By the same Author

AND QUIET FLOWS THE DON

VIRGIN SOIL UPTURNED

by

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Translated from the Russian
by

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Bannik, Gregor Matveich. A cossack working his own land and antagonistic to the Collective Farm.

Batalshchikov, Ivan. A cossack member of the Collective Farm, but hostile.

Beskhlebnov, Akim. A cossack, member of the Collective Farm. Called "the Older," to distinguish him from his son.

„ „ Also member of the farm, called "the Younger."

Borodin, Titok. A rich cossack ("kulak"), formerly a Red Army man.

Borshchev, Timofei. A poor cossack, supporter of the "kulaks."

Damaskov, Frol. A rich cossack ("kulak").

„ Timofei. Frol's son.

Davidov, Siemion. A metal worker, Communist, one of 25,000 workers mobilised by the Soviet Communist Party to organise collective farms, chairman of Gremyachy Collective Farm.

Diemid. A poor cossack, nicknamed "the Silent."

Dubtsiev, Agafon. A cossack, member of the Collective Farm, and in charge of the farm's third brigade of labourers.

Gayev. A "kulak" with a large family.

Ignationok, Mikhail (Mishka). A cossack collective farmer.

„ Uliana. Mikhail's mother.

Kondratko, Osip. An Ukrainian worker, in charge of the column sent to the villages to make propaganda for the collective farms.

Korchinsky. Secretary of the Communist Party District Committee.

Lapshinov, Siemion. A rich old cossack (" kulak ").

Liubishkin, Pavel. A cossack collective farmer, in charge of the collective farm first brigade.

Losiev, Arkady. (Arkashka). A cossack collective farmer, notorious for his love of bargaining.

Lyatievsky, Vatslav Avgustovich. Formerly a lieutenant in the Imperial Army, now a member and organiser of an anti-Soviet conspiratorial organisation.

Maidannikov, Kondrat. A middle-class cossack, member of the Collective Farm.

Nagulnov, Makar. Secretary of Gremyachy Communist Party group.

Nagulnova, Lukeria. Makar's wife.

Naidionnov, Ivan. A Young Communist, member of Kondratko's Propaganda Column.

Ostrovnov, Yakov Lukich. A fairly rich, far-seeing cossack, who becomes manager of the Collective Farm in order to wreck it.

Polovtsiev, Alexander Anisimovich. Formerly a captain in the Imperial Army and regimental comrade of Ostrovnov's, now organiser of an anti-Soviet conspiratorial organisation.

Poyarkova, Marina. Andrei Razmiotnov's mistress.

Razmiotnov, Andrei. A Communist, chairman of Gremyachy Village Soviet.

Shchukar. An old man, member of the Collective Farm, given to bragging.

Shaly, Ippolit. The village blacksmith.

Ushakov, Diemka. A cossack, collective farmer and in charge of the collective farm second brigade.

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the barrel. But the lid slipped from under him and fell with a clatter. He grated his teeth as he heard Davidov ask :

" What's that fallen in there ? "

" I expect the cat's knocked something over. We don't use the hall during the winter. And by the way, I'd like to show you my selected hempseed. I had it sent specially. It's in that hall for the winter. Come in and look at it."

Polovtsiev sprang towards the door leading into the passage, and the well-oiled hinges gave no sound as he opened it, but let him pass out noiselessly.

Davidov left Ostrovnov's hut with a packet of journals under his arm, satisfied with the results of his visit and still more convinced of Ostrovnov's value. " With a man like that, in a year we could transform the village. A clever peasant, the devil, and well read. And how he knows farming and the land ! That's a real qualification ! I don't understand why Makar's so suspicious of him. He'll be of great value to the collective farm. Fact ! " So Davidov thought as he made his way to the village Soviet.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WHOLESALE SLAUGHTER

THROUGH the influence of Yakov Lukich livestock began to be slaughtered every night in Gremyachy. Hardly had darkness fallen when the brief and stifled bleating of a sheep, the mortal scream of a pig or the bellowing of a calf would be heard piercing the silence. Not only those who had joined the collective farm, but individual farmers also slaughtered. They killed oxen, sheep, pigs, even cows ; they slaughtered animals kept for breeding. In two nights the horned cattle of Gremyachy were reduced to half their number. The dogs began to drag entrails and guts about the village, the cellars and granaries were filled with meat. In two days the co-operative shop sold some two hundred poods of salt which had been lying in the warehouse for eighteen months. " Kill, it's not ours now ! " " Kill, they'll take it for the meat collection tax if you don't." " Kill, for you won't taste meat in the collective farm." The insidious rumours crept around. And they killed. They ate until they were unable to move. Everybody, from the youngest to the oldest, suffered with stomach-ache. At dinner-time the tables groaned under the weight of boiled and roasted meat. At dinner-time everybody had a greasy mouth, everybody belched as though they had been at a funeral repast in memory of the dead. And all were owlish with their intoxication of eating.

Old Shchukar was one of the first to slaughter a calf born the previous summer. With his wife's help he tried to hang the carcass from a crossbeam in order to flay it the more easily. They struggled long and vainly, for the fattened calf was heavy; the old woman even sprained her back as she tried to lift the hindquarters, and for a week afterward Mamichikha, the old simples woman, kept an iron pot on her back. But old Shchukar himself did the cooking next day, and, whether annoyed because his old wife had hurt herself, or from extreme greediness, he ate so much of the stewed breast that for some days he did not go farther than the yard, did not fasten up his sack-cloth trousers, and suffered for twenty-four hours on end in the terrible cold among the sunflower stalks behind the shed. Everyone who passed by Shchukar's tumbledown hut during those days saw the old man's fur cap sticking up motionless among the sunflower stalks in the garden. Then Shchukar himself would abruptly emerge from the sunflowers, and would crawl painfully towards the hut without giving a glance into the lane, holding up his unfastened trousers with his hands as he walked. Plodding wearily, hardly dragging his feet along, he would get as far as the gate, then suddenly, as though he had remembered something urgent, he would turn and run with little steps back to the sunflowers. Once more the old man's fur cap would stick up immovably and importantly among the sunflower stalks. And how the frost nipped! And the ground wind swept up sharp-pointed drifts all around him.

Towards evening of the second day, as soon as Razmiotnov heard that the slaughter of cattle was occurring on a wholesale scale, he ran to Davidov.

"Not doing anything?" he asked.

"I'm reading." Davidov turned the page of a small, yellowish book, and smiled meditatively. "There's a book for you, my boy! It takes your breath away!" He laughed, baring his gap-toothed jaws and throwing out his short, sturdy arms.

"Reading novels! Or some song book! While in the village. . . ."

"You fool! Fool! Novels! Where's the song book?" Davidov burst into a roar of laughter, sat Andrei down on a stool opposite him, and thrust the book into his hand. "That's Andreev's report to the Rostov Party active members. That book's worth a dozen novels, my boy! Fact! I started to read and then forgot my grub. I read on and on. Oh, damn it, I'm fed up. I expect it's all cold now." His swarthy face was tinged with vexation and annoyance. He rose, thrust his hands into his pockets, gloomily hitched up his short trousers, and went into the kitchen.

"Will you listen to me or won't you?" Razmiotnov demanded, growing indignant.

"Why, of course, of course I will. One minute."

He brought an earthenware bowl of cold cabbage soup back from the kitchen, and sat down. Fixing his wearily screwed-up grey eyes on Razmiotnov, with one bite he disposed of an enormous hunk of bread, and chewed away, working the muscles above his cheekbones. Gleaming yellow spots of mutton fat floated on top of the cold soup, and a streak of meat showed like a crimson flame.

"Meat in the soup?" Andrei spitefully asked, pointing his tobacco-stained finger at the bowl.

Choking, and smiling with difficulty, Davidov contentedly nodded.

"But where's the meat come from?"

"I don't know, but what does it matter?"

" This, that they've slaughtered half the cattle in the village."

" Who have ? " Davidov screwed up a lump of bread and pushed it away.

" The devils ! " The scar on Razmiotnov's forehead went crimson. " Chairman of the collective farm ! " he sneered. " You'll organise a giant, all right ! It's your collective farmers who're doing it, that's who ! And individual farmers, too. They've gone crazy, the bloody swines ! They've slaughtered everything outright, and I hear they're even killing off the bulls."

" You've got a bad habit of shouting as if you were at a meeting," Davidov said with annoyance, betaking himself to his soup. " Tell me quietly and to the point, who's doing it, and why they're doing it."

" How do I know why ? "

" You always roar and shout. I could shut my eyes and think it was dear old 1917 all over again."

" You'll be roaring in a minute, I expect ! "

Razmiotnov told all he knew concerning the slaughter of the livestock. Towards the end Davidov ate almost without chewing. His facetious mood left him, a radiation of furrows gathered around his eyes, and his face seemed to age.

" Go at once and call a general meeting," he ordered. " Get Nagulnov . . . but don't bother, I'll go along to him myself."

" What's the meeting for ? "

" What's it for ? We'll forbid them to slaughter the stock ! We'll turn them out of the collective farm and bring them to trial. This is a terribly serious matter. Fact ! It's the kulaks have shoved their spoke into our wheel again. Here, take a cigarette and get on with it ! Ah, yes, I've forgotten to sing my own praises ! " A

happy smile slipped across Davidov's face and warmed his eyes ; no matter how much he pursed up his lips he could not conceal his joy.

" I received a parcel from Leningrad to-day. Yes, a little parcel from the boys. . . ." Crimson with pleasure, he bent down, dragged a small box out from under his bed, and raised the lid. In the box lay packets of cigarettes, biscuits, books, a carved wooden cigarette case, and other things in packets and bundles heaped in disorderly confusion.

" The comrades remembered me, and look what they've sent. . . . These are our Leningrad cigarettes, my boy. And they've even sent chocolate, d'you see it ? What's the good of it to me ? I'll have to give it away to somebody's children. . . . But that's not the point, it's the fact that they've sent it that's important. Isn't that so ? The main thing is that they've remembered me and sent me the box, and a letter with it. . . ."

Davidov's voice was unusually gentle. Such an embarrassedly happy comrade Davidov Andrei had never seen before. In some strange way his agitation was communicated to Razmiotnov, and in the desire to say something pleasant Andrei barked :

" Well, that's fine ! You're a great lad, and that's why they've sent you the box. Look at it, that lot wasn't bought for one rouble."

" That's not the point. It's like this : I, poor devil, am a kind of orphan, with no wife or anybody. Fact ! And then this parcel suddenly arrives ! A touching fact ! Look how many have signed the letter." With one hand Davidov held out a box of cigarettes, in the other he held a letter decorated with innumerable signatures. His hands trembled.

Razmiotnov lit the Leningrad cigarette, and asked :

" Well, and how do you like your new quarters ? The mistress is all right, isn't she ? What have you done about your washing ? You could bring it along for mother to do, if you like. Or you could arrange with the woman here. You couldn't cut through that shirt you're wearing with a sword, and it stinks with sweat like a worn-out nag."

Davidov flushed and burst out with :

" Yes, I must do something about it. It wasn't very easy for me to do anything while I was living with Nagulnov. I did any sewing I needed myself, and I did my own washing, too, somehow. I haven't had a good wash since I arrived, that's a fact. And my sweater, too. . . . The village shop hasn't got any soap. I've already asked the woman here to wash for me, and she said : ' Give me the soap and I will.' I'll write to the boys to send me some household soap. But the quarters aren't bad, there aren't any children, I can read without being disturbed, and altogether. . . ."

" You bring your washing along to mother, and she'll do it. Don't feel shy about it. Mother's a good sort."

" Don't worry, I'll manage somehow. Thank you all the same. We must get a bath-house built for the collective farm, that's the idea ! We'll do it ! Fact ! Well, off with you and organise that meeting."

Razmiotnov finished his cigarette and went out. Davidov aimlessly rearranged the packets in the box, sighed, adjusted the well-stretched collar of his dirty, yellowish-brown sweater, and, smoothing his black, upstanding hair, began to dress to go out.

On the way he called to see Nagulnov, who greeted him with knitted brows and averted eyes.

" They're slaughtering the cattle," he muttered, after

they had exchanged greetings. " They're sorry about their property. There's such dismay among the petty bourgeoisie that words can't describe it." He turned sternly to his wife and told her : " You clear out of here at once, Lukeria. Go and sit with the mistress for a while, I don't feel up to talking with you around."

Sorrowfully Lukeria went into the kitchen. Ever since the day Timofei had ridden away with the kulak families she had gone about looking sadly crestfallen. Mournful pools of blue lay under her eyes, even her nose had peaked like a corpse's. It was clear that her heart was heavy at the separation from her dear one. The day the kulaks were sent off to the icy Polar region she had openly and unashamedly hung about the Borshchevs' yard from early morning, waiting to see Timofei. And when towards evening the sledges carrying the kulak families and their goods had set out from Gremyachy, she had given an ill-boding, hysterical scream and flung herself down in the snow. Timofei had been about to jump off the sledge and run towards her, but his father had called to him with a threatening shout. Timofei had strode off behind the sledge, biting his lips, white with his burning hatred, and looking back at Gremyachy again and again.

Like the leaves on the poplars Timofei's caressing words murmured repiningly in Lukeria's mind : it was clear she would never hear them again. How could the woman help withering with impotent yearning, how could she avoid feeling crushed ? Who would say to her now, gazing lovingly into her eyes : " That green skirt suits you perfectly, Lukeria ! You look finer in it than any officer's wife of the old days " ? Or, in the words of the women's song : " Forgive me and farewell, my beautiful. Thy beauty is unending joy to me." Only Timofei could

stir Lukeria to the depths of her soul with flattery and heart-felt effrontery.

From that day she had been completely alienated from her husband. And calmly and weightily, with unusual eloquence, Makar had said to her:

"Live a few last days with me, live them out! And then gather together your bits and pieces, your garters and pots of pomade, and go where you like. I have suffered much shame through my love for you, but now my patience is broken. You played about with a kulak's son, and I held my tongue. But now that you've wept after him in front of all the class-conscious people of the collective farm, I've no more patience with you. It isn't that I'll never reach the world revolution while I'm tied to you, but I may go downhill altogether. You're an unnecessary load on my back. And I'm throwing off that load. You understand?"

"I understand," Lukeria had replied, and said no more.

The same evening Davidov and Makar had had a secret talk together.

"That woman's brought you into the mud! How are you going to face the collective farm people now?" Davidov had demanded.

"That old trouble again. . . ."

"You're a blockhead! You ox-stomach!" Davidov crimsoned down to his neck, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

"How is a man to talk to you?" Nagulnov paced up and down the room, cracking his fingers, and quietly, craftily smiling. "You've hardly said a word when you try to pin me down with: 'Anarchist! Deviator! Trotskyist!' You know what I think about my wife, and why I've stood all this. I've already told you I've

no thought for her. Have you ever stopped to wonder about a sheep's tail?"

"No!" Davidov slowly replied, taken aback by the sudden turn of Nagulnov's remarks.

"Well, I have. I've often wondered what use a sheep's tail is to it. It's extra heavy by nature. But it seems to be of no use whatever. A bullock or a horse, or a dog can drive the flies off with their tails. But the sheep is burdened with eight pounds of fat, it can shake it, but it can't drive off the flies. It's hot to carry around in the summer, and the burrs stick in it."

"What are you driving at with all this talk about sheep's tails and other tails?" Davidov again began to grow quietly angry.

But Nagulnov imperturbably continued:

"I think it's been stuck on it to hide its shame. It's inconvenient, but what could you put in its place? And my woman, my wife I mean, is as necessary to me as a tail is to a sheep. I'm all whetted for the world revolution. I'm waiting for it, for the beloved. But my woman's only a gob, and no more. She's just by the way. Yet you can't get on without her, you've got to cover your shame. I'm a man down to my roots, even if I am sick, and in between whiles I can answer my purpose. If she can't get satisfaction out of me, well, peace be with her! I once told her: 'If you must play about with other men, do as you like; but don't bring home the stains on your skirt, and don't show the signs of where you've been lying on your clothes, or I'll knock your head lopsided.' But you now, comrade Davidov, you don't understand anything of this. You're like a folding footrule. And you don't listen for the coming of the revolution in the same way as I do. But what do you rail at me for because of my wife's sins? She's got enough for both of us. But

as for her hanging on to a kulak and crying after him, after a class enemy, because of that she's a reptile and whatever happens I'll drive her out of my yard. But I've got no strength to beat her. I'm going on to the new life, and I don't want to dirty my hands. You'd beat her, wouldn't you? But, then, what difference is there between you, a Communist, and some man of the old days, some official, say? They always used to beat their wives! And that's the whole point. No, brother, you stop talking to me about Lukeria. I'll settle scores with her myself, your help isn't wanted in this business. A wife's a pretty serious matter. A good deal depends on her." Nagulnov smiled dreamily, then heatedly went on: "Wait till we break down all the frontiers, and I shall be the first to shout: 'Lay on with you, marry yourselves off to the women of foreign blood!' Everybody will get mixed up, and there won't be the scandal of one man having a white body, another having a yellow, and a third having a black, and the whites reproaching the others with the colour of their skin and regarding them as lower than themselves. Everybody will have pleasantly swarthy faces, and all alike. I've often thought about it at night. . . ."

"You live in a kind of dream, Makar!" Davidov said dissatisfiedly. "There's a lot I can't understand about you. The racial differences . . . that's true enough, but as to the rest . . . I can't agree with you on the problems of existence. Well, damn you! Only I'm not going on living with you any more. Fact!"

Davidov had dragged his suitcase out from under the bed, making the tools lying inside it rattle hollowly, and had gone out. Nagulnov had accompanied him to his new quarters, to the childless collective farmer Filimonov and his wife. All the way to the Filimonovs' yard they

had talked about the spring sowing, and they had not returned to the problems of family and life. From that time there had been an even more perceptible coolness in their relationships.

And so, on the occasion of the slaughtering of the stock Nagulnov welcomed Davidov with a sidelong, downcast look. But after Lukeria had gone out he talked more animatedly.

"They're slaughtering the stock, the reptiles!" he declared. "They're ready to choke themselves with meat rather than hand the animals over to the collective farm. What I propose is that we hold a meeting and pass a resolution asking permission to shoot those found deliberately slaughtering."

"What?" Davidov drawled.

"Shoot them, I say. Whose permission do we have to ask to shoot them? The People's Court can't do it, can it? Kill off a couple of those who've slaughtered cows in calf and I reckon the rest'll come to their senses. We must act with the utmost severity now."

Davidov threw his cap down on the chest, and strode up and down the room. A tone of discontent and irresolution sounded in his voice.

"There you go deviating again! You're in a bad way, Makar! Think it over: can you really shoot people for slaughtering their own cows? There aren't any laws to cover that. Fact! There was a resolution of the Central Executive Committee, and it said in so many words: 'imprisonment for two years, deprivation of land, the ill-intentioned exiled from the district.' And you suggest asking permission to shoot them! Really you're. . . ."

"Well, what am I? I'm not anything of the sort. You're always scheming and planning. But what are

we going to do the sowing with? What with, if they kill off their bullocks before they join the collective farm?" Makar strode right up to Davidov, and put his hand on the latter's broad shoulder. He was almost a head taller than Davidov, and as he stared down at him he added:

"Siemion! I'm sorry for you. What have you got such a lazy brain for?" Then he almost shouted: "Can't you see we're done for if we can't manage the sowing? Don't you realise that? We simply must shoot two or three of the reptiles for this business! We must shoot the kulaks! It's their work! We must ask the higher authorities for permission."

"You fool!"

"There you are again with your 'fool'!" Nagulnov gloomily drooped his head. But he threw it up again at once, like a horse feeling the rider's knees, and shouted: "They're all slaughtering! We've come to a time of position warfare, like it was in the civil war. The enemy's rising all around us, and you? It's such as you who'll ruin the chances of the world revolution. It'll never come through you, you slow-wits! All around us the bourgeoisie are torturing the working people, are blowing up the Red Chinese in smoke, are beating up the blacks, and here you are being tender to the enemies! Shame on you! It's a terrible disgrace! My blood runs cold as I think of our own blood brothers that the bourgeoisie abroad are torturing! I can't read the papers because of it. All my inside turns over when I look at them. And you . . . what do you care about our blood brothers that our enemies are leaving to rot in prisons? You've got no pity for them!"

Towsling his gleaming black hair with his fingers, Davidov hoarsely snorted:

"To hell with you! How haven't I pity for them? Don't bawl like that, please! You're a little touched in the head yourself, and you want to make others like you. Was it because of Lukeria's eyes that I settled accounts with the counter-revolutionaries in the war? What is it you're proposing? Come to your senses! There can be no talk of shooting! You'd be better occupied in mass work, explaining our policy. But shooting—anybody can do that! And you're always like that! The least upset and you at once run to extremes. Fact! But where were you before this started?"

"Where you've been!"

"And that's the very point! We've had our eyes shut during this campaign, but now we must put things right, and not talk about shootings! You've done enough hysterics. Get yourself to work. You're a girl, damn you! You're worse than a girl who stains her nails!"

"Mine are stained with blood!"

"Like all who fought with the gloves off. Fact!"

"Siemion, how could you call me a girl?"

"It wasn't serious!"

"Take that word back!" Nagulnov quietly asked.

Davidov stared silently at him for a moment, then laughed.

"All right. You calm down, and let's get off to the meeting. We must put in some hard propaganda about this slaughtering business."

"I spent all day yesterday going from hut to hut, arguing with them about it."

"Now that's a good method. We must go round again, and all of us."

"There you go again! As I was leaving one yard yesterday I thought: 'Well, it seems I've talked them over. But as soon as I got outside I heard a pig squealing

under the knife. And I'd spent a whole hour talking to the reptile of an owner about the world revolution and Communism! And how I talked! Until I was so moved I brought the tears to my own eyes. No, it's no good arguing with them, they've got to be clouted on the head, clouted and told: 'Don't listen to the kulak, you dangerous reptile! Don't learn from him to be fond of property. Don't kill off your animals, you scum!' He thinks he's killing a bullock, but in reality he's stabbing the world revolution in the back."

"Some must be clouted, and others taught," Davidov insisted.

They left the yard. A fine, damp snow was powdering the ground. The sticky flakes were covering the old snow, and melting on the roofs. Through the slaty darkness they made their way to the school. Only half the villagers had turned up to the meeting. Razmiotnov read out the decision of the Council of People's Commissars concerning "Measures for fighting the wilful slaughtering of stock." Then Davidov spoke. At the end of his speech he told the meeting in so many words:

"Citizens, we have received twenty-six more applications to join the collective farm. At to-morrow's meeting we shall sort them out, and those who've allowed themselves to be caught on the kulaks' hook and have killed their cattle before joining will not be accepted. Fact!"

"But supposing someone who's already joined kills a young animal, what then?" Liubishkin asked.

"We'll kick him out!"

The meeting groaned, and a hollow murmur arose.

"Then you can break up the collective farm! There isn't a hut in the village where an animal hasn't been killed," Borshchev shouted.

Shaking his fists, Nagulnov fell on him

"You hold your tongue, you little kulak! Don't stick your spoke into the collective farm's affairs. We can manage without you. Of course you haven't killed your young bullock, have you?"

"I can do what I like with my own cattle."

"Fine! I'll send you off to prison to-morrow where you can do what you like all right!"

"You're too harsh! Too harsh in your decisions!" someone roared in a hoarse voice.

Although the meeting was small, it was stormy. As they broke up the villagers went off in silence, and only when they had left the school and scattered into groups did they begin to exchange views as they went.

"The devil got me to kill two sheep!" the collective farmer Siemion Kuzhenkov complained to Liubishkin. "You pull that meat out of my throat now. . . ."

"I've made a mess of things myself, my boy. I killed a goat," Liubishkin sighed heavily. "Now how can I stand up in front of the meeting? It's all that wife of mine, damn her! She argued me into sin, curse the devil! Nothing but 'Kill!' and 'Kill!' She wanted to eat meat! Oh, the petticoated devil! When I get home I'll knock her teeth out!"

"She ought to be taught better, she ought!" Liubishkin's father-in-law, the ancient Akim Beskhlebnov, advised him. "It's very awkward for you, my son, for you're a member of the collective farm."

"That's just it," Liubishkin sighed, wiping the snow from his whiskers in the darkness, and stumbling over a rut.

"And you killed your piebald bull, didn't you, old Akim?" Diemka Ushakov, who lived next door to Beskhlebnov, coughed and asked.

"I did, my boy. But what else was I to do? The

bull broke its leg, the damned devil! The unclean powers led it to the cellar, and it fell in and broke its leg."

"I thought I saw you at dawn with your daughter-in-law driving the bullock towards the cellar with sticks. . . ."

"What are you saying? What are you saying, Diemka? Take that back!" Old Akim got alarmed and halted in the middle of the street, blinking again and again in the impenetrable nocturnal darkness.

"Come on, come on, old man!" Diemka said soothingly. "What are you standing there like a half-buried plough-share for? You drove the bullock into the cellar. . . ."

"It went of its own accord, Diemka! Don't sin like that! It's a mortal sin!"

"You're cunning, but no more cunning than a bullock. A bullock can reach under its own tail with its tongue, but I don't suppose you can, can you? You thought you'd lame the bullock and get away with it, didn't you?"

A humid wind raged over the village. The poplars and willows howled noisily in the meadows along the stream. A darkness so black that it made the eyes smart enveloped everything. Muffled by the dampness, voices were to be heard a long time in the by-lanes. The snow fell and fell. Winter was shaking out her last, belated gifts.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

DAVIDOV and Razmiotnov left the meeting together. The falling snow was thick and damp. Here and there tiny points of light glittered through the darkness. Broken by gusts of wind, a dog's bark sounded mournfully and incessantly across the village. Davidov recalled what Yakov Lukich had said about keeping the snow on the fields, and sighed: "No, this year we can't manage that. And in such a storm what a lot of snow would lie on the fallow land. It's a shame! Fact!"

"Let's go along to the stables and have a look at the collective farm horses," Razmiotnov proposed.

"All right!" Davidov agreed.

They turned into a by-lane. Soon a point of light appeared: outside Lapshinov's hay barn, which had been converted into a stable, a lantern was hanging. They went into the yard. Under the eaves by the stable door some seven or eight cossacks were standing.

"Who's on duty to-day?" Razmiotnov asked. One of the men put his cigarette out with his boot, and answered:

"Kondrat Maidannikov."

"But why is all this crowd hanging around? What are you all doing here?" Davidov asked.

"Well, comrade Davidov. . . . We're just standing and having a general smoke."