

# The Gulag Archipelago

## — The Arrest —

### Chapter 1

#### Arrest

How do people get to this clandestine Archipelago? Hour by hour planes fly there, ships steer their course there, and trains thunder off to it — but all with nary a mark on them to tell of their destination. And at ticket windows or at travel bureaus for Soviet or foreign tourists the employees would be astounded if you were to ask for a ticket to go there. They know nothing and they've never heard of the Archipelago as a whole or of anyone of its innumerable islands.

Those who go to the Archipelago to administer it get there via the training schools of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Those who go there to be guards are conscripted via the military conscription centers.

And those who, like you and me, dear reader, go there to die, must get there solely and compulsorily via arrest.

Arrest! Need it be said that it is a breaking point in your life, a bolt of lightning which has scored a direct hit on you? That it is an unassimilable spiritual earthquake not every person can cope with, as a result of which people often slip into insanity?

The Universe has as many different centers as there are living beings in it. Each of us is a center of the Universe, and

that Universe is shattered when they hiss at you: “You are under arrest.”

If you are arrested, can anything else remain unshattered by this cataclysm?

But the darkened mind is incapable of embracing these displacements in our universe, and both the most sophisticated and the veriest simpleton among us, drawing on all life's experience, can gasp out only: “Me? What for?”

And this is a question which, though repeated millions and millions of times before, has yet to receive an answer.

Arrest is an instantaneous, shattering thrust, expulsion, somersault from one state into another.

We have been happily borne — or perhaps have unhappily dragged our weary way — down the long and crooked streets of our lives, past all kinds of walls and fences made of rotting wood, rammed earth, brick, concrete, iron railings. We have never given a thought to what lies behind them. We have never tried to penetrate them with our vision or our understanding. But there is where the Gulag country begins, right next to us, two yards away from us. In addition, we have failed to notice an enormous number of closely fitted, well-disguised doors and gates in these fences. All those gates were prepared for us, every last one! And all of a sudden the fateful gate swings quickly

open, and four white male hands, unaccustomed to physical labor but nonetheless strong and tenacious, grab us by the leg, arm, collar, cap, ear, and drag us in like a sack, and the gate behind us, the gate to our past life, is slammed shut once and for all.

That's all there is to it! You are arrested!

And you'll find nothing better to respond with than a lamblike bleat: "Me? What for?"

That's what arrest is: it's a blinding flash and a blow which shifts the present instantly into the past and the impossible into omnipotent actuality.

That's all. And neither for the first hour nor for the first day will you be able to grasp anything else.

Except that in your desperation the fake circus moon will blink at you: "It's a mistake! They'll set things right!"

And everything which is by now comprised in the traditional, even literary, image of an arrest will pile up and take shape, not in your own disordered memory, but in what your family and your neighbors in your apartment remember: The sharp nighttime ring or the rude knock at the door. The insolent entrance of the unwiped jackboots of the unsleeping State Security operatives. The frightened and cowed civilian witness at their backs. (And what function does this civilian witness serve? The victim doesn't even dare think about it and the operatives don't remember, but that's what the regulations call for, and so he has to sit there all night long and sign in the morning. For the witness, jerked from his bed, it is torture too — to go out night after night to help arrest

his own neighbors and acquaintances.)

The traditional image of arrest is also trembling hands packing for the victim—a change of underwear, a piece of soap, something to eat; and no one knows what is needed, what is permitted, what clothes are best to wear; and the Security agents keep interrupting and hurrying you:

"You don't need anything. They'll feed you there. It's warm there." (It's all lies. They keep hurrying you to frighten you.)

The traditional image of arrest is also what happens afterward, when the poor victim has been taken away. It is an alien, brutal, and crushing force totally dominating the apartment for hours on end, a breaking, ripping open, pulling from the walls, emptying things from wardrobes and desks onto the floor, shaking, dumping out, and ripping apart—piling up mountains of litter on the floor—and the crunch of things being trampled beneath jackboots. And nothing is sacred in a search! During the arrest of the locomotive engineer Inoshin, a tiny coffin stood in his room containing the body of his newly dead child. The "jurists" dumped the child's body out of the coffin and searched it. They shake sick people out of their sickbeds, and they unwind bandages to search beneath them.

For those left behind after the arrest there is the long tail end of a wrecked and devastated life. And the attempts to go and deliver food parcels. But from all the windows the answer comes in barking voices: "Nobody here by that name!" "Never heard of him!" Yes, and in the worst days in Leningrad it took five days of standing in crowded lines just to get to that window, And it may be only after half a year or a year that the arrested person responds at all. Or else the answer is

tossed out: "Deprived of the right to correspond." And that means once and for all. "No right to correspondence" — and that almost for certain means: "Has been shot." That's how we picture arrest to ourselves.

The kind of night arrest described is, in fact, a favorite, because it has important advantages. Everyone living in the apartment is thrown into a state of terror by the first knock at the door. The arrested person is torn from the warmth of his bed. He is in a daze, half-asleep, helpless, and his judgment is befogged. In a night arrest the State Security men have a superiority in numbers; there are many of them, armed, against one person who hasn't even finished buttoning his trousers. During the arrest and search it is highly improbable that a crowd of potential supporters will gather at the entrance. The unhurried, step-by-step visits, first to one apartment, then to another, tomorrow to a third and a fourth, provide an opportunity for the Security operations personnel to be deployed with the maximum efficiency and to imprison many more citizens of a given town than the police force itself numbers.

In addition, there's an advantage to night arrests in that neither the people in neighboring apartment houses nor those on the city streets can see how many have been taken away. Arrests which frighten the closest neighbors are no event at all to those farther away. It's as if they had not taken place. Along that same asphalt ribbon on which the Black Marias scurry at night, a tribe of youngsters strides by day with banners, flowers, and gay, untroubled songs.

But those who take, whose work consists solely of arrests, for whom the horror is boringly repetitive, have a much broader understanding of how arrests operate.

They operate according to a large body of theory, and innocence must not lead one to ignore this. The science of arrest is an important segment of the course on general penology and has been propped up with a substantial body of social theory. Arrests are classified according to various criteria: nighttime and daytime; at home, at work, during a journey; first-time arrests and repeats; individual and group arrests. Arrests are distinguished by the degree of surprise required, the amount of resistance expected (even though in tens of millions of cases no resistance was expected and in fact there was none). Arrests are also differentiated by the thoroughness of the required search; by instructions either to make out or not to make out an inventory of confiscated property or seal a room or apartment; to arrest the wife after the husband and send the children to an orphanage, or to send the rest of the family into exile, or to send the old folks to a labor camp too.

No, no: arrests vary widely in form. In 1926 Irma Mendel, a Hungarian, obtained through the Comintern two front-row tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre. Interrogator Klegel was courting her at the time and she invited him to go with her. They sat through the show very affectionately, and when it was over he took her-straight to the Lubyanka. And if on a flowering June day in 1927 on Kuznetsky Most, the plump-cheeked, redheaded beauty Anna Skripnikova, who had just bought some navy-blue material for a dress, climbed into a hansom cab with a young man-about-town, you can be sure it wasn't a lovers' tryst at all, as the cabman understood very well and showed by his frown (he knew the Organs don't pay). It was an arrest. In just a moment they would turn on the Lubyanka and enter the black maw of the gates. No, one certainly cannot say that daylight arrest,

arrest during a journey, or arrest in the middle of a crowd has ever been neglected in our country. However, it has always been clean-cut-and, most surprising of all, the victims, in cooperation with the Security men, have conducted themselves in the noblest conceivable manner, so as to spare the living from witnessing the death of the condemned.

Not everyone can be arrested at home, with a preliminary knock at the door (and if there is a knock, then it has to be the house manager or else the postman). And not everyone can be arrested at work either. If the person to be arrested is vicious, then it's better to seize him outside his ordinary milieu — away from his family and colleagues, from those who share his views, from any hiding places. It is essential that he have no chance to destroy, hide, or pass on anything to anyone. VIP's in the military or the Party were sometimes first given new assignments, ensconced in a private railway car, and then arrested en route. Some obscure, ordinary mortal, scared to death by epidemic arrests all around him and already depressed for a week by sinister glances from his chief, is suddenly summoned to the local Party committee, where he is beamingly presented with a vacation ticket to a Sochi sanatorium. The rabbit is overwhelmed and immediately concludes that his fears were groundless. After expressing his gratitude, he hurries home, triumphant, to pack his suitcase. It is only two hours till train time, and he scolds his wife for being too slow. He arrives at the station with time to spare. And there in the waiting room or at the bar he is hailed by an extraordinarily pleasant young man: "Don't you remember me, Pyotr Ivanich?" Pyotr Ivanich has difficulty remembering: "Well, not exactly, you see, although. . ." The young man, however, is overflowing with friendly concern: "Come

now, how can that be? I'll have to remind you. . . ." And he bows respectfully to Pyotr Ivanich's wife: "You must forgive us. I'll keep him only one minute." The wife accedes, and trustingly the husband lets himself be led away by the arm — forever or for ten years!

The station is thronged-and no one notices anything. . . . Oh, you citizens who love to travel! Do not forget that in every station there are a GPU Branch and several prison cells.

This importunity of alleged acquaintances is so abrupt that only a person who has not had the wolfish preparation of camp life is likely to pull back from it. Do not suppose, for example, that if you are an employee of the American Embassy by the name of Alexander Dolgun you cannot be arrested in broad daylight on Gorky Street, right by the Central Telegraph Office. Your unfamiliar friend dashes through the press of the crowd, and opens his plundering arms to embrace you: "Saaasha!" He simply shouts at you, with no effort to be inconspicuous. "Hey, pal! Long time no see! Come on over, let's get out of the way." At that moment a Pobeda sedan draws up to the curb. . . . And several days later TASS will issue an angry statement to all the papers alleging that informed circles of the Soviet government have no information on the disappearance of Alexander Dolgun. But what's so unusual about that? Our boys have carried out such arrests in Brussels — which was where Zhora Blednov was seized — not just in Moscow.

One has to give the Organs their due: in an age when public speeches, the plays in our theaters, and women's fashions all seem to have come off assembly lines, arrests can be of the most varied kind. They take you aside in a factory corridor

after you have had your pass checked — and you're arrested. They take you from a military hospital with a temperature of 102, as they did with Ans Bernshtein, and the doctor will not raise a peep about your arrest — just let him try! They'll take you right off the operating table-as they took N. M. Vorobyev, a school inspector, in 1936, in the middle of an operation for stomach ulcer-and drag you off to a cell, as they did him, half-alive and all bloody (as Karpunich recollects). In the Gastronomethe fancy food store — you are invited to the special-order department and arrested there. You are arrested by a religious pilgrim whom you have put up for the night “for the sake of Christ.” You are arrested by a meterman who has come to read your electric meter. You are arrested by a bicyclist who has run into you on the street, by a railway conductor, a taxi driver, a savings bank teller, the manager of a movie theater. Any one of them can arrest you, and you notice the concealed maroon-colored identification card only when it is too late.

Sometimes arrests even seem to be a game — there is so much superfluous imagination, so much well-fed energy, invested in them. After all, the victim would not resist anyway. Is it that the Security agents want to justify their employment and their numbers? After all, it would seem enough to send notices to all the rabbits marked for arrest, and they would show up obediently at the designated hour and minute at the iron gates of State Security with a bundle in their hands — ready to occupy a piece of floor in the cell for which they were intended. And, in fact, that's the way collective farmers are arrested. Who wants to go all the way to a hut at night, with no roads to travel on? They are summoned to the village soviet — and arrested there. Manual workers are called into the office.

Of course, every machine has a point at which it is overloaded, beyond which it cannot function. In the strained and overloaded years of 1945 and 1946, when trainload after trainload poured in from Europe, to be swallowed up immediately and sent off to Gulag, all that excessive theatricality went out the window, and the whole theory suffered greatly. All the fuss and feathers of ritual went flying in every direction, and the arrest of tens of thousands took on the appearance of a squalid roll call: they stood there with lists, read off the names of those on one train, loaded them onto another, and that was the whole arrest.

For several decades political arrests were distinguished in our country precisely by the fact that people were arrested who were guilty of nothing and were therefore unprepared to put up any resistance whatsoever. There was a general feeling of being destined for destruction, a sense of having nowhere to escape from the GPU-NKVD (which, incidentally, given our internal passport system, was quite accurate). And even in the fever of epidemic arrests, when people leaving for work said farewell to their families every day, because they could not be certain they would return at night, even then almost no one tried to run away and only in rare cases did people commit suicide. And that was exactly what was required. A submissive sheep is a find for a wolf.

This submissiveness was also due to ignorance of the mechanics of epidemic arrests. By and large, the Organs had no profound reasons for their choice of whom to arrest and whom not to arrest. They merely had over-all assignments, quotas for a specific number of arrests. These quotas might be filled on an orderly basis or wholly arbitrarily. In 1937 a woman came to the reception room of the

Novocherkassk NKVD to ask what she should do about the unfed unweaned infant of a neighbor who had been arrested. They said: "Sit down, we'll find out." She sat there for two hours — whereupon they took her and tossed her into a cell. They had a total plan which had to be fulfilled in a hurry, and there was no one available to send out into the city — and here was this woman already in their hands!

Universal innocence also gave rise to the universal failure to act. Maybe they won't take you? Maybe it will all blow over? A. I. Ladyzhensky was the chief teacher in a school in remote Kologriv. In 1937 a peasant approached him in an open market and passed him a message from a third person: "Aleksandr Ivanich, get out of town, you are on the list!" But he stayed: After all, the whole school rests on my shoulders, and their own children are pupils here. How can they arrest me? (Several days later he was arrested.) Not everyone was so fortunate as to understand at the age of fourteen, as did Vanya Levitsky: "Every honest man is sure to go to prison. Right now my papa is serving time, and when I grow up they'll put me in too." (They put him in when he was twenty-three years old.) The majority sit quietly and dare to hope. Since you aren't guilty, then how can they arrest you? It's a mistake! They are already dragging you along by the collar, and you still keep on exclaiming to yourself: "It's a mistake! They'll set things straight and let me out!" Others are being arrested en masse, and that's a bothersome fact, but in those other cases there is always some dark area: "Maybe he was guilty. . . ?" But as for you, you are obviously innocent! You still believe that the Organs are humanly logical institutions: they will set things straight and let you out.

Why, then, should you run away? And how can you resist right then? After all, you'll only make your situation worse; you'll make it more difficult for them to sort out the mistake. And it isn't just that you don't put up any resistance; you even walk down the stairs on tiptoe, as you are ordered to do, so your neighbors won't hear.

At what exact point, then, should one resist? When one's belt is taken away? When one is ordered to face into a corner? When one crosses the threshold of one's home? An arrest consists of a series of incidental irrelevancies, of a multitude of things that do not matter, and there seems no point in arguing about anyone of them individually especially at a time when the thoughts of the person arrested are wrapped tightly about the big question: "What for?" — and yet all these incidental irrelevancies taken together implacably constitute the arrest.

Almost anything can occupy the thoughts of a person who has just been arrested! This alone would fill volumes. There can be feelings which we never suspected. When nineteen-year-old Yevgeniya Doyarenko was arrested in 1921 and three young Chekists were poking about her bed and through the underwear in her chest of drawers, she was not disturbed. There was nothing there, and they would find nothing. But all of a sudden they touched her personal diary, which she would not have shown even to her own mother. And these hostile young strangers reading the words she had written was more devastating to her than the whole Lubyanka with its bars and its cellars. It is true of many that the outrage inflicted by arrest on their personal feelings and attachments can be far, far stronger than their political beliefs or their fear of prison. A person who is not

inwardly prepared for the use of violence against him is always weaker than the person committing the violence.

There are a few bright and daring individuals who understand instantly. Grigoryev, the Director of the Geological Institute of the Academy of Sciences, barricaded himself inside and spent two hours burning up his papers when they came to arrest him in 1948.

Sometimes the principal emotion of the person arrested is relief and even happiness! This is another aspect of human nature. It happened before the Revolution too: the Yekaterinodar schoolteacher Serdyukova, involved in the case of Aleksandr Ulyanov, felt only relief when she was arrested. But this feeling was a thousand times stronger during epidemics of arrests when all around you they were hauling in people like yourself and still had not come for you; for some reason they were taking their time. After all, that kind of exhaustion, that kind of suffering, is worse than any kind of arrest, and not only for a person of limited courage. Vasily Vlasov, a fearless Communist, whom we shall recall more than once later on, renounced the idea of escape proposed by his non-Party assistants, and pined away because the entire leadership of the Kady District was arrested in 1937, and they kept delaying and delaying his own arrest. He could only endure the blow head on. He did endure it, and then he relaxed, and during the first days after his arrest he felt marvelous. In 1934 the priest Father Irakly went to Alma-Ata to visit some believers in exile there. During his absence they came three times to his Moscow apartment to arrest him. When he returned, members of his flock met him at the station and refused to let him go home, and for eight years hid him in one apartment after another. The priest suf-

fered so painfully from this harried life that when he was finally arrested in 1942 he sang hymns of praise to God.

“Resistance! Why didn't you resist?” Today those who have continued to live on in comfort scold those who suffered.

Yes, resistance should have begun right there, at the moment of the arrest itself.

But it did not begin.

And so they are leading you. During a daylight arrest there is always that brief and unique moment when they are leading you, either inconspicuously, on the basis of a cowardly deal you have made, or else quite openly, their pistols unholstered, through a crowd of hundreds of just such doomed innocents as yourself. You aren't gagged. You really can and you really ought to cry out — to cry out that you are being arrested! That villains in disguise are trapping people! That arrests are being made on the strength of false denunciations! That millions are being subjected to silent reprisals! If many such outcries had been heard all over the city in the course of a day, would not our fellow citizens perhaps have begun to bristle? And would arrests perhaps no longer have been so easy?

In 1927, when submissiveness had not yet softened our brains to such a degree, two Chekists tried to arrest a woman on Serpukhov Square during the day. She grabbed hold of the stanchion of a street-lamp and began to scream, refusing to submit. A crowd gathered. (There had to have been that kind of woman; there had to have been that kind of crowd too! Passersby didn't all just close their eyes and hurry by!) The quick young men immediately became flustered. They can't

work in the public eye. They got into their car and fled. (Right then and there she should have gone to a railroad station and left! But she went home to spend the night. And during the night they took her off to the Lubyanka.)

Instead, not one sound comes from your parched lips, and that passing crowd naively believes that you and your executioners are friends out for a stroll.

I myself often had the chance to cry out.

On the eleventh day after my arrest, three SMERSH bums, more burdened by four suitcases full of war booty than by me (they had come to rely on me in the course of the long trip), brought me to the Byelorussian Station in Moscow. They were called a Special Convoy — in other words, a special escort guard — but in actual fact their automatic pistols only interfered with their dragging along the four terribly heavy bags of loot they and their chiefs in SMERSH counterintelligence on the Second Byelorussian Front had plundered in Germany and were now bringing to their families in the Fatherland under the pretext of conveying me. I myself lugged a fifth suitcase with no great joy since it contained my diaries and literary works, which were being used as evidence against me.

Not one of the three knew the city, and it was up to me to pick the shortest route to the prison. I had personally to conduct them to the Lubyanka, where they had never been before (and which, in fact, I confused with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

I had spent one day in the counterintelligence prison at army headquarters and three days in the counterintelligence

prison at the headquarters of the front, where my cellmates had educated me in the deceptions practiced by the interrogators, their threats and beatings; in the fact that once a person was arrested he was never released; and in the inevitability of a tenner, a ten-year sentence; and then by a miracle I had suddenly burst out of there and for four days had traveled like a free person among free people, even though my flanks had already lain on rotten straw beside the latrine bucket, my eyes had already beheld beaten-up and sleepless men, my ears had heard the truth, and my mouth had tasted prison gruel. So why did I keep silent? Why, in my last minute out in the open, did I not attempt to enlighten the hoodwinked crowd?

I kept silent, too, in the Polish city of Brodnica — but maybe they didn't understand Russian there. I didn't call out one word on the streets of Bialystok — but maybe it wasn't a matter that concerned the Poles. I didn't utter a sound at the Volkovysk Station — but there were very few people there. I walked along the Minsk Station platform beside those same bandits as if nothing at all were amiss — but the station was still a ruin. And now I was leading the SMERSH men through the circular upper concourse of the Byelorussian-Radial subway station on the Moscow circle line, with its white-ceilinged dome and brilliant electric lights, and opposite us two parallel escalators, thickly packed with Muscovites, rising from below. It seemed as though they were all looking at me! They kept coming in an endless ribbon from down there, from the depths of ignorance — on and on beneath the gleaming dome, reaching toward me for at least one word of truth — so why did I keep silent?

Every man always has handy a dozen

glib little reasons why he is right not to sacrifice himself.

Some still have hopes of a favorable outcome to their case and are afraid to ruin their chances by an outcry. (For, after all, we get no news from that other world, and we do not realize that from the very moment of arrest our fate has almost certainly been decided in the worst possible sense and that we cannot make it any worse.) Others have not yet attained the mature concepts on which a shout of protest to the crowd must be based. Indeed, only a revolutionary has slogans on his lips that are crying to be uttered aloud; and where would the uninvolved, peaceable average man come by such slogans? He simply does not know what to shout. And then, last of all, there is the person whose heart is too full of emotion, whose eyes have seen too much, for that whole ocean to pour forth in a few disconnected cries.

As for me, I kept silent for one further reason: because those Muscovites thronging the steps of the escalators were too few for me, too few! Here my cry would be heard by 200 or twice 200, but what about the 200 million? Vaguely, unclearly, I had a vision that someday I would cry out to the 200 million.

But for the time being I did not open my mouth, and the escalator dragged me implacably down into the nether world.

And when I got to Okhotny Ryad, I continued to keep silent.

Nor did I utter a cry at the Metropole Hotel.

Nor wave my arms on the Golgotha of Lubyanka Square.

Mine was, probably, the easiest imaginable kind of arrest. It did not tear me from the embrace of kith and kin, nor wrench me from a deeply cherished home life. One pallid European February it took me from our narrow salient on the Baltic Sea, where, depending on one's point of view, either we had surrounded the Germans or they had surrounded us, and it deprived me only of my familiar artillery battery and the scenes of the last three months of the war.

The brigade commander called me to his headquarters and asked me for my pistol; I turned it over without suspecting any evil intent, when suddenly, from a tense, immobile suite of staff officers in the corner, two counterintelligence officers stepped forward hurriedly, crossed the room in a few quick bounds, their four hands grabbed simultaneously at the star on my cap, my shoulder boards, my officer's belt, my map case, and they shouted theatrically:

“You are under arrest!”

Burning and prickling from head to toe, all I could exclaim was: “Me? What for?”

And even though there is usually no answer to this question, surprisingly I received one! This is worth recalling, because it is so contrary to our usual custom. Across the sheer gap separating me from those left behind, the gap created by the heavy-falling word “arrest,” across that quarantine line not even a sound dared penetrate, came the unthinkable, magic words of the brigade commander:

“Solzhenitsyn. Come back here.”

With a sharp turn I broke away from the hands of the SMERSH men and

stepped back to the brigade commander. I had never known him very well. He had never condescended to run-of-the-mill conversations with me. To me his face had always conveyed an order, a command, wrath. But right now it was illuminated in a thoughtful way. Was it from shame for his own involuntary part in this dirty business? Was it from an impulse to rise above the pitiful subordination of a whole lifetime? Ten days before, I had led my own reconnaissance battery almost intact out of the fire pocket in which the twelve heavy guns of his artillery battalion had been left, and now he had to renounce me because of a piece of paper with a seal on it?

“You have. . .” he asked weightily, “a friend on the First Ukrainian Front?”

“It's forbidden! You have no right!” the captain and the major of counterintelligence shouted at the colonel. But I had already understood: I knew instantly I had been arrested because of my correspondence with a school friend, and understood from what direction to expect danger.

Zakhar Georgiyevich Travkin could have stopped right there! But no! Continuing his attempt to expunge his part in this and to stand erect before his own conscience, he rose from behind his desk — he had never stood up in my presence in my former life — and reached across the quarantine line that separated us and gave me his hand, although he would never have reached out his hand to me had I remained a free man. And pressing my hand, while his whole suite stood there in mute horror, showing that warmth that may appear in an habitually severe face, he said fearlessly and precisely: “I wish you happiness, Captain!”

Not only was I no longer a captain, but I had been exposed as an enemy of the people (for among us every person is totally exposed from the moment of arrest). And he had wished happiness-to an enemy?

This is not going to be a volume of memoirs about my own life. Therefore I am not going to recount the truly amusing details of my arrest, which was like no other. That night the SMERSH officers gave up their last hope of being able to make out where we were on the map — they never had been able to read maps anyway. So they politely handed the map to me and asked me to tell the driver how to proceed to counterintelligence at army headquarters. I, therefore, led them and myself to that prison, and in gratitude they immediately put me not in an ordinary cell but in a punishment cell. And I really must describe that closet in a German peasant house which served as a temporary punishment cell.

It was the length of one human body and wide enough for three to lie packed tightly, four at a pinch. As it happened, I was the fourth, shoved in after midnight. The three lying there blinked sleepily at me in the light of the smoky kerosene lantern and moved over, giving me enough space to lie on my side, half between them, half on top of them, until gradually, by sheer weight, I could wedge my way in. And so four overcoats lay on the crushed-straw-covered floor, with eight boots pointing at the door. They slept and I burned. The more self-assured I had been as a captain half a day before, the more painful it was to crowd onto the floor of that closet. Once or twice the other fellows woke up numb on one side, and we all turned over at the same time.

Toward morning they awoke, yawned, grunted, pulled up their legs, moved into

various corners, and our acquaintance began. "What are you in for?"

But a troubled little breeze of caution had already breathed on me beneath the poisoned roof of SMERSH and I pretended to be surprised: "No idea. Do the bastards tell you?"

However, my cellmates — tankmen in soft black! helmets — hid nothing. They were three honest, openhearted soldiers — people of a kind I had become attached to during the war years because I myself was more complex and worse. All three had been officers. Their shoulder boards also had been viciously torn off, and in some places the cotton batting stuck out. On their stained field shirts light patches indicated where decorations had been removed, and there were dark and red scars on their faces and arms, the results of wounds and burns. Their tank unit had, unfortunately, arrived for repairs in the village where the SMERSH counterintelligence headquarters of the Fortyeighth Army was located. Still damp from the battle of the day before, yesterday they had gotten drunk, and on the outskirts of the village broke into a bath where they had noticed two raunchy broads going to bathe. The girls, half-dressed, managed to get away all right from the soldiers' staggering, drunken legs. But one of them, it turned out, was the property of the army Chief of Counterintelligence, no less.

Yes! For three weeks the war had been going on inside Germany, and all of us knew very well that if the girls were German they could be raped and then shot. This was almost a combat distinction. Had they been Polish girls or our own displaced Russian girls, they could have been chased naked around the garden and slapped on the behind — an amusement, no more. But just because

this one was the "campaign wife" of the Chief of Counterintelligence, right off some deep-in-the-rear sergeant had viciously torn from three front-line officers the shoulder boards awarded them by the front headquarters and had taken off the decorations conferred upon them by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. And now these warriors, who had gone through the whole war and who had no doubt crushed more than one line of enemy trenches, were waiting for a court-martial, whose members, had it not been for their tank, could have come nowhere near the village.

We put out the kerosene lamp, which had already used up all the air there was to breathe. A Judas hole the size of a postage stamp had been cut in the door and through it came indirect light from the corridor. Then, as if afraid that with the coming of daylight we would have too much room in the punishment cell, they tossed in a fifth person. He stepped in wearing a newish Red Army tunic and a cap that was also new, and when he stopped opposite the peephole we could see a fresh face with a turned-up nose and red cheeks.

"Where are you from, brother? Who are you?"

"From the other side," he answered briskly. "A shhpy."

"You're kidding!" We were astounded. (To be a spy and to admit it — Sheinin and the brothers Tur had never written that kind of spy story!)

"What is there to kid about in wartime?" the young fellow sighed reasonably. "And just how else can you get back home from being a POW? Well, you tell me!"

He had barely begun to tell us how, some days back, the Germans had led him through the front lines so that he could play the spy and blow up bridges, whereupon he had gone immediately to the nearest battalion headquarters to turn himself in; but the weary, sleep-starved battalion commander hadn't believed his story about being a spy and had sent him off to the nurse to get a pill. And at that moment new impressions burst upon us:

"Out for toilet call! Hands behind your backs!" hollered a master sergeant hard-head as the door sprang open; he was just built for swinging the tail of a 122-milimeter cannon.

A circle of machine gunners had been strung around the peasant courtyard, guarding the path which was pointed out to us and which went behind the barn. I was bursting with indignation that some ignoramus of a master sergeant dared to give orders to us officers: "Hands behind your backs!" But the tank officers put their hands behind them and I followed suit.

Back of the barn was a small square area in which the snow had been all trampled down but had not yet melted. It was soiled all over with human feces, so densely scattered over the whole square that it was difficult to find a spot to place one's two feet and squat. However, we spread ourselves about and the five of us did squat down. Two machine gunners grimly pointed their machine pistols at us as we squatted, and before a minute had passed the master sergeant brusquely urged us on:

"Come on, hurry it up! With us they do it quickly!" Not far from me squatted one of the tankmen, a native of Rostov, a tall, melancholy senior lieutenant. His face was blackened by a thin film of metallic dust or smoke, but the big red scar stretching across his cheek stood out nonetheless.

"What do you mean, with us?" he asked quietly, indicating no intention of hurrying back to the punishment, cell that still stank of kerosene.

"In SMERSH counterintelligence!" the master sergeant shot back proudly and more resonantly than was called for. (The counterintelligence men used to love that tastelessly concocted word "SMERSH," manufactured from the initial syllables of the words for "death to spies." They felt it intimidated people.)

"And with us we do it slowly," replied the senior lieutenant thoughtfully. His helmet was pulled back, uncovering his still untrimmed hair. His oaken, battle-hardened rear end was lifted toward the pleasant coolish breeze.

"Where do you mean, with us?" the master sergeant barked at him more loudly than he needed to.

"In the Red Army," the senior lieutenant: replied very quietly from his heels, measuring with his look the cannon-tailer that never was.

Such were my first gulps of prison air.

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