering him, I couldn't tell what.

They gathered the harvest in the fall. You can't imagine how much grain the Budaras poured into their granaries, how much butter and cheese they stored! They also killed a three-hundred-sixty-pound hog ... and repaid the debt. Only the helpful and amiable Budaras were gone. The poor-sighted Budara started seeing, Budarikha didn't go into the woods any more, she stayed home, sewing. She said the house needed a housewife. Budara found a worker somewhere, a lame cripple. He was weak in the upper story, too. He kept chuckling and talking to himself. He worked from sunrise to sunset, sweating blood for twenty kopecks a day. And that wasn't the bad part, that he was feebleminded, every village needs its idiot—I felt sorry for him, I can't tell you how much. Paying twenty kopecks for that labor was a great sin. Data mentioned it to Budara, who replied: "What does the fool need more for?"

You should have seen Budara returning from the woods; he walked like a master. Seva the Fool limped along behind him, barely able to lift his legs, carrying the tools—bent over by the weight of the axes, planes, wedges, and sledge hammer... The poor wretch sweated his guts out by the time he made it to the house. All the stavemakers left their tools in the forest, burying them to protect them from the rain—no more than that. No one ever touched them, there was no stealing in these parts, but Budara said that they would be stolen, and he forced the poor fellow to do the five versts there and the five versts back, as though Seva the Fool wasn't straining with overwork without that.

I had noticed earlier, but didn't say anything, that Budarikha had her eye on Data. Now that things had changed for the better and she filled out, she started making advances. Data didn't even look in her direction, but there was no keeping her in check, there was no getting away from her, no breathing room. She did our wash, swept the floors, she even began sewing and embroidering for us. She should have been washing and sewing for us anyway—it was our charity that let them rise that high, but this wasn't a question of gratitude, she had other things on her mind. I didn't like it at all, but then I just let it go: Data wouldn't lose anything by it, it wouldn't do him any harm. All the Whippers slept with the wives of their fellow sect members—in their religion that wasn't a sin, but the sign of God. Budarikha completely lost her head, seeing these goings on. I said to Data: there's a shortage of women anyway, the Whippers don't want anything to do with Orthodox Christians, don't torture the woman, satisfy her greatest desire, it won't do you any harm. But Data wouldn't let Budarikha near him: he said that doing something like that would make it look like he helped the Budaras in order to satiate his lust. Budarikha hung around, realized nothing would come of it, and retreated. We had to go back to washing our own things in the river.

Back when the Budaras didn't have a copper to their name, they would have given you their last piece of bread, but once they got rich, you couldn't get enough tobacco for one drag from them. A dozen eggs cost five kopecks in Barakaevka. Budarikha never took less than a kopeck per egg, and she never had anything at all for Data and me—whatever you ask for, she refuses. Her conscience wouldn't let her charge us for a jug of milk, so she would say: we don't have any milk, and that was the end of that.

Budarikha began making moonshine, it sold very well. Seva the Fool tore up the skin on his back hauling logs from the forest, but he didn't get a whiff of the vodka for free. But when Budarikha put the mash on and strained it, Seva was given the residue: the poor fool would gorge himself with that stuff and walk around in a daze, his belly swollen as though he had dropsy.

The Whippers came pouring to the Budaras, trying to get them to take on their religion. They came to terms with Budarikha quickly—they said you can't drink vodka, but you can distill it and sell it as much as you want. Budarikha became a Whipper, now she had as many studs as she wanted; but Budara would not renounce the Orthodox faith for anything—I think he didn't want to give up vodka and tobacco. The fact that his woman was rolling from one bed to another and that she couldn't sleep with Budara because he was Orthodox didn't seem to bother him. For the time being, of course. If the poor man had known what was in store for him, he wouldn't have let his wife change religion, he would have killed her first.

Here's what was awaiting him: Budarikha got out of hand, sleeping with every man in the village. She didn't care what her faith banned, she wouldn't let any Orthodox men slip past her. The Whippers were going crazy with anger. And there was Budara himself, too, not

accepting their religion. They would have killed him, but they were afraid, they knew we had taken him under our wing. They were afraid of Data—that's why they didn't touch him. Budara beat Budarikha every day, don't go with strangers, he would shout. But she went on with it. If I refuse to bear this cross, she said, the Lord will take me to him. So go let a goat in your garden and see what happens.

Data watched all this, watched it and then said to me once:

"Tigva, brother, thank you for giving me shelter. God grant that I don't stay in your debt, but I can't remain here any longer. I want these people out of my sight. I'm afraid of committing a sin, after all, they are God's creatures. I'll stay until you find a helper and then I'll go."

I tried to talk him into staying. I said the hell with them, the Whippers, but Data wouldn't budge. Now I could see that I was wrong. He would not have accepted that kind of obscene behavior, and if he had gotten involved, who knows what it might have led to.

Once, as we were going to sleep, we heard screaming and shouting throughout the whole village. I ran to the window and saw Budara banging on the door of Khalutkin's house with a stick, shouting for Budarikha to come out. But she wouldn't listen. The Whippers from grandfather to child poured out into the street.

This would have been a perfect opportunity to beat up Budara, but they were afraid of us. Budara broke down the door and forced his way into the house. Khalutkin ran out into the yard in his underpants. "Help!" he shouted. Budara gave his wife a thorough beating, not leaving a spot untouched, chasing her home, but she wouldn't hear of it. "I won't go," she said, "until I've obeyed God's will." Budara struck her with the stick, she wriggled like a snake under his blows, but wouldn't go home. People were howling in the yard, it was like the end of the world. Budara kept hitting his wife and saying with each blow: "And now will you come home?"

"I won't live with you!" Budarikha screamed. "I'll stay with Khalutkin." And Khalutkin shouted from the yard: "Stay, don't go, you don't need him, the godless, devil's spawn." Budara was shocked, he tried working on her feelings, he wept, but she stuck to her guns, there was no way to influence her. Then Budara yelled: "I'll bring Data, we'll see if you come home or not!" He ran out of the house: "And I'll see how you keep her here!" That was to Khalutkin.

Budara turned and headed straight for our place. He walked slowly, probably waiting for Budarikha to call him, just so that he wouldn't get Data. But no one called him back. The Whippers exchanged glances, whispered. They'll attack Budara, I thought, and pluck him like a chicken. They didn't touch him though. We had a candle burning, they could see we were both watching them out of the window, otherwise they'd have finished him off.

Budara came in, stopped in the middle of the hut, and dropped his head. He knew that he was at fault and that his conscience should not allow him to turn to us. The Whippers crept up to our window, the more brazen ones up close, so they could hear our conversation. It was very quiet, only the cricket could be heard chirping in the corner.

"Don't refuse me, Data, defend me. The Whippers have insulted me, led astray my woman. I know that I am indebted to you... Tell her to come home. She won't listen to anyone but you." And he fell silent.

There was whispering outside the window, then quiet.

Data Tutashkhia stared at the floor and said nothing.

"Go help him, Data," I said to him. "I feel sorry for the fool, and maybe his wife really will listen to you."

"What are you talking about, Tigva! It's not a man's job to interfere in the life of a wanton woman. I meant good for the Budaras, and look what happened. They have ruined themselves. I made one mistake, that's enough!"

I won't get involved in the affairs of a whore, he said. But when sailors were hurting a prostitute in Poti, didn't he defend her? They almost bit off Data's pinky in that fight.

There was more whispering in the yard. Budara realized what Data had said, fell onto the floor, in tears: "I won't leave until you help me bring my wife home."

Data went over to him, raised him. You're a man, he said, is this becoming to you? Budara begged him, the only thing he didn't do was kiss his feet, but Data wouldn't agree.

I looked out the window. The Whippers were very close. "Go settle your own life," Data managed to say.

The Whippers perked up, crept away from our window, talking and laughing. They were gloating that Data had turned Budara away.

"If you refuse, I'll go myself," Budara squealed suddenly and made for Khalutkin's house with measured strides.

As soon as he came even with the Whippers, one of them slammed him on the back with a plank and they fell on him like a pack of jackals. Stakes, fists, and feet flew; Budara squealed like a stuck pig. I ran out of the house to rescue him, but how could you stop those animals?! Normally, no one would have touched me, but in the dark, someone's stick—and to this day, I don't know whose—knocked out my eye. I howled with pain. And Data, like a tiger, rushed to save me. "I'm here, Tigva, hold on!" The Whippers heard Data's voice and scattered. No one was left besides Budara and me, one-eyed. When Data saw what those savages had done to me, he lost his temper completely—but what could he do now... There was no time to waste. Data hitched up the horses, found a man who would bring back the cart, and took me to the hospital. I suffered agonizing pain then. Data nursed me, never leaving my bedside. And that was the end of our life together and the stave business.

"The Budaras' heart did not accept kindness," Data would say tormenting himself.

You could have thought that the Budaras' baseness was more bitter to swallow for him than my trouble.

I met Data Tutashkhia after that, too. There were bad rumors about him, but I don't believe it. He wasn't one of those people who are capable of evil.

COUNT SEGEDI

For me, a lonely man, the prince's arrival, naturally, was a happy event, lie did not stay long, but before leaving, he gave me a letter to read, which made up for the brevity of our talk. The letter had been sent to the prince by his godson, excise clerk Mushni Zarandia. At the end of his epistle, the author assured him that the composition of the letter took a year. Zarandia's judgments in fact did seem convincing, with an inner completeness which is the primary evidence of long and fundamental rumination. The excise clerk was proving to his godfather something like the following.

The history of mankind is made by certain personalities or groups of people who manage to prove to the rest of humanity the superiority of the way of life and faith offered by them over the way of life and faith that everyone has at the given moment. Humanity, from its timeless striving for material progress, on the one hand, and, on the other, its insatiable curiosity, febrile search for the new, and also because of a multiplicity of other strivings, adopted new principles, accepted new faiths, and began a new life. As a result of such watersheds people, for instance, no longer poked at the earth with a hoe but plowed with an iron plow; did not merely cover their nakedness, but dressed in linen and cloth garments; did not worship idols, but prayed to richly painted icons. However, the sadness and misfortune, sorrow, dissatisfaction, and greed common to man were the same as those of the Stone Age; everything changed except spiritual thirst, that is, man himself.

From this it follows that replacing one social system with another is generally unjustified. This', naturally, is known to those persons or groups of people who take upon themselves the mission of proselytizer and organizer of a new life. Their goals are defined by greed. But every movement has its army of fanatics as well.

In our era, power, no matter how rotten its foundations and shaky its supports, has more than adequate methods to resist the enemy, that is, the new. Therefore it can be destroyed only by means of violence and bloodshed. Millions of victims, murder and evildoing—all this merely so that misfortune, dissatisfaction with life, and constant spiritual hunger will torment men as before, or perhaps more than before! It is not enough to say that this is devoid of common sense, it flies in the face of goodness and kindness. The duty of every truly honest man is to light against it, since such struggle is the struggle for man's happiness.

Furthermore, the godson of Prince Grigol Paghava discussed the calling and place of a rational and noble man in the clash between the old and the new. When new coercion battles with old coercion, every

honest man must take the side of old coercion since there is no need to become a proponent of something that will not improve man, but bring new misery, death, and monstrous evil, while there was more than enough of that in the old coercion.

At the end of his letter, excise clerk Mushni Zarandia assured Prince Grigol that in five years of service he had never cast a shadow on his reputation. This circumstance, he stressed, could in no way be explained by an ascetic attitude toward his work responsibilities—it followed from his spiritual merits. Zarandia assured his godfather that his abilities, morality, and energy demanded a different, more significant sphere of action. Having learned in some way of my friendship with Grigol Paghava, he asked the Prince to arrange for his transfer to the gendarmerie, promising by selfless devotion to the throne to earn the trust and gratitude of the authorities.

I myself had served the Romanov Dynasty for three decades and knew a great number of examples and the most varied principles for defending the holy of holies of the existing order, but the philosophy of Mushni Zarandia showed me a new type of loyal subject. I agreed to take Grigol Paghava's godson as a protege with a certain curiosity and interest.

Thus, Mushni Zarandia, deacon's son, in 1890 began his career at the lowest gendarme rank. By that time Data Tutashkhia had been an abrag for five years.

Mushni Zarandia served in the gendarmerie for twenty-three years and in the course of that time there were five medals, three merit promotions, an audience with His Majesty when he was serving in St. Petersburg, an inscribed gift for services rendered, and the rank of colonel of the gendarmerie, and no fiascoes. For a man, even though educated, but of plebeian stock, this was an unprecedented occurrence. Naturally, any career has an element of luck, but Zarandia, as I see it, moved ahead purely thanks to his innate talents. This man, possessing an extremely flexible mind and energetic character, was, along with that, astonishingly cautious and perspicacious. And, if memory serves me, I never met a man who had had such great success in work and no envying enemies. His Majesty deigned to call Zarandia "Alexander the Great from the gendarmerie" after one of his very important victories. This nickname was confirmed. The last six years of his service, Zarandia was the secret deputy of the chief of the Imperial gendarmerie. In that altogether brief period he became one of those men whom hardly anyone knew in St. Petersburg, but on whose labor and talents the government rested.

ALEXEI SNEGIR

I was born in Soldatskaya, a large Cossack village in the Kuban. I have dim recollections of my father—he caught a chill when drunk and died, leaving me and my twin brother and my mother. We were twelve when my mother took ill and to her bed. Life became hard and our farmstead went downhill. We had a little land, a horse, a cow, a pig, and geese. Almost everyone in our village kept geese. In the summer we took them out to feed and sold them in the fall. We sold about a hundred and fifty, but there were families that kept five or six hundred.

Mother grew worse with every day. My brother and I didn't know what to do, where to start, everything went wrong. Our neighbor suggested taking in a lodger. And so we did. The lodger was around twenty-five years old. We agreed on three rubles a month. He paid a month in advance, and after living with us for a while and seeing our poverty and troubles, gave us five months' rent and told us to get a doctor for our mother. He called himself Luka, but his real name was Data Tutashkhia. I learned that much later. My brother and I brought the doctor, he examined Mother and said there was nothing he could do. He didn't take any money. Luka made us get another doctor, but he didn't help either. Mother had consumption and she was melting away like a candle. Mother was still breathing when Maruda showed up and demanded his advance back.

Maruda came to the village in early spring, went from house to house, came to terms about buying geese and gave deposits for a receipt. In the fall he paid in full and took away the geese.

He had another profitable venture at the bazaar, but more about that later. He wasn't local, his last name was Malinovsky. They called

him Maruda because he was always dirty and unwashed, like a beggar. A heavy-set, puffy man with a pouting lower lip and tiny, swinish eyes, he always walked around with his mouth open, as if he had been posed a difficult question at birth and was still working on it. Either Maruda learned that our mother was dying, or for some other reason, but he announced that he didn't need the geese and wanted the deposit returned. That day was out with the geese. My brother was at home. He said that we didn't have any money and couldn't pay. Then Maruda demanded payment in geese. Brother said that the geese were too young, but Maruda refused to wait and demanded the geese or the deposit. Mother overheard the conversation. She hadn't been out of her bed in a long time but here she gathered her strength and headed for the window. Her legs gave out under her, she fell and struck her head on the frame. The neighbors came running, beat up Maruda and threw him out. He filed a complaint about us. A week later a police-officer came and took away the geese. Luka wasn't home at the time. He came back in the evening. You can imagine the scene: Mother groaning, my brother and I howling. He began comforting us and gave us forty rubles. But his kindness couldn't help my mother any more. She suffered another week and gave up her soul to God. Luka brought a coffin, the neighbors dug the grave. We buried Mother, grieved, and calmed down. We had to go on living. We were orphans, but again with Luka's help, we didn't give up. Poor as we were, we did have a house and a farm. We went on working as best we could.

Neither my brother nor I took time to think who Luka was, why he was in our parts, and where he disappeared during the day time. We were foolish then. I only learned everything later, when I went to work for Maruda as his errand boy.

It happened this way. It was already three months since Mother died, it was fall, I remember, and I was bringing the shop-keeper some eggs. On the way I met Maruda, carrying a small table under his arm. He beckoned to me and I came over, I don't bear a grudge a long time. "Come work for me," he said. "I need a boy. I'll give you half a ruble a day." Fifty kopecks was no mean sum in those days, especially for a lad my age. "But you have a boy," I replied. "I threw him out," he said, "he was stealing money." I knew the boy and his work at Maruda's too.

The table Maruda was carrying was for gaming. Six squares were drawn on it. In each square there were dots: one in the first, two in the second, three in the third and so on up to six, like on dice. Each dot had its own name: yek, do, se, chahar, pandj, shesh. Maruda came to the bazaar with his table, set it up where there were a lot of people, the boy took a cup with a saucer, set the cup on it upside down, and there were dice under the cup. Maruda would shout:

"Put down five kopecks and if you're in luck, you'll come away with twenty."

A crowd gathered around the table. Say someone puts five kopecks on the yek square—the boy shakes the cup and saucer, mixing the dice, and lifts the cup. One dice, say, reads yek, then the owner of the five-kopeck piece gets ten kopecks; if both dice show yek, Maruda pays out twenty kopecks, and if neither one has yek, Maruda keeps the five kopecks. The boy told me that there were days when Maruda made up to fifteen rubles at the bazaar and other times when he barely made five.

I was overjoyed at Maruda's words—what could be better. I had envied his assistant so: when he shook the cup and the dice rattled, my heart contracted—all I had was an empty home and no job to speak of. No one was more miserable than I. How could I not agree! I told Maruda that I would run to the shop-keeper, give him the eggs, and hurry to meet him.

Time passed and one day Luka asked me what kept me away from home. I told him I was working for Maruda. Luka grew thoughtful, but asked no more questions. About three days after that conversation my boss sent me to split a three-ruble note. I ran to the hatter's row, it was the closest. The hatters were usually Georgian. I ran into the hatter's workshop and saw Luka there. He was standing with his back to the entrance and watching a game of backgammon. While the hatter, whose name was Gedevan, broke my note, the game ended and the players stood up. The first, wearing a black coat, was the Circassian Mahmud; I also knew the second one, Selim, who sold

barrels. Selim the cooper pulled out a pack of money from his pocket and began putting it into a pile. My three-ruble note had been changed already, but—I remember it even now—my feet were glued to the floor: I had never seen so much money in my life. Selim put the money together, folded the pack in the middle, thrust it in his pocket,

took off his belt and, throwing it on the backgammon board, began adjusting his clothing.

"Take the dice, Selim!" I heard Luka's voice.

"Whatever for?" he asked, smiling.

"Take them, I said!"

Selim put on his belt, took the dice, and tossed them on his palm:

"I took them, and so what?"

"Roll a six!"

The cooper put the dice on the board.

"Go take care of your own business!" He waved his hand right under Luka's nose.

Luka pulled a revolver out of his shirt, cocked the trigger, and aiming the barrel at Selim, ordered him to sit down. Selim realized that things were bad, and sank into the chair, turning deathly pale.

It grew quiet in the shop.

"Take the dice," Luka hissed. "Roll a six, a six!"

Selim took the dice, shook them—he did it in a strange way—and threw the dice on the board. And it did come up a six.

"Do it again and roll a four," Luka said.

Selim was pale, there was sweat on his brow, and his eyes were very angry.

"Roll again, roll," Luka repeated. "Roll a four."

He rolled a four.

"Now take out the money and give it back to Mahmud!" Selim waited.

Luka waited too. Selim squinted at the revolver, pressed almost against his chest, took out the money and threw it on the board.

"Take yours," Luka said to Mahmud.

The Circassian counted out his money, taking a good three-quarters of the total, and threw the rest back.

There was a long silence.

"Why did you take it away from me?" Selim asked softly.

"You cheated."

"Everyone does what he wants," Selim said. "I play backgammon."

"I did what I wanted to do," Luka said. "I took the money away from you and gave it to him!"

Selim headed for the door. At the threshold he turned:

"You want to show everyone how brave you are? We know that already. I won't lie—I haven't met many like you."

"But there are plenty like you. And I'm nobody special. And I'm not trying to show off how brave I am."

"You're right again, Data," Selim said without crossing the threshold. "There are many like me, our whole world. At your age I was just like you, maybe a little worse. Age takes its toll. I gave up trying to change this world. I sell barrels. The world," he said nodding at Mahmud, "is made up of men like him. You can't change them. He knows that he won't win, but he sits down to play anyway. If not today, then tomorrow he'll lose to me again. Why? Because he hopes to win, he's very greedy."

The Circassian leaped over to Selim. There was the sound of a slap.

"Next time you'll get more."

Selim went out without saying a word. Luka left, too. "But it is true," one of the apprentices said. "Whether they're cheating or not—it's their own business."

"That's the way he is. He doesn't like it..." Gedevan broke off his sentence and patted me on the back of the head. "Go on, sonny."

I ran from the workshop.

"Where were you?" Maruda jumped on me. "Where the devil did you get lost?" I was so astonished by all I had witnessed that even if he hadn't asked me I would have told him the whole story. Accurately, thoroughly, word for word, I told him everything. "Does that Circassian have light hair?" Maruda asked. "He does," I replied. A long time passed. "That devil from the murky swamp calls himself Luka, but Selim, you say, called him Data?"

"Yes," I said and suddenly I grew afraid. I didn't know what frightened me, but I sensed that I was doing something wrong.

Luka came home early. After dinner I asked him:

"You took Selim's money away because he was cheating, right?"

Luka nodded.

"Any game means cheating," I announced.

"That's true," he agreed. "And how do you know?"

"Maruda said so. He also said that in this world everyone cheats someone."

Luka was silent a long time, it seemed he had forgotten all about me.

"Not everyone. Most of them," he said, turning to me suddenly.

I rarely met Luka at the bazaar, and I was very surprised when the next day he came over to our little table and began watching the game. He stood there for a whole hour and then left. Then he returned and tossed twenty kopecks on the square with three dots—se... He lost slowly. I say slowly because that's the kind of game it is: you lose three or four times and then win once or twice. But in the end you'll be the loser for sure. In a half hour Luka lost three rubles. I kept making signs at him: don't play, drop it. He lost and left.

At home I found him at the table in front of a pile of coins and a sheet of paper divided up like our gaming table. Luka was playing with himself. He played a long time, pleased with something. The longer he played the happier he grew. Finally he tore himself away from the game.

"Does Maruda know that I'm your lodger? Have you told him about it? Think!"

I rummaged in my memory. I had told him so much I may have blurted that, too. No, I didn't think I did.

"Remember," Luka said, "if he asks about me, tell him whatever pops into your head, but not a word about this, understand?" He pointed at the game.

In the morning I saw him again at the bazaar. He stood aside, watching our table. When people gathered, he came over and started to play.

An hour later Maruda loaded the table upon my back and we left the bazaar.

"I took thirty-five rubles with me. Not a kopeck left," my boss said. "I don't understand a thing..."

Neither did I. In all the time that I worked for Maruda, this had never happened. And couldn't as far as I had thought.

We reached Maruda's hut: Maruda got out the vodka, scooped up some sauerkraut, and started thinking. I chewed the cabbage, looked at Maruda, and waited for him to think of something. Maruda drank half the bottle and ordered me to take the table back to the bazaar. I'll catch up, he said.

I had covered half the distance when he caught up with me. The sky was clear and cloudless. It was good gaming weather. At the entrance to the bazaar Maruda gave me fifty rubles and told me to change the bill. I ran to the stalls and saw Luka. It was clear to me now that he spent all his time in the workshops and stalls of his fellow countrymen.

"Back again?" he asked.

I nodded silently.

People gathered as soon as the table was set up. Luka came over. In less than an hour there was nothing left of Maruda's fifty rubles or of the money he had managed to win. Once again my boss loaded the table on my back and we set off for home.

"The Georgian wins," Maruda said. "His name is Luka, right? I've never seen such luck. All the time. And he wins precisely when he bets big money. Well, never mind. We'll see how long his luck lasts..."

Luka cleaned us out on the third day, and on the fourth when he put his money on the table, Maruda refused to play with him. Luka left. It seemed to be the end of my boss's misfortune, but no: every day we came back from the bazaar completely wiped out. Everyone seemed to win, but especially the Georgian craftsmen. Two weeks had passed since the day when we first lost to Luka. Maruda had nothing left. There was no point in continuing the game—loss became the rule and Maruda's business was damned. But that wasn't the only thing killing my boss. How did the people Luka sent over manage to win?—that's what he couldn't understand. He was mad with anger and was going bust. I learned that he bought the geese with the money he won. And now he couldn't buy them and he had also lost his deposits. However, Maruda did not let me go. Work was work! He couldn't pay more than twenty kopecks now, but that was fine with me. We spent each day sitting in his hut. He drank and munched on cabbage. I ate cabbage and munched on bread. After his first glass he grew thoughtful.

"In a month's time I have to take the geese, and with what? They won't return the deposits, it's almost autumn, it's their right. That means the deposit is lost. Borrow? Where? From whom?"

"The bazaar has changed," he complained after the second glass. "They've ruined my game. Should I move to another village? And what there? No matter how much I play, I won't make enough in a month for the geese."

"They say there's a God," he wailed after the third glass. "If there is would he allow things to turn out like this? The game is gone, the deposit is gone."

At this point the boss overflowed with tears and fell asleep. I went home and in the morning it all started over again.

One day Maruda sipped his first glass and stared at me.

"You say his name is Luka but Selim called him Data?"

My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, but Maruda didn't need any answer. He sipped some more, chewed some sauerkraut, and lost himself in rumination. I swear to God that he sat for an hour without moving. Then he stood up and called me after him.

It was Sunday. The bazaar hustled. A motley crowd churned up the mud. Until noon Maruda went from stall to shop to tavern, whispering with whoever came his way. He didn't take me with him, I remained in the street. I had no idea what he was whispering about and what deals he was making, but I sensed evil and I felt awful because I had to drag after him. Finally he turned in to see Selim the cooper. He spent a long time there. They came out together and kept whispering. I clearly recall that. Selim was afraid of something.

"Have you seen Hasan?" Maruda asked when we were alone.

"He went down the street."

Hasan was the sergeant on duty at the bazaar. He had arranged things in such a way that all the tavern-keepers, merchants, middlemen, and second-hand dealers gave him a bribe every day, like a ransom. He was so greedy—he didn't mind small coins. When Maruda ran the game, Hasan was in his pay, too.

We found Hasan in the cattle row. He was arguing with a Gypsy, shouting that the Gypsy had a stolen horse. The Gypsy's half-ruble slipped into Hasan's pocket and the sergeant quieted down. Maruda beckoned him furtively.

"There's a job for you," he whispered to Hasan, leading him aside. "Someone has to be taken."

"Who's that?"

"Someone."

"What has he done?"

"What do you care? Arrest him and hold him at the station house while I go get the police chief. How much do you want for that?"

"You say you'll go get Shevelikhin? Shevelikhin has no time for you today. He's got company."

"That's not your business, either. I'll bring him. What will it cost?"

"Is he armed?"

"I don't think he's carrying anything, but you won't be able to take him alone. You'll need two or maybe three men to help you."

"Who is this fellow? You say three policemen? They'll want money, too."

"You don't say! You're rather free with my money."

"They won't come for nothing."

"Well, how much will they want?"

"Three rubles each."

"Nine rubles?!"

"Ten. One for vodka and eats."

"And for you?"

"Me?" Hasan thought. "Five rubles for me."

"What, you scum? You mean a sergeant costs more than a policeman?"

"As you wish... Go cool off and come back later. You're sorry to part with fifteen rubles, but you won't get it for fifty tomorrow. Your deal stinks, don't try to fool me."

Hasan turned and walked away. Maruda ran after him.

"All right, all right. Go pick him up. We'll settle accounts later."

"I'm no fool," Hasan turned his back to Maruda again.

There was nothing else to do. Maruda pulled out the money.

"Take it! I owe you five rubles."

Hasan looked around, shouted at someone... Maruda stuffed the ten-ruble coin in his pocket. Hasan's hand slid in after, to check the gold piece by feel.

"Who is he and where do I take him?"

"First bring the policemen."

We waited less than five minutes at the station house before Hasan came out with three policemen, whispered with Maruda—I didn't catch a word of what he said—and then he explained something to the policemen en route. Maruda and I remained in the workshop of the dagger maker. Hasan and the police burst into Papchuk's tavern, quickly brought out Luka with his hands tied, and led him to the station house.

"Now, we'll have some money," Maruda said gloatingly, watching them go. "Five thousand—I won't take any less. Half for Shevelikhin, he'd better not ask for more. I'll get twenty-five hundred rubles and give you fifty. You earned it. I couldn't have come up with this deal without you. Now off to the police chief. They'll let me in! It's Sunday. Let's go."

I followed unwillingly. At first I tried not to lag behind, but then I lost Maruda in the crowd. I didn't try to find him. I was so stunned my legs wouldn't carry me: someone shouldered me aside, then someone else, they pushed and shoved me but I couldn't care less. I didn't see or hear anything and I began imagining that life was far off somewhere and I was all alone, with no one around me, feeling dazed and confused. I don't know how I came to be in front of the hatters'. Everything was the same in the workshop. Gedevan was cutting karakul pelts and tossing them to his apprentices. In the far corner of the room, dice clicked—they were playing backgammon.

"Uncle Gedevan," I said, as if in a dream. "Luka's been arrested."

Gedevan looked up at me, stared a long time, beckoned me closer, questioned me, and announced the news to the backgammon players. One of the players was Mahmud. I told them the whole story again.

"Selim was right," the second player said in the ensuing silence. "He doesn't like the way things are, he plans to change the world! I told him—leave Maruda alone. You're looking for trouble... Throw the dice!"

"Throw the dice you say? Just because the world is filled with shit like you, the sun shouldn't shine?! It's not for a birdbrain like you to judge the deeds of a noble man. Get out of here!"

Mahmud's partner was going to argue, but thought better of it, pushed away the backgammon, and went out.

There was silence once again. "If so many adults are thinking about how to save Luka, maybe he really can be saved," I thought hopefully.

"Then Hasan the sergeant doesn't know whom he's arrested or why?" Mahmud said, breaking the silence.

"No, he doesn't," I replied quickly. "My boss told him that it was none of his business."

"Maruda went to Shevelikhin's?"

"Yes. He said they'd let him in."

"You call him Maruda the Fool, but look at the dirty trick he's played on us," Mahmud said and cracked his fingers. "I'm about to do something that will keep my grandchildren laughing to the end of their days."

Gedevan handed Mahmud some money.

"Not necessary. I won't need that much. In our country the law is the cheapest merchandise. It costs from a glass of vodka to a hundred rubles. That's why I love my homeland, because a good deed doesn't cost a lot of money. Otherwise I'd have moved somewhere far away."

Mahmud left the workshop, I tried to keep up with him. At Gurianov's house, which is opposite the police station, he stopped and told me to go into the courtyard and see what's going on inside. I crept up to the barred window of the station house and quickly returned to Mahmud.

"In the left room there are three policemen: two are sleeping, the third is smoking cheap tobacco. In the right room, Hasan is sitting at the table and Luka on a bench. No one else is there."

"Now go call Hasan. Tell him that I'm waiting for him on urgent business. Make sure no one hears you."

I went past the policemen and called Hasan as Mahmud had ordered. Hearing Mahmud's name, the sergeant grew wary and nodded silently.

I ran from the station house, jumped over Gurianov's fence, and hid.

Looking around, Hasan approached Mahmud.

"What do you want?"

"How much will it cost to let that man go?"

"What man?"

"Quiet. The one you arrested for Maruda."

Hasan stared silently at Mahmud.

"Yesterday Shevelikhin was asking me if I knew what happened to Bastanov's horses," Mahmud dropped casually. "He's ready to redeem them himself, with his own money. The hell with the thieves, he says, he doesn't want to be bothered with them."

"What did you say to him?" The sergeant's voice trembled, but he immediately controlled himself and feigned a yawn.

"Well, I couldn't tell him that Hasan the sergeant took the horses away from the thieves and sold them to land-surveyors in Pashkovskaya for seventy rubles each," Mahmud said in a friendly tone.

"You're pals with my boss, that's for sure! That's after you helped him sell a police-officer's post?" Hasan shook his head bitterly. "Ah, my good man, aren't you ashamed? You took seven hundred fifty rubles from Gashokov for the job and gave Shevelikhin only two hundred fifty? Where's the rest?"

"Shevelikhin and I know about that. Don't stick your nose in the affairs of decent men. Just tell me how much you want for that man—and let's shake hands on it."

"I can't let him go!" Hasan said curtly.

"And why is that?"

"Maruda went for Shevelikhin."

"Put someone else in his place."

"Who?"

"Aren't there enough people in the world? Look at all those wandering around!" Mahmud took a twenty-five ruble note out of his pocket.

Hasan's eyes lit up, he looked around and saw a drunken Cossack reeling up the street, wiping gates and fences.

"Come here!" Hasan called him sternly.

The Cossack didn't realize Hasan meant him and went on his way. Hasan called him once again and the Cossack staggered along to the station house.

"Surname?"

"Chertkov."

"Go on with you."

"Why did you let him go?" Mahmud asked angrily.

"That's the cousin of Captain Chertkov, don't you see?"

"So what?"

"He'll scream."

"Anyone would scream. There are no fools."

"Shevelikhin will ask why he's screaming."

"Then find someone who won't. What are you taking the money for?"

"There's no time to go looking around. I'm expecting Shevelikhin. You go find someone who won't scream and hurry up about it." Hasan reached for the money.

"I'm supposed to bring the man and give you twenty-five rubles—you make demands like a minister."

Hasan's mood fell.

"Damn it, take the money and give me ten change!" Mahmud ordered. "Hurry it up."

Hasan took out a gold coin reluctantly.

"Well, bring someone over," he said wanly and headed for the station house.

"Wait!" Mahmud called after him. "What now?"

"I'll go myself."

Hasan was about to object but Mahmud took him by the arm and they disappeared inside the building.

I came out from behind the fence. It wasn't a long wait. Luka appeared on the station-house porch. He called me over, questioned me thoroughly, flicked my nose with his fingers, and went off in the direction of the bazaar.

I went into the station yard and pulled up to look into the window. Mahmud was sitting on the bench that had held Luka. Hasan the sergeant, sitting at the table, leafed through a thick notebook. The three policemen nodded, each holding a worn book in his lap.

As soon as they heard Shevelikhin's phaeton, Hasan jumped up and prodded the sleeping policemen awake. Mahmud lay down on the bench with his back to the door and pretended to be asleep. The policemen tugged at their uniforms, twirled their mustaches, and sitting back down on the bench, peered with noticeable diligence into their books.

The phaeton stopped at the station house, and the horses fed on police oats pawed the ground hotly. I could hear the chief of police jump down onto the sidewalk and after that from the open doors of the station house came a piercing: "Atten-tion!" Hasan the sergeant stood erect before the entering Shevelikhin and after saluting, shouted "At ease!"

"How are things, my eagles?" Shevelikhin turned toward the sleepy policemen.

The "eagles'" noses weighed a pound apiece—red and puffy. In unison they reported that they serve the Tsar and homeland. The police chief asked what they were reading and learning that in their spare time his subordinates read the Bible, voiced his approval and even gave them a quick quiz. The first mumbled to his excellency "*thou shalt not kill*", the second, "*thou shalt not commit adultery*", and the third "love thy neighbor"... While Shevelikhin was involved in the exam, Maruda, who had slipped in behind him, tried to get a good look through the open door at the man lying on the bench. But his excellency, astonished by the erudition of his policemen, swayed from side to side and got in his way. Exam over, Shevelikhin headed for the room where Mahmud lay. Hasan and Maruda followed. The police chief turned his questioning gaze on Maruda at last, and the latter pointed at the sleeping Mahmud. "Get up," his excellency barked so loudly that the portrait of the emperor hanging on the wall shuddered and almost fell off. Mahmud stretched deliciously, lazily turned over, looked at the men standing before him and forced himself to get up with difficulty.

"Salaam, Your Excellency!"

"Monsieur Zhambekov!" The astonished Shevelikhin burst out laughing.

He laughed long and loud.

Hasan the sergeant smiled toadyingly, but kept his eyes open, knowing that he wouldn't get off with just his chief's laughter. The stunned Maruda couldn't open his mouth. Only Mahmud was unmoved and there wasn't a trace of nervousness about him.

Shevelikhin stopped laughing and stared at my boss. Silence descended on the station house.

"That's not him," Maruda managed to say.

"Not him, you say!" And a new rumble of laughter followed. "Monsieur Zhambekov, why are you here?" Having laughed his fill, he finally addressed Mahmud.

"That scoundrel," Mahmud nodded at Hasan without looking at him, "with three others just like him burst into Papchuk's drinking establishment and arrested me."

"On what basis?" There wasn't a trace of his former merriment in Shevelikhin's voice.

Hasan quickly came to his senses.

"On the basis of a denunciation by that idiot!" Hasan looked straight at Maruda. "He announced that the two sheep that disappeared from the Kabardians yesterday were taken away by Mahmud. Go ahead and arrest him, he said, have no doubts, I'll run and bring witnesses."

The next day the hatter Gedevan swore that the blow the police chief landed on Hasan's ear could be heard in his workshop.

Maruda moved closer to the door, just in case.

"Your Excellency!" Mahmud flared up. "This is insulting! To accuse me of the theft of two sheep... two pathetic lambs! You know better... A coal tender disappeared in Armavir, a camel caravan with its cargo disappeared in Baku... But two measely sheep! Oh dear! What humiliation! What shame!"

"Yes, Your Excellency, two!" Hasan insisted.

"Two what?"

''Two sheep—that's what he told me." Hasan was so sincere that I felt a stirring of pity for him.

"The Lord preserve our Emperor!" Shevelikhin turned his whole body toward the tsar's portrait. "How can the emperor rule when his subjects are such idiots? How can you rule such scalawags, our long-suffering father."

In Hasan's piteous posture there was such humble respect and compassion that I thought I saw tears.

"And now let's get back to business." Shevelikhin extended his hand to Maruda.

My boss placed a heavy packet of banknotes in it. The fifty rubles he had promised me were there, too.

"Your Excellency," Mahmud reminded him of his presence. "This bastard even fined me twenty-five rubles."

"Return it!"

As soon as Hasan recovered from Mahmud's brazenness and was about to speak, Mahmud beat him to it:

"Your Excellency! Do you remember asking me about Bastanov's horses?"

The police chief froze.

Twenty-five rubles immediately traveled from Hasan's pocket to Mahmud's pocket.

"I was told today that Bastanov found his horses."

The news brought Shevelikhin into excellent spirits and he ordered Hasan and the policemen to give Maruda fifteen lashes, got into his phaeton with Mahmud and drove off.

When my boss was whipped in the station yard, Hasan participated with great zeal.

I came home. Luka was gone. A ten-ruble coin lay on the table. In tears I rushed to look for Luka—I thought I'd find him somewhere at the bazaar. It was getting dark. The only one I found was Selim the cooper.

"Luka?" he asked. "Luka's brought order to our parts. Now he's off to correct other regions!"

I sought him long and in vain, and with time stopped hoping to meet that man who had had such a good influence on me as a child and whose memory, mixed with a feeling of deepest respect, I treasure in my heart to this day.

A few years later my brother and I sold the house and moved to Rostov. We had relatives there. I worked as an errand boy at a hotel. Later I got a job as a waiter in the restaurant. I no longer hoped to meet Luka, but fate brought us together. He stopped for a day in our hotel. The meeting made both of us happy. In the evening I came to him with a copious dinner on a tray. We sat a long time, recalling the old days and laughing.

"It's merry to recall," Luka said. "Everything seems funny now. But if you think, do you know what happened? Maruda cheated people for years, right?"

"Of course."

"What I did was done supposedly out of compassion for strangers—I finished off Maruda, he stopped tricking people. And what came of it? You know yourself that things got worse and worse for Maruda. He couldn't buy the geese, he lost his deposit, he drank himself to death in Pashkovskaya. That's one. The other was that you lost a good job. I often wondered what was happening to my little twins, cold and hungry. Hasan was fired—that's three. Gedevan was dragged into the station house every day for a year, it nearly drove him crazy—that's four. Mahmud—you must've heard that—spent six months in prison for his little trick. That's five. And now the most important thing: apparently people do not want to live without being oppressed, tricked, and cheated. Maruda's business was shut down, and in his place appeared Grishka Pimenov with three-card monte stripping the populace tenfold at the bazaar. Nothing positive came from my efforts. Do you see how many bad things I counted up for you? Nothing but evil. I had read in books and heard from people: if you see someone in distress, act as your heart tells you and be satisfied with whatever comes of it. That may be so, but the question remains whether people are worthy of having a decent man involve himself in their affairs. Remember my words. Actually I myself don't know where the truth lies. You must think and have experience in order to understand..."

We said our farewells. We were fated to meet again in Tiflis, at the provincial prison. But about that some other time.

COUNT SEGEDI

In 1893 the name of Tutashkhia surfaced simultaneously in the cases of several gendarme departments of the North Caucasian provinces. At that time illegal literature was widely distributed in this area. On top of that the office of the chief of gendarmes received an agent's report about a planned assassination attempt on his excellency the grand duke. Also, some criminals, whose identity had not been established, had slaughtered the family of a wealthy merchant in the village of Kavkazskaya, stealing money and jewelry worth a goodly sum. General Shanin, who came from St. Petersburg to investigate the case, studied the materials and expressed his certainty that the North Caucasus was the center of activity of a clandestine political organization with bases in the Transcaucasus, in other words, in my territory. It followed from his conclusions that the large sum stolen from the merchant was intended to finance the terrorist act and that none other than Data Tutashkhia was one of its organizers. Thus, I was accused of negligence and ordered to take measures, moreover, since the chief of gendarmes demanded an explanation of everything that had occurred, the liquidation of the groups carrying on subversive activity, and the arrest of Tutashkhia.

In connection with all this I was supposed to analyse and determine the characteristic features of Tutashkhia's earlier crimes. His new felony, I felt, was a total fabrication. I obtained all the extant materials in his case and undertook an analysis. I will say by way of comment, even though this does not relate to the subject of my notes, that the conclusions of Gen. Shanin turned out to be superficial and unfounded. The gendarmerie authorities finally broke the case. The information about the planned assassination on the grand duke and the attempt to give the murder of the merchant family a political motive turned out to be uncertified. Besides which, the investigation revealed that neither the political terrorists nor the murderers knew Tutashkhia.

Something else caught my attention: study of the materials on Tutashkhia showed me the man in a new, clearer light and led me to a curious conclusion. The first and most important thing that struck me was, if I may put it that way, the absence of any specific characteristic which would mark all of Tutashkhia's crimes; in other words, the crimes he committed were not distinguished by any single method of operation, moreover by any system, and thus it was just as easy to charge Tutashkhia with a crime committed by an unknown criminal as to assign Tutashkhia's crime to someone else. His file included many different crimes, but it was impossible to determine which he had actually committed and which had just been attributed to him. It was extremely important for me to determine his criminal type, to draw his criminal-psychological portrait. Material based on theories and hypotheses was not appropriate for that. After a month's work the only thing clear to me was that Tutashkhia had no program of action and no definite political credo. Apparently, all his offenses against the law were the result of his reaction to a situation. I was convinced of another extremely important circumstance: his fame and influence were immeasurable among the populace. People with such authority become leaders of the rabble in times of sedition. The materials made it clear that the people were waiting for their lost idol and were not hiding their eagerness. All this demanded a decisive step. Along with other measures aimed at capturing the criminal we offered a reward of five thousand rubles for his head. Tutashkhia seemed to have been waiting just for that—less than a month had passed from the day the reward was announced when he returned and marked his homecoming appropriately: with the anarchist Bubuteishvili he robbed the usurer Bulava in Poti.

I did not understand then what had forced him to return to Georgia and with his former daring, cleverness, and energy resume playing with fire.

NIKIFORE BUBUTEISHVILI

Our people were preparing a terrorist act. We desperately needed money. I was assigned to get three thousand. I knew where to get it but I needed a dependable person, good for this sort of job. Data had just returned then. I came to Samurzakano and asked one of our people about Tutashkhia. I was told he was hiding somewhere along the coast with the herdsmen.

I needed a man to expropriate money from the usurer Kazha Bulava. He lived on the outskirts of Poti. I couldn't pull a job like that alone—the usurer knew me too well. Politics is like that—don't get caught over trifles. You're arrested, dragging chains in penal colony, and who's going to struggle for the idea? The man in the street? Of course, Data Tutashkhia didn't want to hear a word about either politics or the party, he was politically unenlightened, but he knew very well that no one could be worse than the tsar and the gendarmes. He was my blood brother—he did not have the right to refuse me.

So I found Data and told him the plan. How much do you need, he asks. Three thousand, I say. So much—where can it be gotten? I tell him about the usurer, and he says:

"It would be better to rob the mail!"

What an idea! Why get involved with the mailmen and the Cossacks, when the usurer is just asking for it. But Data insisted the mail was better and wouldn't budge! I had to agitate, convince, explain to him what kind of man that usurer was. He's a leech, a spider, a vampire on the body of the people and so on, I said. He seemed to understand, but went on with his mail. I had no choice—I reminded him about our relationship. I'm desperate for this, and you're abandoning your blood brother. I finally broke him. All right, he says, we'll do it your way, maybe your actions will ease the lot of the people.

I already said that Kazha Bulava's den was on the outskirts of Poti. There's no other word to describe his dwelling. He lived in a corn shed, believe it or not, in a granary and not in a house or some shack. The granary was about five paces long, three wide, smeared with manure inside and out, in the middle hung a sheet, dirty and full of patches. That made two halves sort of: on one side of the sheet there was his wife and six kids, on the other, him and his money. He kept the money here in the granary—that was certain, a dependable person had put us onto him, he wouldn't have lied. But where exactly, which corner—the devil himself couldn't have found out. We had to give him a good scare, the son of a bitch would get frightened and give away the money—what else was there for him to do?

He was so stingy that he didn't even keep a dog.

We went over the fence, the moon was full, it was like daylight. Right by the fence, under a pear tree, a pig was tied oinking away. We crept up to the hovel, our Mausers at the ready. The single window was wide open and the stench coming out of it—it could knock you off your feet. We listened: the children were wheezing and snoring, each his own tune. We looked in: the esteemed master himself was sitting on a snag, picking his nose, staring at a candle stub. What was the bastard thinking about, I wondered?

He probably had charged triple value on a pawn and now he was sitting and dreaming that his debtor miss the due date by a day—then Kazha would sell the pawned article and gain a triple profit.

I covered my face behind a hood and stuck the Mauser through the window:

"Well, come on, open up quickly!"

No, you had to see it for yourself—no words can describe what followed. The usurer froze, like a pointer, finger up to his nose, eyes on the barrel, he couldn't tear them away. I clicked the trigger. The usurer jumped up to open the door. Data came in and ordered the man to sit down. He looked around, threw off his cloak, and tossed it in the corner. He sat down at the table, took out two Mausers and stared hard at the usurer. This was the moment to put pressure on him, not give him a chance to draw a breath, but Data was silent, wasting time. He would come to his senses any minute, and then we would have to write it off—we wouldn't get anything out of him, that was for sure! But Data was silent. He seemed to get tired of looking at Kazha, and he found something else to do—he began examining the walls, the floor, the ceiling—and for a long time, thoughtfully like. I saw that in another moment everything would be ruined. I leaned in the window up to my waist and pushed my Mauser in his face.

"Put the money on the table, you son of a bitch! And hurry up!"

Kazha Bulava turned very carefully and grimaced—he was either about to smile or to bawl.

"What money are you talking about? If I had money—would I live in a hole like this?"

And he started spinning yarns—the cur had come to his senses! Now was the time to keep pushing, or we'd lose him completely.

"Out with the money, you rat, I'm talking to you. Or you're a dead man in a second! Hurry it up, I tell you!"

And I stuck my Mauser in his face again, as though I was about to pull the trigger any second.

"Spare me," whines the usurer and gets up slowly.

In the corner stood a huge trunk with iron rims. He pulled out the key, raised the lid, and started hauling out Cherkez coats, saddles, sabers, daggers—he built a mountain! And so quickly—where did he get the energy? The trunk was empty, and Bulava was sighing and whining again.

"There ... that's everything I have. Everything." I nodded to Data, for him to look if there's anything else. He felt around the bottom and pulled out a fat book. He began leafing through it—every page was full of notes, marks, even drawings, and stuck between the pages were receipts and promissory notes.

"Give it to me, I say."

And Kazha started caterwauling:

"Gojaba, Tsabu, Biki, Kiku, Tsutsu, Domenti... Robbers are taking our book! Hurry, children, there's trouble!"

Data froze. To tell the truth I, too, hadn't expected that kind of squealing—it threw me, I won't hide it! And from behind the sheet scrambled a crowd of little brats—skinny and bow-legged—and did they shout and howl, oh my god! A witches' sabbath! Kazha Bulava, the sneaky bastard, could see that we were taken aback, losing our chance, losing it, and he pressed his point—he fell on his back, kicking his legs, and hollering:

"Trouble! Trouble!"

Then I heard the gate creak. I figured it's Kvakva, Kazha's wife, coming back from the port. He had all that money, the blackguard, and he sent his wife, who had six children on her hands, to scrub the floors in someone's warehouse for three rubles a month. I didn't care—the hell with her, that Kvakva, and the warehouse, and her pups, but it's just that in expropriations and similar operations there's nothing worse than coming across a dame. She'll howl and scream and raise the police for miles around. I rushed to the gate, and near the pear tree where the pig was tied, I almost knocked some devil off his feet...

It was Kvakva! And she was already screaming.

I hit her in the teeth with my Mauser. You won't believe it, but the shout broke off like a string! And it suddenly grew quiet in the shed! I still don't know how Data managed to quiet that possessed gang. But the kids and their blasted father shut up. Thanks for that—but what do I do with the broad? There was no time to lose—she would come round any second and start biting, spitting, scratching—and then I'd have to run for it, without a thought for the money! I pulled off my belt and tied the fool's hands behind her back—someone would have a pretty hard job untying it. She had a scarf on her head, I tore it off, there was another under it. I stuffed one into her mouth, deep, and wrapped the other around her face, tied it in a knot on her neck, and dumped her under the tree. I let the pig off the chain and put Kvakva on it.

"No oinking, understand?" And I ran back to Kazha's hovel.

I crept up to the window, afraid to move, in case it started Kazha's brood screaming again. And what do I hear? Kazha Bulava and Data Tutashkhia peaceably wagging their tongues, like two gossips on a bench.

"The receipts alone are for over a hundred thousand," Data reproaches Kazha earnestly, "and yet you keep your children, your own flesh and blood, in this rotten hole..."

"But I live in the same hole, as you call it, Data-batono, also."

I peeked into the window cautiously. I saw Kazha still lying on the floor.

"That's the point," Data says. "Who are you saving the money for? Get up and sit down. But don't you start yelling. No one's afraid of your screams."

The usurer knew that for himself. He was trying to gain our sympathy, that's why he cried.

Tutashkhia could talk so well, he could lure a snake from its pit. "Let him talk," I thought. "Maybe he'll get the stuff from the usurer quietly, peaceably."

"Answer when you're asked a question," Data pressed on. "What do you need all this money for, if you're rotting away with your children in this hole?"

At this point the pig that I had untied pushed open the door with its snout. It had an enormous yoke around its neck, to keep it from

climbing through fences. It stood at the doorstep, sniffing around the clay floor with its snout. But no one seemed to care.

"A hundred thousand, Data-batono, do you call that money? Now at the port there's a Greek, Sidoropullos, you've heard of him, haven't you?"

Kazha's eldest daughter hushed the pig, but her skinflint of a father said:

"Don't chase it away, daughter, let her look around, maybe she'll find something. Why let anything edible go to waste?" And then back to Data: "So I was telling you about Sidoropullos, the Greek. He's already got a million. He's started his second one."

Kazha kept it up without cease, but Data was no longer listening to him. He was thinking. Finally he raised his hand.

"Yes, your money has ruined you, Kazha Bulava. I pity you... Would you have any kerosene?" he asked, after a pause.

"Kerosene? Where would I get kerosene? Ask rich people for kerosene, Data-batono."

"Well, all right. But tell me, if there were a fire and your whole hovel were to burn down, saddles, and Cherkez coats, and daggers, and the book with them, and the money that is definitely hidden here somewhere, what would you do then, pray tell me?"

The blood coursed away from the usurer's face, I swear on the bones of my father, he grew as green as a cornstalk.

"My God, thy will be done," he said, crossing himself over and over again. "Please, Data-batono! I used up so much energy on this money! For a second time ... a second start I won't be able to gather the strength! I won't be able to, I'll die!"

"Well, well!" Tutashkhia was surprised. "You mean, you'd start it all over again?"

The usurer was truly woebegone, but he managed to avoid a direct answer.

"You were asking about the kerosene, Data-batono. Don't take a sin on your soul, don't send my children begging in the street."

Out on the street they might be better off than starving to death with a father like that, I thought to myself.

"Well, your song is sung, looks like!" Data says. "You'll have to suffer and struggle, poor wretch! .. But what can you do! We need the money. If we take it by force, I'm afraid you'll die, and I don't want that sin on my soul. Let's do it this way: you lend me three thousand, and I'm not Data Tutashkhia if I don't return it."

When the usurer heard about the loan, he cheered up, as though he was being made a gift of money.

"If only I had the money, Data-batono! .. Why a loan? I'd just give it to you! People like you don't forget a good turn."

I began shaking with fury.

"Hey, Data Tutashkhia," I shouted through the window. "Don't forget the guarantee, and give him a receipt, the son of a bitch."

My blood brother didn't get the joke.

"Don't be silly!" he replied, looking out the window. "If I had something I could leave as a guarantee, do you think I'd be suffocating in this stink?" And he looked back at Kazha.

I was tired of their chatter and, more important, it didn't look as though Data was going to leave Kazha's with the money. I rushed into the devil's hole and shot a few rounds at the usurer's feet.

"Cough up, you mangy bitch, if your life is anything to you! Move it, you scum!"

The children, like crickets, hopped up on their father's trestle bed and started caterwauling, the damned things. The pig took fright and stuck its head through the wicker door. The head got through, but the yoke stopped the rest. It couldn't go either way and struggled and squealed as though going to slaughter. The chickens started clucking in the attic, fluttering against the roof. The whole hovel was shaking. It's going to collapse any minute, I thought—no time to waste. I stuck the barrel of my Mauser in the usurer's ribs, gave him a punch in the face and he deigned to get up. He moved away the trunk, and under the trunk I saw not quite a door and not quite a damper, something iron. He moved that aside, lay down on the floor, and leaned waist—deep into the cellar. Kazha's ass and his short fat legs stuck out.

"Hurry it up," I shouted, "Hurry, Kazha, you scoundrel!" And I kept kicking him.

I looked over at Data, and he might have been walloped with a flour sack, he was so pale, his chin trembling, he couldn't take his eyes from the wailing children. They huddled on the bed, like wolf cubs, and were howling, ready to pounce at any second and attack. Thank God the

Mauser looked impressive enough, or they would have eaten us alive! The usurer was dangling in the hole and seemed dead: not moving an inch further, and not coming out either. Waiting for a miracle. I pulled him by the leg.

"Climb out and bring what you were told to! I'll tear you apart like a baby chick!"

Kazha Bulava rose, pale as a sheet, a purse in his hands. I grabbed the purse—good, it was heavy, nothing but gold!

"My Kvakva isn't here," the creature bleated, "or you'd get zilch from me!"

"Go look for your Kvakva under the pear tree, she's chained up there. Don't be afraid, she won't run away."

As soon as Data heard that, he grew even more pale, grabbed his cloak and headed for the door, but since the pig was stuck in the door, he couldn't get out. The pig was squirming, the hovel staking. Tutashkhia kicked the door out, the pig went into the yard backwards, and Data followed.

"How much is in here?"

"Five... But you only need three..."

I almost died laughing... What a thing to say!

I stuck the purse inside my shirt, and then Kvakva started screeching. Data had taken the gag from her mouth—that was for sure. Kvakva howled like a wolf. Their mother's cry brought the children into a total frenzy. It was time to make myself scarce.

I ran to the pear tree. Kvakva was shouting so loud my ears hurt. Data was fooling around with the chain, he couldn't untie it. The moon was shining away. There were flitting shadows on the other side of the fence. I didn't like any of this.

"Forget it, Data! There'll be plenty of people to let the bitch off the chain! Let's go!"

But he wasn't leaving, he couldn't let go of the chain.

"Help! These robbers have stolen my property! All of it! Catch'em! Beat'em! To death! That's Data Tutashkhia! They're giving five thousand for his head! Help, people!"

No sooner had the idiot spoken Data Tutashkhia's name than the shadows on the other side of the fence disappeared.

Data jerked the chain once more and finally pulled it off. We ran out onto the road, Kvakva behind us, her hands still tied by the belt, dragging the chain clanking on the cobblestones, but you couldn't shut up her mouth. I turned and shot twice into the air—she stopped following us, but yelled louder than before.

"Data Tutashkhia," we heard behind our backs. "I lent you that money, it's a loan! You asked for it, and I gave it to you! You'll return it if you're Data Tutashkhia and not a thief like your pal!"

"It's a good thing he's not asking for interest," I said.

So, we left and got in our saddles.

"I told you the mail would have been better," Data said.

It was too bad that I had to get into the usurer's lair myself. But what else could I do when Data was making a mess of things?

Two years later our people were caught—on other business. Six were tried. The gendarmes were looking for me, and I couldn't attend the trial, but people told me how it went. It turned out that the terrorist act for which Data and I expropriated five thousand didn't take place. The money that I turned over to the cashier of the organization was sent to our people in exile. The tsarist satraps twisted the facts at the trial and made it sound as though the émigrés lost all the money at cards and spent it on girls. And they calumnied me, too; to listen to them, Bubuteishvili only gave the party cashier four thousand, and appropriated a thousand for himself. But the organization had ordered me to get three thousand, and I brought in four! Did a persecuted anarchist have the right to keep a small fraction for his upkeep of what he had himself obtained or did he not? How was I supposed to live and work otherwise, I wonder?

Data Tutashkhia, of course, may not have known that the gendarmes and the police were deliberately blackening the names of the fighters for the freedom and happiness of the people. Spreading all kinds of filthy rumors about us, they try to blemish the idea itself. But, in any case, he should have known that the life of an outlaw demands great expenses. After the trial, I ran into Data once. He barely said hello. I asked if I had insulted him in some way. No, he shook his head. But I kept after him. Data was quiet for a long time, and then said:

"It turns out your people are trash, and you're no better."