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KEY TO PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- ASTAKHOV, STEPAN.** A Cossack.
- ASTAKHOVA, AKSINYA.** Wife of Stepan.
- BUNCHUK, ILYA.** A Cossack revolutionary.
- FOMIN, YAKOV YEFIMOVICH.** A Cossack commander, at first a Red, then leader of a White bandit group.
- KALMYKOV.** White Guard officer.
- KAPARIN.** Captain. Red officer. Afterwards Fomin's chief of staff.
- KOPYLOV, MIKHAIL GRIGORYEVICH.** Captain. Chief of staff to Grigory Melekhov.
- KORSHUNOV, GRISHAKA.** An old Cossack.
- KORSHUNOV, MIRON GRIGORYEVICH.** His son, father of Natalya Melekhova.
- KORSHUNOVA, MARYA LUKINICHNA.** Wife of Miron.
- KORSHUNOV, DIMITRY MIRONOVICH (Mitka).** Son of Miron and Marya Korshunov.
- KORSHUNOVA, AGRIPPINA MIRONOVNA.** Daughter of Miron and Marya.
- KOSHEVOI, MIKHAIL (Misha).** A Red Cossack.
- KOTLYAROV, IVAN ALEXEYEVICH.** A Red Cossack.
- KRIVOSHLYKOV.** A Cossack revolutionary.
- KUDINOV.** Commander of Don Cossack insurgent forces.
- LISTNITSKY, NIKOLAI ALEXEYEVICH.** A landowner.
- LISTNITSKY, YEVGENY NIKOLAYEVICH.** Son of Nikolai Listnitsky, a White officer.
- MELEKHOV, PANTELEI PROKOFYEVICH.** An elderly Cossack.

MELEKHOVA, ILYINICHNA. Wife of Pantelei.
MELEKHOV, PYOTR PANTELEYEVICH. Pantelei's elder son, a Cossack officer.
MELEKHOV, GRIGORY PANTELEYEVICH (Grisha). Pantelei's younger son, a Cossack officer, commander of Cossack insurgent division.
MELEKHOVA, YEVDOKIYA PANTELEYEVNA (Dunya). Pantelei's daughter.
MELEKHOVA, DARYA. Wife of Pyotr Melekhov.
MELEKHOVA, NATALYA. Wife of Grigory Melekhov.
MELEKHOVA, POLYA (Polyushka). Daughter of Grigory and Natalya.
MELEKHOV, MISHATKA. Son of Grigory and Natalya.
MOKHOV, SERGEI PLATONOVICH. Shopkeeper and mill-owner in the village of Tatarsky.
MOKHOVA, YELIZAVETA SERGEYEVNA (Liza). Sergei's daughter.
PODLYOLKOV. A Cossack revolutionary. Commander of Red Cossack forces.
POGUDKO, ANNA. Machine-gunner in Bunchuk's detachment
SHAMIL, MARTIN, ALEXEI and **PROKHOR.** Cossacks, brothers.
STOCKMAN, OSIP DAVYDOVICH. A Communist organizer.
TIMOFEI, "Knave." Scalesman at Mokhov's mill.
TOKIN, CHRISTONYA. A Cossack.
ZYKOV, PROKHOR. A Cossack, orderly to Grigory Melekhov.



Милоротов

МИХАИЛ ШОЛОХОВ
Tikhii Don
ТИХИЙ ДОН

РОМАН В ЧЕТЫРЕХ КНИГАХ

*

КНИГА ПЕРВАЯ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
МОСКВА

MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV

**AND QUIET FLOWS
THE DON**

A NOVEL IN FOUR BOOKS

*

BOOK ONE

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

A TRANSLATION FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY STEPHEN GARRY

REVISED AND COMPLETED
BY ROBERT DAGLISH

DESIGNED
BY O. VEREISKY AND Y. KOPYLOV

BOOK ONE

Not by the plough is our glorious earth furrowed....

Our earth is turrowed by horses' hoots.

And sown is our earth with the heads of Cossacks.

Fair is our quiet Don with young widows.

Our father, the quiet Don, blossoms with orphans.

And the waves of the quiet Don are filled

with fathers' and mothers' tears.

Oh thou, our father, the quiet Don!

Oh why dost thou, our quiet Don, so sludgy flow?

How should I, the quiet Don, but sludgy Row!

From my depths the cold springs beat.

Amid me, the quiet Don, the lohite fish leap.

Old Cossack Songs.

PART ONE

T

he Melekhov farm was at the very end of the village. The gate of the cattle-yard opened northward towards the Don, A steep, fifty-foot slope between chalky, moss-grown banks, and there was the shore. A pearly drift of mussel-shells, a grey, broken edging of wave-kissed shingle, and then the steel-blue rippling surface of the Don, seething in the wind. To the east, beyond the willow-wattle fences of threshing-floors-the Hetman's highway, grizzled wormwood scrub, the hardy greyish-brown, hoof-trodden plantain, a cross standing at the fork of the road, and then the steppe, enveloped in a shifting haze. To the south, a chalky ridge of hills. To the west, the street, crossing the square and nmning towards the leas.

The Cossack Prokofy Melekhov returned to the village during the last war but one with

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Turkey, He brought back a wife-a little woman wrapped from head to foot in a shawl. She kept her face covered, and rarely revealed her wild, yearning eyes. The silken shawl bore the scent of strange,

aromatic perfumes; its rainbow-hued patterns aroused the envy of the Cossack women. The captive Turkish woman kept aloof from Prokofy's relations, and before long old Melekhov gave his son his portion. All his life the old man refused to set foot inside his son's house; he never got over the disgrace.

Prokofy speedily made shift for himself; carpenters built him a house, he himself fenced in the cattle yard, and in the early autumn he took his bowed foreign wife to her new home. He walked with her through the village, behind the cart laden with their worldly goods. Everybody, from the oldest to the youngest, rushed into the street. The men laughed discreetly into their beards, the women passed vociferous remarks to one another, a swarm of unwashed Cossack children shouted catcalls after Prokofy. But, with overcoat unbuttoned, he walked slowly along, as though following a freshly-ploughed furrow, squeezing his wife's fragile wrist in his own enormous, black palm, and holding his head with its straw-white mat of curls high in defiance. Only the wens below his cheek-bones swelled and quivered, and the sweat stood out between his stony brows.

Thenceforth he was rarely seen in the village, and never even attended the Cossack gatherings. He lived a secluded life in his solitary house by the Don. Strange stories were told of him in the village. The boys who pastured the calves beyond the meadow-road declared that of an evening, as the light was dying, they had seen Prokofy carrying his wife in his arms right as far as the Tatar burial mound. He would set her down, with her back to an ancient, weather-beaten, porous rock, on the crest of the mound, sit down at her side, and they would gaze fixedly across the steppe. They would gaze until the sunset had faded, and then Prokofy would wrap his wife in his sheepskin and carry her back home. The village was lost in conjecture, seeking an explanation for such astonishing behaviour. The women gossiped so much that they had not even time to search each other's heads for lice. Rumour was rife about Prokofy's wife also; some declared that she was of entrancing beauty; others maintained the contrary. The matter was settled when one of the most adventuresome of the women, the soldier's wife Mavra, ran along to Prokofy's house on the pretext of getting some leaven; Prokofy went down into the cellar for the

leaven, and Mavra had time to discover that Prokofy's Turkish conquest was a perfect fright.

A few minutes later Mavra, her face flushed and her kerchief awry, was entertaining a crowd of women in a by-lane:

"And what could he have seen in her, my dears? If she'd only been a woman now, but a creature like her! Our girls are far better covered! Why, you could pull her apart like a wasp. And those great big black eyes, she flashes them like Satan, God forgive me. She must be near her time, God's truth."

"Near her time?" the women marvelled.

"I wasn't bom yesterday! I've reared three myself."

"But what's her face like?"

"Her face? Yellow. No light in her eyes-doesn't find life in a strange land to her fancy, I should say. And what's more, girls, she wears . . . Prokofy's trousers!"

"No!" the women drew in their breath together.

"I saw them myself; she wears trousers, only without stripes. It must be his everyday trousers she has. She wears a long shift, and underneath you can see the trousers stuffed into socks. When I saw them my blood ran cold."

The whisper went round the village that Prokofy's wife was a witch. Astakhov's daughter-

in^{aw} (the Astakhovs were Prokofy's nearest neighbours) swore that on the second day of Trinity, before dawn, she had seen Prokofy's wife, barefoot, her hair uncovered, milking the Astakhovs' cow. Since then its udder had withered to the size of a child's fist, the cow had lost its milk and died soon after.

That year there was an unusual dying-off of cattle. By the shallows of the Don fresh carcasses of cows and young bulls appeared on the sandy shore every day. Then the horses were affected. The droves grazing on the village pasture-lands melted away. And through the lanes and streets of the village crept an evil rumour.

The Cossacks held a meeting and went to Prokofy. He came out on the steps of his house and bowed.

"What can I do for you, worthy elders?"

Dumbly silent, the crowd drew nearer to the steps. One drunken old man was the first to cry:

"Drag your witch out here! We're going to try her. . . ."

Prokofy flung himself back into the house, but they caught him in the passage. A burly Cossack, nicknamed Lushnya, knocked his head against the wall and told him:

"Don't make a row, there's no need for you to shout. We shan't touch you, but we're going to trample your wife into the ground. Better to de-

stroy her than have all the village die for want of cattle. But don't you make a row, or I'll smash the wall in with your head!"

"Drag the bitch out into the yard!" came a roar from the steps. A regimental comrade of Prokofy's wound the Turkish woman's hair around one hand, clamped his other hand over her screaming mouth, dragged her at a run across the porch and flung her under the feet of the crowd. A thin shriek rose above the howl of voices. Prokofy flung off half a dozen Cossacks, burst into the house, and snatched a sabre from the wall. Jostling against one another, the Cossacks rushed out of the house. Swinging the gleaming, whistling sabre around his head, Prokofy ran down the steps. The crowd drew back and scattered over the yard.

Lushnya was heavy on his feet, and by the threshing-floor Prokofy caught up with him; with a diagonal sweep down across the left shoulder from behind, he clave the Cossack's body to the belt. The crowd, who had been tearing stakes out of the fence, fell back, across the threshing-floor into the steppe.

Half an hour later the Cossacks ventured to approach Prokofy's farm again. Two of them stepped

cautiously into the passageway, O! the kitchen threshold, in a pool of blood, her head flung back awkwardly, lay Prokofy's wife; her

lips were writhing tormentedly, her gnawed tongue protruded. Prokofy, with shaking head and glassy stare, was wrapping a squealing little ball—the prematurely-born infant—in a sheepskin.

Prokofy's wife died the same evening. His old mother had compassion on the child and took charge of it. They plastered it with bran-mash, fed it with mare's milk, and, after a month, assured that the swarthy, Turkish-looking boy would survive, they carried him to church and christened him. They named him Pantelei after his grandfather. Prokofy came back from penal servitude twelve years later. With his clipped, ruddy beard streaked with grey and his Russian clothing, he did not look like a Cossack. He took his son and returned to his farm.

Pantelei grew up swarthy, and ungovernable. In face and figure he was like his mother. Prokofy married him to the daughter of a Cossack neighbour.

From then on Turkish blood began to mingle with that of the Cossack, and that was how the hook-nosed, savagely handsome Cossack family of Melekhovs, nicknamed "Turks," came into the village.

When his father died Pantelei took over the farm; he had the house rethatched, added an acre of common land to the farmyard, built new

sheds, and a barn with a sheet-iron roof. He ordered the tinsmith to cut a couple of weathercocks out of the scrap iron, and when these were set up on the roof of the barn they brightened the Melekhov farmyard with their carefree air, giving it a self-satisfied and prosperous appearance.

Under the weight of the passing years Pantelei Prokofyevich grew gnarled and craggy; he broadened and acquired a stoop, but still looked a well-built old man. He was dry of bone, and lame (in his youth he had broken his leg while hurdling at an Imperial Review of troops), he wore a silver half-moon ear-ring in his left ear, and his beard and hair retained their vivid raven hue until old age. When angry, he completely lost control of himself and undoubtedly this had prematurely aged his buxom wife, whose face, once beautiful, was now a perfect spider-web of furrows.

Pyotr, his elder, married son, took after his mother: stocky and snub-nosed, a luxuriant shock of corn-coloured hair, hazel eyes. But the younger, Grigory, was like his father: half a head taller than Pyotr, some six years younger, the same pendulous hawk nose as his father's, the whites of his burning eyes bluish in their slightly oblique slits; brown, ruddy skin drawn tight over angular cheek-bones. Grigory stooped

slightly, just like his father; even in his smile there was a similar, rather savage quality.

Dunya—her father's favourite—a lanky large-eyed lass, and Pyotr's wife, Darya, with her small child, completed the Melekhov household.

II

Here and there stars still hovered in the ashen, early morning sky. The wind blew from under a bank of cloud. A mist rolled high over the Don, piling against the slope of a chalky hill, and creeping into the

gullies like a grey, headless serpent. The left bank of the river, the sands, the wooded backwaters, the reedy marshes, the dewy trees, flamed in the cold, ecstatic light of dawn. Below the horizon the sun smouldered, and rose not.

In the Melekhov house Pantelei Prokofyevich was the first to awake. Buttoning the collar of his embroidered shirt, he walked out on to the steps. The grassy yaid was spread with a dewy silver. He led the cattle out into the street. Darya ran past in her shift to milk the cows. The dew sprinkled over the calves of her bare white legs, and she left a smoking, flattened trail behind her over the grass of the yard. Pantelei Prokofyevich stood for a moment watching the grass

rise from the pressure of Darya's feet then lurned back into the best room.

On the sill of the wide-open window lay the dead rose petals of the cherry-trees blossoming in the front garden. Grigory lay asleep face downward, one arm flung out sideways.

"Grigory, coming fishing?"

"What?" Grigory asked in a whisper, dropping his legs off the bed.

"Come out and fish till sunrise."

Breathing heavily through his nose, Grigory pulled his everyday trousers down from a peg, drew them on, tucked the legs into his white woollen socks, and slowly put on his sandals, straightening out the trodden-down heel.

"But has Mother boiled the bait?" he asked hoarsely, as he followed his father into the porch.

"Yes. Go to the boat. I'll come in a minute."

The old man poured the strong-smelling, boiled rye into a jug, carefully swept up the fallen grains in his palm, and limped down to the beach. He found his son sitting hunched in the boat.

"Where shall we go?"

"To the Black Bank. We'll try around the log where we were sitting the other day."

Its stern scraping the ground, the boat broke away from the shore and settled into the water.

The current carried it off, rocking it and trying to turn it broadside on. Grigory steered with the oar, but did not row.

"Why aren't you rowing?"

"Let's get out into midstream first."

Cutting across the swift mainstream current, the boat moved towards the left bank. The crowing of the village cocks rang out after them across the water. Its side scraping the black, craggy bank rising high above the river, the boat slid into the pool below. Some forty feet from the bank the twisted branches of a sunken elm emerged from the water. Around it turbulent flecks of foam eddied and swirled.

"Get the line ready while I scatter the bait," Pantelei whispered. He thrust his hand into the steaming mouth of the jug. ~~The rye scattered audibly over the water, like a~~ whispered "Sh-sh." Grigory threaded swollen grains on a hook, and smiled.

"Come on, you fish! Little ones and big ones too."

The line fell in spirals into the water and tautened, then slackened again. Grigory set his foot on the end of the rod and fumbled cautiously for his pouch.

"We'll have no luck today. Father. The moon is on the wane."

"Bring any matches?"

"Uh-huh."

"Give me a light."

The old man began to smoke, and glanced at the sun, stranded beyond the elm.

"You can't tell when a carp will bite/" he replied. "Sometimes he will when the moon is waning."

"Looks as if the small fish are nipping the bait," Grigory sighed.

The water slapped noisily against the sides of the boat, and a four-foot carp, gleaming as though cast from ruddy copper, leaped upward with a groan, threshing the water with its broad, curving tail. Big drops of spray scattered over the boat.

"Wait now!" Pantelei wiped his wet beard with his sleeve. '

Near the sunken tree, among the branching, naked boughs, two carp leaped simultaneously; a third, smaller, writhed in the air, and flapped stubbornly close to the bank.

Grigory impatiently chewed the wet end of his cigarette. The misty sun was half up. Pantelei scattered the rest of the bait, and, glumly pursing his lips, gazed stolidly at the motionless end of the rod.

Grigory spat out the stub of his cigarette, watching its rapid flight angrily. Inwardly he was cursing his father for waking him so early.

Smoking on an empty stomach had made his mouth reek like burnt bristles. He was about to bend and scoop up some water in his palm, but at that moment the end of the rod jerked feebly and began to sink.

"Hook him!" the old man breathed.

Grigory started up and grabbed the rod, but it bent in an arc from his hand, and the end plunged into the water.

"Hold him!" Pantelei groaned, as he pushed the boat off from the bank.

Grigory attempted to lift the rod, but the fish was too strong and the stout line snapped with a dry crack. Grigory staggered and almost fell.

"Strong as a bull!" his father whispered, trying to jab a hook into some fresh bait but missing it. With an excited laugh Grigory fastened a new line to the rod, and made a cast. Hardly had the lead touched the bottom when the end of the rod bent.

"That's him, the devil," Grigory grunted, with difficulty holding in the fish, which was making for midstream.

The line cut the water with a loud swish, raising a sloping, greenish rampart behind it. Pantelei fumbled with the bailer handle in his stumpy fingers.

"Take care he doesn't snap the line."

"Don't worry,"

A great red and yellow carp rose to the surface, lashed the water into foam, and dived back into the depths.

"He's pulling my arm off! No, you don't!"

"Hold him, Grisha!"

"I am holding him!"

"Don't let him get under the boat!"

Taking breath, Grigory drew the played-out carp towards the boat. The old man thrust out the bailer, but with its last strength the carp again plunged into the depths.

"Get his head up! Make him swallow some air, that'll quiet him!" Pantelei ordered.

Once more Grigory drew the exhausted fish towards the boat. It floated open-mouthed with its nose against the rough gunwale, its orange-golden fins flickering.

"He's finished!" Pantelei croaked, lifting the fish in the bailer.

They sat on for another half hour. The carp stopped leaping.

"Wind in the line. We've had our catch for today!" the old man said at last.

Grigory pushed off from the bank. As he rowed he saw from his father's face that he wanted to say something, but Pantelei sat silently gazing at the houses of the village scattered under the hill.

"Look here, Grigory. . ." he began uncertainly, pulling at the knot of the sack under his feet. "I've noticed that you and Aksinya Astakho-va...."

Grigory flushed violently, and turned away. His shirt collar cut into his muscular, sunburnt neck,

pressing out a white band in the flesh.

"You watch out, young fellow," the old man continued, now roughly and angrily, "or I'll be having another kind of talk with you. Stepan's our neighbour, and I won't have any mucking about with his woman. That kind of thing can lead to mischief, and I warn you beforehand, if I see you at it I'll flay the hide off you!"

Pantelei clenched his gnarled fist, and with narrowed eyes watched the blood ebbing from his son's face.

"It's all lies!" Grigory muttered, and gazed straight at the bluish bridge of his father's nose.

"You keep quiet."

"People like to talk-"

"Hold your tongue, you son of a bitch!"

Grigory bent to the oars. The boat leapt forward. The bubbling water danced away from the stern in little scrolls.

They remained silent until, as they were approaching the shore, his father reminded him:

"Mind what I've said, or from now on I'll

stop your going out at night. You won't stir a step outside the yard!"

Grigory made no answer. As he beached the boat he asked:

"Shall I give the fish to the women?"

"Go and sell it," the old man said more gently. "You can have the money for tobacco."

Biting his lips, Grigory followed his father. "Try it. Dad! I'm going out tonight even if you hobble my feet!" he thought, his eyes boring fiercely into the back of the old man's head.

When he got home Grigory carefully washed the sand off the fish and fixed a twig through its gills.

At the farm gate he ran into his old friend Mitka Korshunov. Mitka was strolling along, toying with the end of his silver-studded belt. His round, yellow eyes glistened impudently in their narrow slits. Mitka's pupils were long, like a cat's, making his glance swift and elusive.

"Where are you off to with the fish?"

"We caught it today. I'm going to sell it."

"To Mokhov?"

"Uh-huh."

Mitka estimated the weight of the fish with a glance.

"Fifteen pounds?"

"Fifteen and a half. We weighed it on the scales."

"Take me with you. I'll do the bargaining."

"Come on."

"And what do I get?"

"You needn't fear. We shan't quarrel over that."

Church was over, and the villagers were filling the streets. The three Shamil brothers came striding down the road side by side. The eldest, one-armed Alexei, was in the middle. The tight collar of his army tunic held his sinewy neck erect, his thin, curly, pointed little beard twisted provokingly sideways, his left eye winked nervously. His carbine had exploded in his hands at the shooting range many years previously, and a piece of the flying iron had ploughed into his cheek. Now his left eye winked in season and out of season, and a blue scar ran across his cheek, burying itself in his tow-like hair. His left arm had been torn off at the elbow, but Alexei was a past master at rolling a cigarette with one hand. He would press his pouch against his chest, tear off the right quantity of paper with his teeth, bend it into a trough-shape, rake up the tobacco, roll the cigarette and almost before you realized what he was doing, he would be asking you for a light.

Although he was one-armed he was the finest fighter in the village. His fist was not particularly large as fists go-about the size of a calabash

-but he had once happened to get annoyed with his bullock when ploughing, and being without his whip, gave it a blow with his fist that stretched the bullock out over the furrows, blood streaming from its ears. And it hardly recovered. The other brothers, Martin and Prokhor, resembled Alexei down to the last detail. They were just as stocky and broad-shouldered, only each had two arms.

Grigory greeted the Shamils, but Mitka walked on, turning his head aside sharply. At the fisticuffs during Shrovetide, Alexei Shamil had shown no regard for Mitka's youthful teeth. With a powerful swing, he had struck him in the mouth, and Mitka had spat out two good teeth on the grey-blue ice, scarred by the trampling of iron-shod heels.

As he came up to them, Alexei winked five times.

"Selling your load?"

"Want to buy it?"

"How much?"

"A couple of bullocks, and a wife thrown in."

Screwing up his eyes, Alexei jerked the stump of his arm.

"You're a card! Haw-haw! A wife thrown in! Will you take the brats, too?"

"Leave yourself some for breeding, or the Shamils will die out!" Grigory grinned.

In the square the villagers were gathered around the fence of the church. The church warden was holding a goose above his head and shouting: "Going for fifty kopecks. Any more offers?"

The goose craned its neck and peered round, its beady eye squinting contemptuously.

In the middle of a ring of people a grizzled old man, his chest covered with crosses and medals, stood brandishing his arms.

"Old Grishaka is telling one of his tales about the Turkish war," Mitka said, nodding towards the ring. "Let's go and listen."

"While we're listening to him the carp will start stinking and swell."

"If it swells it'll weigh more."

In the square beyond the firecart shed rose the green roof of the Mokhov's house. Passing the outhouse, Grigory spat and held his nose. From behind a barrel, an old man emerged, buttoning up his trousers, and holding his belt in his teeth.

"Hard pressed?" asked Mitka ironically.

The old man buttoned up the last button, and took the belt out of his mouth.

"What's it got to do with you?"

"Your nose ought to be stuck in it, or your beard; so that your old woman wouldn't be able to wash it off in a week."

"I'll stick you in it," said the old man, offended.

Mitka screwed up his cat's eyes in the sun's glare.

"Aren't you touchy!"

"Get out, you son of a bitch. Why are you bothering me? Do you want a taste of my belt?"

Laughing quietly Grigory approached the steps. The balustrade was richly fretted with wild vine. The steps were speckled with lazy shadows.

"See how some folk live, Mitka!"

"Even the door-handle's got gold on it!" Mitka sniffed as he opened the door leading to the verandah. "Imagine that old fellow getting in here. . . ."

"Who's there?" someone called from the other side of the door.

Grigory entered shyly. The carp's tail trailed over the painted floor-boards.

"Whom do you want?"

A girl was sitting in a wicker rocking-chair, a dish of strawberries in her hand. Grigory stared silently at the full, rosy, heart-shaped lips embracing a berry. With her head on one side the girl looked the lads up and down.

Mitka came to Grigory's rescue. He coughed.

"Want to buy some fish?"

"Fish? I'll go and ask."

She rocked the chair upright, and rising padded away in her embroidered slippers. The sun shone through her white dress, and Mitka saw the dim outline of full legs and the broad, billowing lace of her underskirt. He was astonished at the satiny whiteness of her bare calves; only on the small round heels was the skin milkily yellow.

"Look, Grisha, what a dress! Like glass! You can see everything through it," he said, nudging Grigory.

The girl came back through the door leading to the corridor, and sat down gently on the chair.

"Go into the kitchen!"

Grigory tiptoed into the house. When he had gone Mitka stood blinking at the white thread of the parting that divided the girl's hair into two golden half-circles. She studied him with mischievous, restless eyes.

"Are you from the village?"

"Yes."

"Whose son are you?"

"Korshunov's."

"And what's your name?"

"Mitry!"

She examined her rosy nails attentively, and with a swift movement tucked up her legs.

"Which of you caught the fish?"

"My friend Grigory."

"And do you fish, too?"

"When I feel like it."

"With hook and line?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to go fishing some time," she said, after a pause.

"All right, I'll take you if you want to."

"Really? How can we arrange it?"

"You'll have to get up very early."

"I'll get up, only you'll have to wake me."

"I can do that. But how about your father?"

"What about my father?"

Mitka laughed. "He might take me for a thief and set the dogs on me."

"Nonsense! I sleep alone in the corner room. That's the window." She pointed. "If you come for me, knock at the window and I'll get up,"

The sound of Grigory's timid voice, and the thick, oily tones of the cook came intermittently from the kitchen. Mitka was silent, fingering the tarnished silver of his belt.

"Are you married?" she asked hiding a smile.

"Why?"

"Oh, I'm just curious."

"No, I'm single."

Mitka suddenly blushed, and she, smiling coquettishly and playing with a twig from the hot-house strawberries scattered over the floor, asked:

"And do the girls like you, Mitka?"

"Some do, some don't."

"Really, . . . And why have you got eyes like a cat?"

"A cat?" Mitka was now completely abashed.

"Yes, that's just it, they're cat's eyes."

"Must have got them from my mother. I can't help it."

"And why don't they marry you off, Mitka?"

Mitka recovered from his momentary confusion, and sensing the hidden sneer in her words, let a glitter appear in the yellow of his eyes.

"The cock must grow before it finds a hen."

She raised her eyebrows in astonishment, flushed, and rose from her seat. There was a sound of footsteps ascending the steps from the street. Her fleeting smile lashed Mitka like a nettle.

Shuffling softly in his capacious kid boots, the master of the house, Sergei Platonovich Mo-khov, carried his corpulent body with dignity past Mitka.

"Want me?" he asked as he passed, without turning his head.

"They've brought some fish. Papa."

Grigory appeared without his carp,

The first cock had crowed when Grigory returned from his evening out. From the porch came the scent of sour hops, and the spicy perfume of stitchwort.

He tiptoed into the room, undressed, carefully hung up his Sunday trousers, crossed himself and lay down. There was a golden pool of moonlight on the floor, criss-crossed by the shadow of the window frame. In the corner the silver of the icons gleamed dully under embroidered towels, from the shelf over the bed came the droning hum of agitated flies.

He would have fallen asleep, but in the kitchen his brother's child started to cry. The cradle creaked like an ungreased cartwheel. He heard his brother's wife Darya mutter in a sleepy voice: "Go to sleep you little brat! You don't give me a moment's peace!" And she began crooning softly to the child:

Oh, where have you been? I've been watching the horses. And what did you see? A horse with a saddle
All fringed with gold. ...

As he dozed off with the steady, soothing creak in his ears, Grigory remembered: "Tomorrow Pyotr goes off to the camp. Darya will be

34

left with the baby. . . . We'll have to do the mowing without him."

He buried his head in his hot pillow, but the chant seeped persistently into his ears:

And where is your horse? Outside the gate. And where is the gate? Swept away by the flood.

He was aroused from sleep by lusty neighing. By its tone he recognized Pyotr's army horse. His sleep-numbed fingers were slow in buttoning up his shirt, and he almost dropped off again under the flowing rhythm of Darya's song.

And where are the geese?

They've gone into the reeds.

And where are the reeds?

The girls have mown them.

And where are the girls?

The girls have taken husbands.

And where are the Cossacks?

They've gone to the war.

Rubbing his eyes, Grigory made his way to the stable and led Pyotr's horse out into the street. A floating cobweb tickled his face, and his drowsiness unexpectedly left him.

Slanting across the Don lay the wavy never-ridden track of the moonlight. Over the river

hung a mist, and above it, the stars, like sprinkled grain. The horse set its hoofs down cautiously. The slope to the water was hard going. From the farther side of the river came the quacking of ducks. A sheat-fish jumped with a splash in the muddy shallows by the bank, hunting at random for smaller fry.

Grigory stood a long time by the river. The bank exuded a dank and musty rottenness. A tiny drop of water fell from the horse's lips. There was a light, pleasant void in Grigory's heart, he felt good and free from thought. As he walked back, he glanced towards the east, where the blue murk was already clearing.

By the stable he ran into his mother.

"Is that you, Grisha?"

"And who do you think it is?"

"Watered the horse?"

"Yes," he answered shortly.

His mother waddled away with an apronful of dried dung fuel, her bare withered feet slapping on the ground.

"You might go and wake up the Astakhovs. Stepan said he would go with our Pyotr."

The morning rawness set a spring stiffly quivering in Grigory. His body tingled with prickles. He ran up the three echoing steps leading to the Astakhovs' house. The door was unlatched. Stepan was asleep on an outspread

rug in the kitchen, his wife's head resting on his arm.

In the greying dawn light Grigory saw Ak-sinya's shift rumpled above her knees, and her unashamedly parted legs white as birch bark. For a moment he stood gazing, feeling his mouth going dry and his head bursting with an iron clangour.

He shifted his eyes stealthily. In a strange, hoarse voice he called:

"Hey! Anyone here? Get up."

Aksinya gave a sob of waking.

"Oh, who's that?" She hurriedly began to fumble with her shift, drawing it over her legs. A little drop of spittle was left on her pillow; a woman's sleep is sound at dawn.

"It's me. Mother sent me to wake you up."

"We'll be up in a minute. We're sleeping on the floor because of the fleas. Stepan, get up, d'you hear?" By her voice Grigory guessed that she felt embarrassed and he hastened to leave.

Thirty Cossacks were going from the village to the May training camp. Just before seven o'clock wagons with tarpaulin covers, Cossacks on foot and on horseback, in homespun shirts and carrying their equipment, began to stream towards the square.

Pyotr was standing on the steps, hurriedly stitching a broken rein.

Pantelei stamped about round Pyotr's horse, pouring oats into the trough. Every now and then he shouted:

"Dunya, have you put the rusks in the sack yet? Have you salted the bacon?"

Dunya, rosy and blooming, flew to and fro like a swallow and answered her father's shouts with a laugh:

"You look after your own affairs. Father, and I'll pack for Brother so well that nothing will budge till he reaches Cherkassk."*

"Not finished eating yet?" Pyotr asked, nodding towards the horse.

"Not yet," his father replied deliberately, testing the saddle-cloth with his rough palm. One little crumb sticking to the cloth can chafe a horse's back into a sore in a single march.

"When he's done eating, water him. Father."

"Grisha will take him down to the Don,"

Grigory took the tall, rawboned Don horse with a white blaze on its forehead, led it out through the gate, and resting his left hand lightly on its withers, vaulted on to its back and went off at a swinging trot. He tried to rein the horse in at the descent to the river, but the animal stumbled, quickened its

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